

LIVING WAGE STRIKE

ABOUT 250 workers at G and W Base and Industrial Minerals at Wadeville recently went on strike for two days in support of their demand for a living wage.

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union put forward a wage demand of R2 an hour as workers were very badly paid in the factory.

Management replied by declaring what the increase would be without negotiating with the union.

This was totally unacceptable to the workers and a special meeting was called with management.

At the meeting the company refused to make a better wage offer because they claimed that profits were bad.

This was not believed by the workers as the company had recently built a new plant at Brakpan so they decided to down tools.

Workers only returned to work when management agreed to open its books to union auditors so that profit could be checked by somebody they trusted.

They also demanded that the company negotiate a further increase with the union in October.

Frame workers win first round

WORKERS at the huge Frametex mill at New Germany have won their first round of their battle against the stubborn Frame management.

In terms of an industrial court order, Frame has been barred from recognising its sweetheart union - TUCSA's Textile Workers Industrial Union - until a conciliation board has been held.

Ever since the birth of the National Union of Textile Workers during the 1973 Frame strikes, workers at the New Germany mills have fought for the right to be represented by the NUTW.

In a renewed campaign started last year the NUTW signed up more than two-thirds of the workers at this mill in the heart of the Frame empire.

The NUTW called on Frame to recognise the NUTW as the union chosen by its workers to represent them.

However, Frame kept true to its union bashing practice by

resorting to sweetheart unionism. The company brought in the tame TUCSA union.

Frame immediately granted the TWIU rights to organise on factory premises and pressured workers to joining the 'red card' union.

THREATENED

NUTW members reported that they had been threatened with 'retrenchment' and that they had been told that the 'red card' union was the one that Frame wanted in the factory.

In the light of this militant sweetheart unionism, NUTW asked the industrial court to prevent Frame recognising the TWIU.

VICTORY

In this important first-step victory for the NUTW, the court ordered that Frame was not allowed to grant facilities to the TUCSA union that it had not given to NUTW.

NUTW general secretary, John Copelyn said that the TWIU by not contesting NUTW's application had seemingly admitted to workers being forced to join the TUCSA union.

NEXT STEP

As the next step in the fight against Frame, the NUTW has applied for a conciliation board in order to force Frame to negotiate with the union.

WOMENS' OPPRESSION HIGHLIGHTED

THE plight of South Africa's women workers was highlighted at a conference of the International Food Unions held in Geneva recently. Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union general secretary, Maggie Magubane told delegates that women, like men, in this country suffer from oppression and exploitation. 'However, women suffer special discrimination and disabilities because they have less education and training than men,' she said.



MAGGIE MAGUBANE

'PATHETIC' WAGES INCREASED

THE Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union has won a significant wage increase for workers at Tongaat Milling at Estcourt.

In terms of the agreement which became effective from April 1, the minimum monthly wage has been increased by R32.

And on top of this, workers will get a R2 a year service allowance (workers who have worked for the company for ten years, for example, will get R20 extra a month).

A SFAWU organiser hailed the wage increase as a major breakthrough in an area which was known for its 'pathetic' wages.

He said the union was now firmly entrenched as the biggest union in the milling industry in Natal.

'Because of this, they have less opportunities to get jobs and are often the lowest paid workers,' she added.

In her report given at this conference, Sister Magubane said women workers were often pulled in to work in the less lucrative areas of industry particularly in 'border' industries.

'One of the perks offered to industrialists who are willing to move into border areas is that they are exempt from minimum wage determinations.

'This opens the way for paying extremely low wages to the predominantly female workforce,' she said.

Sister Magubane told delegates that management were often reluctant to train women to get better jobs as they said women did not stay in jobs long enough to make training them worthwhile.

She said the question of maternity leave and also that of contraception were two key areas where women workers suffered discrimination.

'The Factories Act made no provision for paid maternity leave nor was there any law which made it compulsory for firms to re-employ women after they have had their babies,' she explained.

Sister Magubane said women workers often accepted unpleasant and unsafe contraceptive methods such as the depo-provera injection from management run clinics.

'For pregnancy in many cases means almost certain job loss,' she said.

The conference was told that the SFAWU negotiated for equal pay for equal jobs regardless of sex and also insisted that training be given to both.

Sister Magubane said that the union, in agreements with the individual firms, sought to introduce clauses which would protect women on maternity leave.

BACK TO THE BAD OLD DAYS OF LIAISON COMMITTEES

FOCUS ON HEALTH ACT

AMONGST the many new laws that are being passed in parliament this year is one that, in time, will affect many of the factories organised by FOSATU.

This is the Machinery and Occupational Safety Act - a new law aimed at reducing accidents caused by work.

New regulations and measures are long overdue - every year 300 000 accidents are reported in South Africa's factories.

These accidents kill 2 000 workers and leave 30 000 permanently disabled every year.

A further 3 000 workers are compensated every year for illness caused by working conditions - far more illness goes unrecognised.

An important way that this new law affects workers and their unions is that it requires employers to establish Health and Safety Committees in their factories.

The way that these committees are to be established and run takes industrial relations back to the bad old days of works and liaison committees.

- management will appoint the worker representatives.

- management will chair the meetings and draw up the

ACT

agenda.

- worker health and safety representatives have no special training, no right to information and no powers to enforce decisions made by the committee.

Organised workers need to think about how the establishment of this kind of committee is going to affect the existing shop stewards' committee in the factory. It is best to have planned your response before management comes up with the suggestion for health and safety committees.

Health and safety at work is an important area of union activity that is still very new to most South African unions.

In Britain the Trades Union Council (a federation consisting of all the major British trade unions) has itself trained more than 100 000 shop stewards as health and safety representatives over the last eight years.

These representatives are backed up by a Health and Saf-

ety at Work Act that gives workers a lot more power than South Africa's Machinery and Occupational Safety Act does.

British health and safety representatives are entitled to -

- be elected by the workers if they are organised by a union.

- investigate and inspect the workplace (for example they can leave work and go immediately to the scene of an accident where someone is injured)

- inspect managements' documents that are relevant to the workers' health.

- one week's paid leave a year to attend union health and safety training courses.

- sit on health and safety committees where there is 50/50 worker/management representation.

- meet and consult with government factory inspectors and to file complaints with these inspectors.

These are the kinds of rights that workers can gain if the establishing of a health and safety committee in their factory is negotiated and not just left to be a management initiative and a disruption to the activities of the union inside the factory.

SELECTIVE INCREASE SPARKS OFF MILL STRIKE

ABOUT 350 workers at Premier Paper Mill at Kliprivier went on strike for over a week at the end of last month in protest at management giving a selective wage increase.

The dispute was sparked off when the company gave wage increases to only 48 out of the 350 workers at the mill.

Management tried to shrug off the workers' outcry by saying that the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union had agreed to the increases - a blatant lie.

The selective increase came shortly after workers' demands for a reasonable increase had been turned down by the company which said it had 'no money'.

In the light of the company's reported profit of R3,2 million and this selective increase workers felt this was not good enough

so downed tools.

Workers slammed Premier for using the recession as an excuse to negotiate low increases.

Although the company negotiated the return to work with union shop stewards, Premier cancelled the recognition agreement with PWAU and then tried to get the workers to elect a workers' committee.

Workers angered by this 'trick' refused to take part in any new elections and said they wanted to be represented by their shop stewards.

STOP PRESS: Premier has backed down and decided to negotiate with the shop stewards and has offered to negotiate recognition with PWAU. But in wage negotiations it has offered a measly 10c an hour increase and negotiations were heading towards a deadlock.