

Workers reinstated

BEING in the cloakroom without authority, sounds like the kind of crime schoolchildren are often accused of.

However, Western Cape safety-belt manufacturer, Safety Transport Inter, decided this was a big enough offence to fire three of its workers.

The National Automobile and Allied Workers Union immediately demanded the reinstatement of the three workers — Maureen Mfakala, Dawn Joseph and Gert rude Alberts.

Several meetings were held with senior management with no success so NAAWU decided to launch an unfair labour practice claim.

During the waiting period, the company agreed to take back Sister Mafakala but said they would contest the case of the other two in court.

But, on the third day of the court case, STI settled the matter out-of-court by agreeing to reinstate the other two to positions 'not less favourable to those they had previously held'.

New bargaining forum in biscuit industry

FOLLOWING the collapse of the biscuit industry's industrial council, a new negotiating forum has been set up in order to accommodate the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.

The industrial council fell apart in August when the TUCSA biscuit union blocked SFAWU's entry to the council.

In order to negotiate with SFAWU the industry's two major companies, Bakers and Fed-bisco, pulled out of the council.

Now a new negotiating forum has been set up covering biscuit workers in Natal and the Transvaal.

A SFAWU spokesperson said 'the union believes its strength still lies in bringing all biscuit workers together.'

However, the new negotiating forum has not exactly been free of problems.

The first meeting was called off as the minority unions came without shop stewards so SFAWU refused to begin talks until these unions were 'properly represented'.

At the second meeting in a joint union caucus, SFAWU persuaded the minority unions to back the union's demand for a 32 percent increase across-the-board and a minimum weekly wage of R110.

But the employers were only prepared to offer a 12,5 percent increase and they refused to accept any of the other demands covering hours of work, overtime and public holidays.

The employer's offer was completely rejected by workers and it was decided to continue pushing for a better offer.

At the next meeting the minority unions wanted to settle but SFAWU managed to 'pull them along' to the next step of mediation.

'As they have no democratic structures and no shop floor strength, it was easy for the officials to decide that we were wasting time by pushing,' a SFAWU spokesperson said.



Simba workers at a report-back meeting in the back-yard of a township house

SFAWU tames Simba lion

THE Simba lion seemed to lose his roar as the boycott called by 393 sacked Simba workers began to spread.

And just over two months after the boycott was launched Simba agreed to take back all the workers.

In this major victory for the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union, the company has agreed to reinstate the workers in the same jobs and at the same wages when the Isando factory reopens next year.

In the meantime, the company will be paying off the scabs that it hired to replace the sacked workers.

The SFAWU members will also be paid R60 000 as interim relief by Simba.

In turn, the workers have agreed to call off the boycott of

Simba products.

The Simba workers were fired early in August when they went on strike in support of three dismissed colleagues.

The first of the three was dismissed in April for 'damaging the company's property' — he threw a potato into a container.

The other two were fired on May 2 for 'not taking a lawful instruction' — they had refused to fetch and carry boxes because it was not part of their jobs.

When the dismissals were challenged by shop stewards the management refused to reconsider their decision.

At a final meeting between shop stewards and the company, management even refused permission for shop stewards to report back to workers during work time.

Workers felt that Simba had made no real attempt to negotiate with their representatives so when the management issued a notice on August 10 saying their decision was final, the workers stopped work.

Management responded by informing workers that they intended taking disciplinary action against the chairman of the shop stewards and another worker.

On Monday August 13 the company dismissed the workers when they refused to heed an ultimatum which demanded that they accept the dismissals and that they agree to hold no more work stoppages.

When SFAWU president, Chris Dlamini appealed to Simba to reconsider, management told him that they had had problems

communicating with their present black workforce and that they now intended employing 'coloureds'.

The sacked Simba workers on their own initiative formed three committees — fundraising, publicity and organisation.

The workers printed stickers and posters calling on people to boycott Simba products.

The Simba campaign received the support of a wide-range of organisations including trade unions, community and student organisations.

And in many East Rand townships, shops agreed not to stock Simba products.

With the support of SFAWU, the boycott began to spread to other areas of the country and support committees were set up in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

Eastern Province chairman elected new vice-president

THE Chairman of the Eastern Province Region, Thembinkosi Mkalipi, has been elected as FOSATU's new vice-president.

Brother Mkalipi, who is a senior shop steward at a Port Elizabeth paint factory, was elected to his new post during the last Central Committee meeting.

He replaces Andrew Zulu who automatically lost his position when he left the Metal and Allied Workers Union to form the break-away United Mining, Metal and Allied Workers of South Africa.

Brother Mkalipi was born in the PE township of KwaZakhele back in 1958 — both his parents were workers.

'My father worked for a construction firm as a general labourer and my mother was a domestic worker,' he told FOSATU Worker News.

His early schooldays were spent at a school at Witkleibos near Humansdorp.

'My parents sent me away from the townships to keep me out of trouble,' he said.

But in the strife ridden days of 1976-7 he was back in KwaZakhele.

'The school boycotts were

much rougher than they are now — lots of people were killed,' he said.

Brother Mkalipi said he had been forced to leave school in 1977 'because of the type of activities I was involved in'.

He said he had been a member of the black consciousness linked South African Students Movement, which was banned after 1976.

'Some of my friends were killed, some detained and some left the country,' he said.

'For two years I moved around as it was not easy to settle down because of the situation,' he added.

'I came back to Port Elizabeth in 1979 and started to look for work,' Brother Mkalipi said.

In October, he said, he started working at Plascon and has been working there ever since.

'Before the Ford and VW strikes in the 80's we knew nothing about trade unions,' he said.

'But because of the strikes, some workers at Plascon decided to find out which was the best union to join — we looked at GWUSA, MACWUSA and FOSATU,' Brother Mkalipi said.

He said the two Plascon factories in Port Elizabeth had been split on which union they wanted to join.

'Workers at the smaller car paint factory wanted to join MACWUSA but we at the household paint factory wanted to join FOSATU,' he said.

'Finally, they went it alone and we went it alone,' he added.



Thembinkosi Mkalipi

But in 1982 the FOSATU affiliated Chemical Workers Industrial Union signed a recognition agreement with the company as the majority union.

'This gave us shop steward and basic union rights and even covered workers in the other factory,' Brother Mkalipi said.

In the same year he was elected as the chairman of the Port Elizabeth local and recently took over as regional chairman when John Gomomo stepped down.

When asked about his earlier links with black consciousness, Brother Mkalipi said, 'I cannot dispute that black consciousness played a relevant role in the struggle.'

'But when I came to the factory things were different. All workers were treated the same whether black or white.'

'I supported FOSATU because of its non-racial policy,' he said.

'As a student I didn't think workers should lead the struggle but now I see that only when workers take the lead will decisions be taken which serve the interests of the workers which are the majority in our society,' Brother Mkalipi concluded.