



*QwaQwa workers, who were hired by Fluor to work at Sasol, speak of their bitter experience*



*This slogan was used in the United Mineworkers of America's campaign against Fluor*



*Not even the beautiful Drakensberg mountains can hide QwaQwa's poverty*

ONLY three-days after the 6 500 Sasol workers were sacked for their role in the November stay-away, scabs were being bused in from the homelands by American multinational, Fluor Corporation.

An investigation has revealed that Fluor hired hundreds of workers from the homeland of QwaQwa in order to maintain production at the Sasol II and III plants near Secunda. It is likely that others were recruited from other homelands.

FOSATU Worker News recently travelled to Thibella, a small QwaQwa village, which lies in the shadow of the Drakensberg mountains only a short distance from the popular tourist resorts.

A large group of bitter workers told of how they had been signed on by a Fluor recruitment officer on November 9, never suspecting that within 10 weeks they would find themselves dumped back in the homeland.

None of them were told they would be taking the jobs of the sacked Sasol workers.

Not that it would have made any difference as they were all grateful to get a job. And here lies the advantage of South Africa's homeland system for employers.

Under the smokescreen of creating 'independent countries' for blacks, the government has, in reality, merely set up huge migrant labour camps.

Attempts to create employment in the homelands have failed dismally and with the recession they have now become dumping grounds for the unemployed.

Starvation for most has almost become a way of life. And the only way out is for at least one member of the family to get a job in 'white' South Africa.

The homeland system, therefore, makes it easy for an employer to fire all strikers, like Sasol did, and then replace them with scabs from the homelands.

Where the sacked strikers have certain skills, employers use the scabs to keep production going until their workers are forced to come back to work.

In the past, this tactic has been used by employers to crush unions as they can weed out the strong union members when they re-employ the strikers.

The QwaQwa workers told FOSATU Workers News that seven bus loads left the homeland for Sasol on November 9. They were all taken to camps within the perimeter of the Sasol security fences.

Johannes Tsotetsi, one of those recruited, said that the next morning they were all taken to the Safety Department where they were told that they were no longer Fluor workers but were now Sasol workers.

'We were told that Sasol was the father of the family which will give us uniforms. Later we were told by the supervisors that we had only been hired on

a temporary basis and that we were doing the jobs of the people who had been fired during the strike but when the people get back then we are to go,' he said.

Surprisingly, some of the QwaQwa workers worked in what is called the SDP department.

This department is responsible for cleaning the houses of white supervisors and management in nearby Secunda.

It would seem that not even the cleaning of company houses could wait for the return of the Sasol workers!

However, only six days after they had arrived the SDP workers were told that they were not needed any longer and were shipped back to the homeland.

In a memorandum handed out to Sasol employees some time after Christmas, the company praised itself for having been able 'to handle the labour disruption without having any marked effects over the short

term.'

At about that stage, Sasol announced in the press that it would 'sympathetically' consider applications from ex-employees 'some of whom have been recently dismissed for participating in the unlawful stay away'.

This spelt the end of the QwaQwa workers' temporary stay at Sasol. They had achieved what the company wanted them to — their scab labour had enabled Sasol to weather the 'labour disruption'.

On January 22, the majority of the QwaQwa workers were told by the Fluor personnel officer that there was 'no more work' and that in the next day or two they would be taken home by bus.

Only 10 weeks after their recruitment, the workers found themselves back in the homeland — pawns in the struggle between Sasol and the sacked members of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union.