



Support grows after strike victory

HAMMARSDALE in Natal is becoming an important new centre of FOSATU growth.

Only two months ago, the NUTW had 3 000 members in its Hammarsdale factories. Now, it has already broken the 5 000 mark.

One of the reasons for the increased support for the union is its success in the recent Progress Knitting strike. Earlier this year, Progress management took a fairly tough attitude towards the NUTW.

It eventually agreed to give stop order facilities to the union but granted no shop steward representation or negotiation rights.

TWO FIRED

Then, at the beginning of May, management fired two workers for reasons which their fellow workers in their department felt to be unfair. The department stopped work and the workers went to the union office.

They agreed to return to work on condition management negotiated with the union.

Management re-employed the two workers - but then fired two others on the grounds that they had incited workers to strike. A delegation of six workers representing the whole factory was then sent to management to protest.

POLICE CALLED

The company responded by saying they were not going to be told by the workers who to hire and fire, and called in the police to arrest two of the delegation - James Ntshingela and Beauty Mdladla. Both spent several days in prison without being charged.

This triggered off a full scale strike by all 1 600 workers, which lasted for eight days. It also threatened to spread to the other textile factories organised by the NUTW in Hammarsdale.

The union met with other managements to get them to inter-

vene, and shop stewards' committees in several factories approached their managements independently to warn them of the danger of the strike spreading if the dispute was not quickly resolved.

Meanwhile, meetings were also held in the Mpumalanga township to build support for the strikers.

MARCH

On May 9, all 1 600 Progress workers marched to the factory, with many workers from other factories either joining in or showing their support on the way.

With this show of militancy, the company's determination began to crack.

Earlier, the company had distributed leaflets in the township, saying it would not negotiate with the union over the strike under any circumstances and that it was employing new workers.

SOLIDARITY

However, solidarity in the area was so great that only thirty workers applied for jobs in eight days.

After the march on the factory, the Department of Manpower also got worried and persuaded the company to take back all the workers and to negotiate union recognition afterwards.

Workers returned to work on May 13 and negotiations began. On June 4, shop steward elections took place and workers voted in the two representatives arrested by the police as senior shop stewards.

LEGAL ACTION

The union is now taking legal action against the police for holding the two workers for longer than 48 hours without laying a charge.

Senior shop steward James Ntshingela has said: "Workers in Hammarsdale have good reason to be pleased with their union. They are now flooding to our offices to join."

Hammarsdale workers on the march



VW workers down tools over retrenchments

RETRENCHMENTS continue to be one of the biggest problems facing FOSATU unions today.

Tensions are mounting in many factories over this issue and it seems clear that employers are heading for trouble if they do not negotiate retrenchment procedures which workers consider to be fair.

According to union spokesmen, recent events at Volkswagen in Uitenhage show how easily a confrontation can develop if employers insist on making retrenchment a management prerogative in which workers have no say.

SUGGESTIONS

Volkswagen informed NAAWU of the need to retrench workers on March 31. In subsequent negotiations management refused to accept alternative suggestions put forward by NAAWU shop stewards such as working short, cuts in overtime and working alternative weeks. Severance pay for retrenched workers was also turned down.

While the negotiations were still continuing, workers started receiving letters when they came to work informing them that they had been retrenched, and eventually 316 workers were affected.

"The worst thing about the whole situation," says John Gomomo, full-time shop steward at VW, "was to see people with clean records being retrenched".

Workers were outraged. "Their fear was that if workers with clean records were affected, nobody was safe. To the workers, this was not a retrenchment but a strategy to break the union."

MEETING

Workers responded by downing tools, but resumed work a day later pending negotiations. At a meeting on May 27, 4 000 workers demanded that those with clean service records be reinstated immediately and severance pay be paid to the rest, pending further negotiations. Management rejected this and a

strike followed which lasted until May 6. At this point, workers agreed to return on condition the company:

- immediately reinstated 20 workers
 - signed an agreement undertaking to employ retrenched people as vacancies arose
 - did not employ any new workers until all retrenched workers had been taken back
 - pay workers affected while they were out of work.
- management eventually agreed that only union members should be immediately re-employed.

ACCEPTED

VW accepted these terms but said there was still a group of workers they were not prepared to take back. NAAWU shop stewards rejected this, saying the issue should be negotiated with the union.

Management agreed and the list of the 20 workers to be reinstated was given to the union. Even this did not settle the matter as, when the shop stewards examined the list, they found four non-union members on it.

At a general meeting on May 12 workers refused to accept this and

MAWU launches new campaign

THE Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) has begun a campaign to negotiate retrenchment agreements in all its factories on the Rand.

It is demanding that workers be granted greater protection against retrenchments.

MAWU's proposals were adopted at its first joint Witwatersrand shop stewards' council meeting held in Katlehong last month, attended by 230 shop stewards from 66 MAWU factories.

MEETINGS

Meetings are now being held in the Roodepoort, Katlehong, Thembisa and Johannesburg locals to promote the campaign further.

MAWU believes retrenchments are often used to force increased production from fewer workers in order to cut costs - and not because firms are financially threatened.

According to the union, the metal industry is largely controlled by a few big companies with huge resources. Retrenchments are therefore aimed at maintaining high

profits and not at avoiding closure. Sometimes, retrenchments are also used as a disciplinary measure, MAWU believes.

PROPOSALS

Its proposals include the following:

- Companies should set up funds to help keep workers in jobs when business is slack (slack funds).
- Employers should notify workers at least a month in advance of plans to retrench, giving full reasons and a list of workers who would lose their jobs.
- They should then negotiate the issue with MAWU and stop recruitment, stop overtime and if necessary go on short time.

REDUNDANCY PAY

Where retrenchments are unavoidable MAWU wants redundancy pay for affected workers; that retrenchment takes place on the LIFO principle (last in first out); and that retrenched workers are guaranteed re-employment before any others when more jobs become available.

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