

1000 workers in three major cities go on strike

IN a unique strike, more than 1 000 workers from three Autoplastics factories in different parts of South Africa downed tools at the same time last month.

The workers, all organised by FOSATU's National Automobile and Allied Workers Union, struck when they heard that management was not prepared to give them a wage increase.

In national negotiations in August which covered the three Autoplastics factories — Cape Town, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth — NAAWU put forward its 'living wage' demand of a R3,50 per hour minimum.

IMPOSSIBLE

The company replied by saying that it was impossible to have full scale wage negotiations at this stage as the company's budget had already been set for the year.

NAAWU agreed to accommodate this and put forward an interim wage demand for a 15c per hour increase across-the-board.

Autoplastics called a special Board meeting to discuss this but returned on September 12 saying 'there is no money therefore we cannot give an increase'.

STRIKE

Hearing this workers at the Pretoria and Cape Town plants downed tools that afternoon and the Port Elizabeth workers followed the next morning.

On September 13 after the company agreed to meet the union again that afternoon and also agreed that there would be no dismissals, workers returned to work.

At the afternoon meeting the company put forward a proposal of an 8c per hour increase.

Workers accepted this increase

Womens' group to fight for maternity rights

WOMEN shop stewards and organisers from all FOSATU affiliates in the Transvaal have been meeting to discuss maternity.

As one shop steward put it, the problem facing women workers is clear 'if you get pregnant, that's it, the boss fires you'.

This Transvaal womens' group was formed shortly after the education lecture on Women Workers presented as part of the FOSATU Winter School in July.

Instead of focusing on all the problems facing women workers, the group has initially decided to focus on maternity.

At a recent meeting of the group, a chemical shop steward reported that women workers were actually made to sign a document which stated: 'I the undersigned hereby declare that I am currently not pregnant. I furthermore agree that should I fall pregnant in the next twelve months, my services could be terminated immediately'.

A textile shop steward said that before leaving to have her baby she had been earning a meagre R22 a week.

When she returned she was told by management that she was lucky to get re-employed after the birth — at R17 a week!

Yet another women said she had successfully hidden her pregnancy from her boss by wearing

at general meetings held in the three different plants.

NAAWU organiser, Taffy Adler said the workers saw the wage increase as a 'substantial shift' on the part of the company — from nothing to 8c.

INADEQUATE

'But it is still inadequate in terms of what we want and we will be raising the NAAWU national demand again next year,' he said.

Cape Town organiser Andrew Wilson said the 'unity' of the workers had been a 'bit of a surprise' as the union had only just started recruiting in the plant.

'But at the end of the strike everybody just flocked for membership cards,' he said.

POLICE

Eastern Cape regional secretary, Les Kettledas said that at the Port Elizabeth plant, the local management had called in the police during the stoppage.

'We told the manager that we were not happy with the police presence as there was no need for them, but his attitude was very negative,' he said.

'We then said we would like to speak to the company's head office in Pretoria. Shortly after this the police were removed from company premises,' he added.

However in spite of this incident the peaceful stoppage by Autoplastics' workers was a huge success — showing what can be achieved by disciplined united worker action.

oversized dustcoats because she could not afford to stay at home with no pay.

After a lot of discussion the women resolved to fight in their factories for the following maternity demands:

- * the right not to be dismissed.
- * the right to return to a job at the same rate of pay.
- * the right to paid maternity leave.
- * the right to time off to attend clinics of their own choice before and after the birth of their babies.
- * the right to time off for breast feeding.
- * the right to safe conditions of work while pregnant.

New trade union library

SOUTH Africa's first trade union library has been opened in Cape Town.

Jewellers and Goldsmith Union general secretary, Ted Frazier, who is also the chairman of the library said it had been formed because 'knowledge is too important to remain in the hands of the bosses'.

The library which is at 108C Malta House, Malta Road, Salt River is open from 10 am to 5 pm on Saturdays.



NEW ORGANISERS COURSE

TWO new national organisers courses have been recently launched by FOSATU — a beginners' course and an advanced course. Here organisers from the beginners' course are shown the ins and outs of the FOSATU printing unit by Lawrence Mchunu (centre).

Think twice before you fire!

TEXTILE employers in the Transvaal must surely be thinking twice before they fire members of the National Union of Textile Workers.

Over the past year, the union has made major in-roads into the so-called right of employers to arbitrarily fire workers.

The union recently again won the re-instatement of a worker — this time at Edenvale knitting factory, AA Fabrics.

Brother Typo Thobejane was fired for allegedly disobeying an order.

But, Brother Thobejane said he had refused to sweep an area of the factory when told to do so by a manager because he was a machine operator and still had been busy working on his machines.

After his dismissal, the shop stewards took up the matter in terms of the disciplinary procedure, but without any success so a dispute was declared.

At a hearing at the knitting industry's Industrial Council, the NUTW argued Brother Thobejane's case and won his re-instatement.

However, it appears that some employers just never learn.

Recently the Industrial Court ordered the re-instatement of the senior shop steward at Polyknit.

MAWU attacks Seifsa for changing migrant contracts

A MOVE by the giant metal employers' association, Seifsa, to make the retrenchment of migrant workers easier has been slammed by the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

In a recent report, Seifsa informed its members that it had approached the department of Co-operation and Development in order to change the migrant labour contracts and call-in cards.

Seifsa said the department had 'no objections' to the contract period being changed from 12 months to an initial probationary period of one

month and 'thereafter be continued on a daily basis with one day's notice required to terminate the contract'.

The association advised its members that to avoid 'any possible problems with retrenchment during the contract period' they should consider changing the contracts.

A MAWU spokesman said the changes to the contract would mean that the employers could dismiss a migrant worker with only a days notice.

He said MAWU had called for the scrapping of the contract

Major breakthrough at Congella Brewery

AFTER a nine month battle, the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union has finally been recognised at the Congella Brewery in Durban.

A SFAWU organiser said the Port Natal Administration Board owned brewery had continually delayed recognition saying that there were '13 Administration Boards in the country and we have not yet developed any policy in relation to the recognition of trade unions'.

He said SFAWU members viewed the recognition as a 'major breakthrough' for thousands of workers employed by Administration Boards throughout the country.

In this agreement, the employers agreed that there would be no retrenchments this year.

NUTW also said it had reason to believe that two of the women had been fired after they had refused to accept sexual harassment.

In response to both these actions by the company, NUTW has taken court action against Polyknit.

A worker leader said the union had won the right for Administration Board workers to have their own 'democratic representative unions'.

The agreement recognises SFAWU's right to elect shop stewards, to stop orders, to access for union officials and for time off for union training.

It also lays down a six month time limit for the signing of a full recognition and procedural agreement.

Since the union won recognition at the brewery, workers from other sections of the Port Natal Administration Board have been clamouring to join SFAWU.

system but this had been ignored by Seifsa.

'But as soon as it suits them, the employers change the contract', he added.

The spokesman said it was obvious that Seifsa had changed the contract in order to prevent a union suing a company for breaking a migrant workers contract in the event of retrenchment.

Earlier this year, MAWU successfully sued Dunswart Iron and Steel on the basis that it had retrenched workers in the middle of their contract.