

Sasol: the whole story

SASOL, the pride and joy of the South African government, has become for workers the symbol of repression.

On Wednesday November 7, 6 500 Sasol workers (90 percent of the workforce at the two Secunda plants) were dismissed for participating in the two-day stay-away.

They were then 'escorted' on to buses by gun-toting police and soldiers which took the workers back to the 'homelands'.

Sasol, which produces oil from coal, represents for the government a home-grown answer to

the oil embargo.

Seven of the eleven members of Sasol's Board of Directors are appointed by the government and the remaining four are selected by the Board.

Sasol has become the symbol of the wonder of modern science, new technology and hope for the future.

But workers do not share this gleaming futuristic image.

For them it represents dangerous and strenuous working conditions, barrack-like hostels, racial oppression and rumours of men killed in accidents during the night being whisked away.

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union after recruiting the majority of the workers at the Sasol II and III plants began to work towards changing these repressive conditions.

When the two-day stay-away was called in the Transvaal, the Sasol workers insisted on participating.

On November 5 over 90 percent of the workers stayed away and in the hostels nobody went to work.

The workers who peacefully observed the stay-away were watched closely by riot police and the army who patrolled

the township.

And at six that morning helicopters flew over the hostels dropping thousands of pamphlets - the pamphlets warned workers that they would be dismissed if they did not return to work by 10 am the next day.

At an all-night meeting of shop stewards and union organisers, it was decided to recommend to workers that they return to work.

But when two 'hippos' drove into the next day's general meeting, angry workers vowed to continue the stay-away.

During November 6 the police

and army presence increased dramatically and a 'sneeze machine' was added to their wide variety of equipment.

At 5 am the next morning workers walked to work, accompanied by hippos and police landrovers, but they were turned away at the gates and marched back to the hostels.

The union then held another general meeting where workers decided not to collect their pay and to remain at the hostels.

However, the hippos and landrovers moved in and surrounded the hostel blocks - police told workers that they would have to leave the hostels even if they did not collect their pay.

Workers had no choice

In the face of such a massive show of force by the army and police, the Sasol workers could do little else but collect their pay and board the buses.

Commenting on the Sasol dismissals, a CWIU spokesperson said, 'Sasol aware of its image in South Africa just could not tolerate the idea of its workers participating in the stay-away and making political protest.'

'They just could not let it go by unpunished and it also provided them with an excellent opportunity to get rid of the union,' he said.

'Their massive command of resources, police, army, political influence allowed the company to accomplish the extraordinary feat of paying off and removing over 6 000 workers in one afternoon.'

'No doubt part of the training of the new workforce will be the suggestion that a union-free plant would be much better than a unionised plant,' the union spokesperson concluded.



Sasol workers gather outside the hostels to discuss the company's deadline



Under the watchful eye of the army and police, workers are paid off



Workers escorted to the buses under armed guard

World federation condemns 'witchhunt'

THE giant International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has slammed the South African government for the detention of FOSATU president, Chris Dlamini, and other trade unionists.

And has warned that such acts of repression 'can no longer be tolerated by the international community'.

The ICFTU called for the unconditional release of all those detained and demanded that they be given the freedom to carry out their trade union activities.

In the statement released only hours after the arrest of Chris

Dlamini, the ICFTU said it strongly condemned 'the witch-hunt' being carried out against trade union leaders in South Africa.

It added that this was another example of 'the emptiness, and the mockery of so-called trade union reforms'.

The International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) has also added its voice to the worldwide protest over the recent detentions.

IMF general secretary, Herman Rebhan said, 'If the South African authorities intend to use the recent work stoppages and protests as an excuse to move against

the trade unions, this will have major repercussions internationally.'

He warned that any repression of the independent trade union movement could lead the world trade union movement 'to agree with those who denounce the possibility of peaceful change' and instead call for the 'most extreme measures against the apartheid government'.

Brother Dlamini, a shop steward at Kelloggs in Springs, was taken from the factory by security police on November 9.

Metal and Allied Workers Union Transvaal branch secretary, Moses Mayekiso, was detain-

ed after a pre-dawn raid on his Alexandra home the day before.

And on September 10, the Transvaal branch secretary of the National Union of Textile Workers, Bangi Solo, was also arrested by security police.

Early on November 14, the Transport and General Workers Union's Transvaal branch chairman, Jethro Dlalisa, was detained.

This brings to four the number of FOSATU unionists being held after this recent wave of detentions.

The detentions come soon after the two-day stay-away in

the Transvaal which was supported by FOSATU.

Brother Mayekiso represented FOSATU on the ad-hoc committee which announced the stay-away and which sent a telegram to the Minister detailing the demands.

And Brother Solo had been appointed by the Central Committee to keep FOSATU informed of all the events taking place in the Transvaal townships.

While carrying out the detentions the security police also searched FOSATU's Germiston offices and took photographs and names of all those working there.