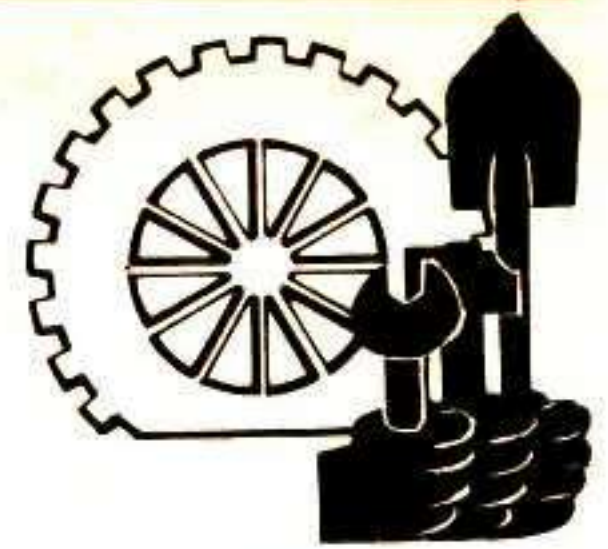


FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



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AT 4.30 pm on Monday 27 June workers of Natal Thread in Hammarsdale walked off the job in the first legal strike in years. Outside the gates, the police were nevertheless waiting with dogs.

Negotiations with the National Union of Textile Workers broke down in June after 5 months of wrangling.

'It was evident' says Prof Sineke, NUTW's branch secretary, that the company was trying to provoke workers to strike in the hope that the workers would lose. The company's offer was no more than a 6 per cent increase for 11 months when inflation was over 12 per cent. The offer was completely unreasonable.'

After negotiations broke down at the factory, NUTW applied for a conciliation board. When the conciliation board deadlocked, NUTW called for a strike ballot on Natal Thread's premises during working hours. Natal Thread was confident that workers would vote against the strike during a recession. Only 8 workers voted to accept the company's offer. An overwhelming 315 voted to strike for an improvement in their wages.

When management realised that the strike was not just an empty threat, the company began to prepare for a strike. The

FIRST LEGAL STRIKE FOR YEARS

gates were strengthened. The factory windows were barred. Riot police with dogs were outside on the expected day of the strike. 'Workers never planned a riot' says John Copelyn, NUTW's general secretary, 'this was a controlled exercise of workers' power. While management might be right to be confident of beating a strike during a recession, they miscalculated badly when they underestimated the disciplined response of our union members.'

FWN believes that Natal Thread's management will have to learn to respect workers' legitimate grievances the hard way.



NATAL Thread workers discussing the finer details of the strike the day before it was due to begin.

At 4.30 pm on June 27, Natal Thread workers walked off the job.

THE Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union has broken the tight grip of a closed shop which forced workers to belong to the tame SA Typographical Union.

And now about 350 workers at three Nampak factories - Nampak Sacks, Nampak Conical and Nampak Cores and Tubes - in Industria can now belong to the union they have chosen to represent them.

Workers said the 'Typo Union' had been brought into the factories by the bosses.

'We only had one meeting with that Typo union, when

we joined. Since then we've never had a single meeting until we called them to tell them we wanted to resign,' they said.

Late last year the Nampak workers started joining the PWAWU and as soon as there was a majority in the factory, shop stewards were elected and the union was introduced to management.

The workers immediately said they were opposed to the Typo Union and demanded that deductions be stopped.

However, management said they could do nothing since they were bound by

the Industrial Council.

In terms of the Industrial Council agreement all workers in factories covered by the agreement must belong to the Typo Union, whether they like it or not.

But workers would not accept this and they continued to raise the matter with management and signed petitions saying they wanted to resign from the TUCSA union.

Eventually the Industrial Council agreed to exempt the Nampak factories from the closed shop but only when it was convinced that the workers were opposed

to the Typo Union.

After a long delay the SA Typographical Union called meetings in the factories and workers made it clear that they did not want them, their deductions or their so-called benefits. All they wanted were resignation forms.

Workers said the Typo Union had forced itself on them, it did little for them and they knew very little about this union of which they were supposed to be members.

The SA Typographical Union is essentially a white union which recently set up

'parallel' structures for black workers.

It still maintains separate branches - A for whites, B for coloureds and Indians and C for blacks.

Like many TUCSA unions, the Typo Union has abused the closed shop to force black workers to join this 'racial' union.

FOSATU is not against the principle of closed shop which can be used to protect hard won worker rights. But it must always be the union that the majority of the workers have chosen.

A senior shop steward at Nampak said the exemption from the closed shop was a 'major victory' against 'sweet heart' unions.

'Workers were pressured by management into joining this TUCSA union. But workers conquered in the end,' he said.

WORKERS BREAK FREE