

German unionist visits Transvaal Alloys



IG Chemie's Dieter Honerhoff (centre) with the German Labour Attache, Peter Michalzte (left) and MAWU Witbank organiser, Frank Boshelo (right) at Transvaal Alloys

A WORKER representative on the board of directors of Nord-Deutsche Affinerie, a German-based multinational, recently came out to South Africa to investigate the anti-union activities of the company's local subsidiary, Transvaal Alloys.

Last year the Metal and Allied Workers Union laid complaints with both the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the European Economic Community (EEC) after Transvaal Alloys dismissed 200 union members at its vanadium plant at Middelburg.

In the lengthy document outlining the union's dispute, MAWU accused the company of paying starvation wages, assaulting workers, showing no concern for workers' health and safety, and denying workers basic trade union rights.

On hearing of the dispute, the German chemical union (IG Chemie), which represents workers at the multinational's head office, decided to send Dieter Honerhoff to assist MAWU.

Brother Honerhoff, an IG Chemie official, sits on the

Nord-Deutsche Affinerie's Supervisory Board as a representative of the company's workers.

The Supervisory Board functions much like a Board of Directors except that it consists of representatives of both workers and company shareholders.

On February 19, Brother Honerhoff joined a MAWU delegation in negotiations with Transvaal Alloys management.

According to a MAWU organiser who was present at the talks, the company agreed to improve everything 'in the future', including dealing with the union, but it was not prepared to take back or even compensate the sacked workers.

This refusal to consider the 200 sacked union members is completely unacceptable, the organiser said.

'We made some suggestions to the company which Dieter Honerhoff will be reporting back to IG Chemie and to the Supervisory Board,' he added.

Meanwhile, the German government is also investigating the Transvaal Alloys dispute as a result of the complaint being lodged with the EEC.

Breakthrough at Dorbyl

THE giant Dorbyl group, which has been hit by a number of strikes over retrenchment, has backed down on its refusal to negotiate severance pay at factory-level.

This significant shift of policy has been greeted by unions as a 'major breakthrough'.

Towards the end of last year, workers at Dorbyl subsidiary, Wispeco, held a sit-in strike for six weeks when management refused to discuss severance pay with the Metal and Allied Workers Union for 81 workers it had laid off.

To make matters worse, shortly after the strike was called off, the company announced that it intended to lay off a further 109 workers. For the time being, MAWU has managed to block this.

MAWU branch secretary, Geoff Schreiner said the union had discovered that Wispeco was not retrenching the workers but was intending to make them redundant.

He said the company planned to shift some of its operations to Johannesburg.

'We believe that to put workers out of jobs without a very large compensation is immoral and something we cannot accept,' he added.

MAWU has demanded that Wispeco supply the union with information so that it can be established whether it is in fact necessary to lay off these workers.

Meanwhile, MAWU is not the only union which has been battling against Dorbyl's unfair retrenchment policy.

The General Workers Union launched a court case against the company when it laid off a worker at its Bellville marine plant without consulting the union.

Cedric Petersen, a welder at Dorbyl Marine, was only told he was being retrenched the day before it was due to happen.

The industrial court ordered

the temporary reinstatement of Brother Petersen and criticised Dorbyl for not giving sufficient warning and for not discussing the retrenchment with the GWU.

The court backed the union's argument that fair retrenchment could only take place when there was meaningful consultation between the company, the worker and the union.

The GWU has now applied to the court for the permanent reinstatement of Cedric Petersen.

It would appear as if the court case and the various retrenchment strikes persuaded the Dorbyl Group to change its retrenchment policy.

In the meantime, the GWU and MAWU have decided to join forces by forming a national shop stewards council for the Dorbyl Group which will be launched early in March in Johannesburg.

CG Smith provident fund

IN 1981 during a wave of strikes which virtually paralysed the Natal sugar industry and quickly spread to other industries, thousands upon thousands of workers resigned from company pension schemes.

Although, the strikes were sparked off by the government's plan to 'freeze' pensions, many other worker grievances were raised when company pension schemes were put under the spotlight.

Since then most FOSATU unions have held seminars and discussions on the issue of pensions and a number of pension fund rules have been renegotiated.

Early in 1984 worker members of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union at CG Smith, a major Natal sugar company, decided to push for the setting up of a new provident fund.

Unlike the previous pension

funds, the rules of the new provident fund were drawn up in negotiations with worker representatives.

As a SFAWU shop steward who was involved in the negotiations put it: 'This is our scheme. It has not been imposed on us like the pension scheme.'

'The management of the fund is in the hands of the eight trustees, of which four will be elected by us.'

'For the first time we have equal say in the running of the benefit scheme. We can say that we the workers have won a great victory,' he added.

The new fund goes a long way in removing the workers' problems with pension funds and is, therefore, better able to meet their needs.

In terms of the provident fund's rules, CG Smith workers can choose between having benefits paid out in a lump sum

or in installments.

Workers are entitled to part of the company's contribution irrespective of the reasons for leaving employment — the amount depends on length of service.

In the case of retrenchment, the fund pays out an extra sum of money based on a worker's length of service. Also, workers can take out building loans from the fund.

The retirement age has been reduced to 55 with the worker having the option of retiring anytime between 55 and 65-years.

Death benefits include three years' wages for death by natural causes and six years' wages for death at anytime by accidental causes.

And the fund pays out up to R1 000 funeral benefits for the death of a worker, his wife, children or direct dependants.

R15 000 paid to sacked Dunlop workers

THE long-standing dispute between the Metal and Allied Workers Union and Dunlop which led to a strike by 2 000 workers at four factories in October last year has finally been settled.

On February 13, the company agreed to pay R15 000 to four workers who were dismissed in October 1983.

The Dunlop workers went on strike when the company refused to refer the dismissals to the industrial court or to an independent arbitrator.

The strike was watched closely by a number of British unions who have membership in Dunlop factories in England.

After the return to work, new talks were held on the

dismissals at which it was decided to call in Prof Blackie Swart as an advisory mediator.

Prof Swart found that the four employees had indeed been unfairly dismissed.

All of the sacked workers chose to take financial repayment for their wrongful dismissal rather than reinstatement as they feared that the company would victimise them.

In a press statement released after the settlement, MAWU said it hoped that Dunlop would now begin to improve its industrial relations practices which had been 'extremely unsatisfactory' in the past and had provoked 'immense worker frustration and anger'.

Barlows company refuses to discuss retrenchments with shop stewards

FOR the second time SA Traction Manufacturing at Germiston has refused to negotiate retrenchments with the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

SA Traction is jointly owned by the Barlows Group and by British multinational, GEC. In Britain the GEC is well known for being anti-union.

A MAWU organiser said management even refused to allow union shop stewards to attend the meeting about the retrenchments.

'And while the meeting was going on, management sent instructions to the foreman to start retrenching,' the organiser said.

'The company refused to discuss severance pay or retrenchment procedures with us.'

And when we asked them to tell us how they would re-employ the retrenched workers when the situation improved, they just refused to say, which makes us very suspicious,' the organiser said.

He said that during the previous retrenchment SA Traction had laid off 70 workers, of these 55 were union members.

'The company has consistently taken an anti-union position. For nearly three years SA Traction delayed recognising the union and tried to force members to resign,' he added.

The organiser said MAWU was 'disgusted' to see a subsidiary of the supposedly progressive Barlows Group refusing to negotiate retrenchment procedures.