

300 strike at Wispeco over factory negotiations

FOR over two weeks, 300 workers at window frame manufacturer, Wispeco, have held a sit-in strike in the company's canteen.

The workers at this Moberi factory are demanding that the company negotiate with the Metal and Allied Workers Union at plant-level.

The strike was sparked off when Wispeco went ahead and retrenched 81 workers - including two shop stewards and the senior steward - and refused to discuss severance pay with the union.

Wispeco said it had chosen to negotiate with trade unions only at the metal industry's industrial council.

The company completely ignores the fact that the metal employers' association, SEIFSA, has said at the industrial council that it cannot deal with severance pay at national level and that this should rather be negotiated at each factory. Natal branch secretary, Geoff Schreiner said.

Key metal firm cracks

ONE of the key members of a group of Natal metal companies which are stubbornly refusing to negotiate at plant-level with the Metal and Allied Workers Union has cracked.

Pietermaritzburg's Mckinnon Chain has finally agreed to discuss with MAWU any wage increases granted over and above those agreed to at the industrial council.

Mckinnon Chain along with a number of other Natal factories has blindly followed the line of the metal employers' association, SEIFSA.

SEIFSA has openly advised employers not to negotiate with unions at factory-level saying it will undermine the metal industry's industrial council.

MAWU has clearly shown that this policy is misguided.

The union this year joined in talks at the industrial council as well as holding negotiations at factory-level with a number of companies.

When Mckinnon Chain after this year's council talks refused to negotiate the additional increases the company was giving to workers at plant-level, the union began court proceedings.

The industrial court case was being widely followed as a test case - it would show whether companies had to negotiate additional increases with representative unions.

But when the union filed court papers, Mckinnon Chain suggested that they hold settlement negotiations.

MAWU agreed to these on the basis that Advocate Paul Pretorius be called in to mediate the dispute.

The company initially agreed to negotiate job grades with MAWU.

After another mediation session, it agreed to discuss with the union the additional wage increases.

Dunlop strike ends with march to work

SEPTEMBER 14 proved to be the turning point in the four-week Dunlop strike.

In the morning the company sent a notice to St Anthony's hall, where the strikers had been meeting every day, saying that it was only prepared to sign on the workers as new employees.

It also said that Dunlop would not take back ten workers who it accused of 'participating in intimidatory acts'.

However, within hours of issuing this notice, the company surrendered.

In a new notice, Dunlop said it would take back all the strikers without any loss of service benefits.

New talks would also be held on the issue of the dismissal of five workers which had sparked off the strike by 1 900 Dunlop workers.

The strikers accepted this offer at a meeting on September 17 and staged a victory march back to the Sydney Road factory.

During the march, the police attempted to arrest three union leaders but released them later.

Outside the factory gates, the jubilant strikers sang union songs as they waited for their clock cards.

The mood soured a little when Dunlop told workers that 10 of them were suspended.

But the suspensions were soon withdrawn when the strikers threatened to walk out again.

The strike brought to a virtual

standstill the production of Dunlop motor car tyres when MAWU members at Ladysmith joined their colleagues at the Durban tyre plant.

Workers at Dunlop Sports at Jacobs near Durban also downed tools in support of the demand for the reinstatement of the five dismissed workers.

For four-weeks workers from the Sydney Road factory and the Dunlop Sports' workers met every day at St Anthony's to discuss new developments.

The Ladysmith workers met in the factory canteen and kept in contact with the Durban shop stewards.

Shortly before the strike was settled, the Dunlop workers decided to launch a boycott of the company's products.

Immediately, the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) pledged its support.

The strike was also taken up by two British unions - the Transport and General Workers Union and the General and Municipal Workers Union - which have members at Dunlop factories in England.

MAWU praised the Dunlop workers who 'have through their unity and solidarity won a massive victory against a very hostile, anti-union company'.

'They have demonstrated very clearly that union bashing policies will not succeed,' the union said.



The Dunlop workers march back to work

Dunlop wives speak about strike

THE other side to a strike is shown in these two interviews with the wives of Dunlop workers. Lengthy stoppages put an incredible burden on the families of strikers who are often deprived of their only source of income. But what emerges from these interviews is that in spite of the hardships, the wives support their husbands and are sympathetic to their struggle for worker rights. This shows how important it is for workers to teach their families about the worker struggle.

My husband is working for Dunlop Tyre in Sydney Road, Durban. He has been working there since 1966, so he has 18 years' service, says Mrs Beatrice Kheswa of Umlazi.

We are both old. He is 55-years-old and I am 51. I am a housewife.

Ever since my husband started working for Dunlop he has been complaining about many things but not as much as he does now.

One afternoon both my husband and my son arrived home to tell me that the workers at Dunlop had decided to go on strike in protest at the dismissal of their worker leaders.

At first this sounded strange to me. I had heard of strikes for higher wages before, but to take the risk of losing your job because some people had lost their's seemed like madness.

They used to wake up every

morning and whenever they bade me farewell, they would say, 'Bye-bye, see you later in the afternoon, we're just going to the forest.'

When one day I asked them what forest it was that they were visiting everyday, my son butted in and said, 'Look mummy, every morning we used to wake up in order to go to work where we spent most of our waking hours. But now that we are not going to work, but to a meeting elsewhere, then we're going to a forest.'

Well, for five weeks my husband and son kept on going to their 'forest' everyday. It was very tough for the family, I can tell you.

Imagine, I am a mother of seven children. The eldest is living in Johannesburg with his wife. The second eldest is out on

strike with his father, the other is a casual worker and the remaining four are of school-going age.

In spite of all these difficulties, my husband and my son seemed determined to carry on to the bitter end.

Their friends in the neighbourhood were very sympathetic and sometimes they offered them money to enable them to go to the 'forest'.

Would she in future allow her husband to go on strike?

Of course, I learnt a lot through this strike.

My husband's 18 years' service has been sucked by Dunlop. Do you see that?

No wonder that even women workers from Dunlop Sports, who know a lot about family suffering, also joined in the sympathy strike.

Although the company fired them all, the pressure forced the company to call them back. They were also assured that their complaints were going to be attended to.

This must serve as inspiration to the workers in other factories as well.

Mrs MaNgcece Nkosi also of Umlazi is a mother of 10 children, five of whom are school goers.

Things were pretty difficult but my husband would tell me that theirs was a collective decision - so what else could I do but give him all my support, she says.

We survived by selling odd things like candles and so forth.

I used to prepare him food to eat during their day-long meetings which he would carry in his skoff tin.

It is the support from people and their families that has really won the Dunlop workers their demands.



Dunlop wives - MaNgcece Nkosi (left) and Beatrice Kheswa