

Wage talks grind to a halt

THE Transport and General Workers Union has accused major bus company, Putco, of hiding its real financial position.

TGWU is at present in a wage deadlock with Putco and attempts to settle it by mediation have failed.

The dispute has now been referred to arbitration.

Both mediation and arbitration have to be followed by the union as bus companies are defined in labour legislation as 'essential services'.

So unlike workers in other industries where a wage deadlock could lead to a legal strike, bus drivers face heavy fines or even imprisonment for striking.

JOKING

When wage talks opened earlier this year, Putco initially refused to consider any wage increase and in fact said their managing director favoured wage cuts.

Workers response to this was 'You must be joking'.

Eventually the company worked its way up from its first offer of R3 to R4 per week and a further R3 increase in the first six months of next year.

This has been rejected by workers who agreed to halve their original demand of an increase of R65 to R30 per week.

At this stage wage talks deadlocked.

TGWU rejected the company's excuse that it had made a loss last year and therefore could not afford to pay a higher increase.

SOUND

The union said that in fact Putco was in a 'sound' financial position and that it was 'definitely not near disaster as management has tried to convince us'.

TGWU argues that judging from the tax the company had paid for the second half of last year, it must have made about R6.5 million.

The union also argues that Putco has recently invested about R47 million in new buses and other equipment.

It remains to be seen whether arbitration will settle this wage deadlock to the benefit of the workers.

Gas workers win R2 min.

WORKERS at Union Liquid Air in Germiston recently became the first workers in the gas industry to win a R2 an hour minimum.

This follows negotiation between the Chemical Workers Industrial Union and the company where a minimum wage of R2.01 was agreed upon.

This is now the highest wage in the industry.

The CWIU is organised in two out of the four major companies producing and distributing industrial gas.

It now hopes to organise the remaining two gas companies and achieve a living wage for all workers in the industry.



Striking municipal workers sitting on the grass outside the Queensburgh Civic Centre (Photo courtesy of the Daily News)

Municipal workers march

ABOUT 200 workers marched through the town centre of Queensburgh at the end of last month and then staged a sitdown in the front of the Civic Centre.

The municipal workers of this suburb near Durban were peacefully protesting the Town Council's refusal to pay wage in-

creases this year.

They demanded that their wages be increased by 15 per cent.

The workers began gathering at various points throughout the suburb at about 7am and then to the surprise of early morning shoppers, marched quietly through the centre of the town.

Following this, the workers sat on the grass in front of Queens-

burgh's Civic Centre and waited for the arrival of officials from the Transport and General Workers Union.

After talks with the TGWU, the Town Clerk agreed to call a meeting of Town Council representatives as 'urgently as possible' to discuss an interim recognition of the workers' union and to negotiate a possible wage

agreement.

He also agreed not to take any action against any person as a result of the 'illegal' strike.

The workers' peaceful protest has set them on the way for recognition of the TGWU which they had recently joined.

They have also shown the Council that they feel they should have a say in their wages and working conditions.

Drought hits workers' wages

MORE and more workers are turning to unions for help because of the worsening drought, according to the Southern Natal branch secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers Union, Geoff Schreiner.

Over the past two months the membership at MAWU's Natal branch has doubled.

There are now more than 5 470 organised workers at about 38 factories.

Brother Schreiner said workers were now having to send more and more money home to the rural areas because the drought had killed off the crops.

POOR

The poor wages that the workers had been getting were now not only having to support the worker himself but also his family in the rural areas, he said.

He added that the picture for the future did not look much better as no new crops were being planted at present.

Wage increases for workers have now become a matter of life or death.

'So they have been turning to MAWU as they have heard that the union has rejected the low increase given at the metal industry's Industrial Council and is now pushing for higher wage increases at plant level,' Brother Schreiner said.

He also said workers for the first time saw MAWU as a non-racial union which fought for rights for all workers.

'No longer are the Indian and African workers divided within factories - within MAWU they fight together for better working conditions,' he said.

But this tremendous growth has not been without its problems.

At Ocean Manufacturing, management dismissed all the workers when they went on strike over wages.

However, the union managed to negotiate a settlement in which the company agreed to take back all except thirty workers who are to be paid compensation.

It also agreed to sign a preliminary agreement with MAWU.

And at Mckinnon Chain, the union has declared a dispute and is taking the company to the Industrial Court.

EAGER

Brother Mbanjwa, the local MAWU organiser said the company had on many occasions told the union it would recognise it, but has never stuck to this.

'Now we have had enough of these empty promises and we are eager to get the company in court because it has now been established that employers have to negotiate in good faith with representative unions,' he said.

Disputes have also been declared with:

* CYC Engineering for failing to produce safety boots and clothing for their workers who are



The scramble for water (Photo courtesy of SPP)

involved in dangerous work.

* WB Camerons for refusing to disclose any information to the union to assist in wage negotiations. This could be an important case for unions as it tests the union's right to demand that the company reveal reasonable information.

* Gedore Tools in Pinetown for retrenching 13 workers without consulting the union.

Very recently MAWU also declared a dispute with Scottish

Cables, one of the biggest companies in Pietermaritzburg, for refusing to negotiate wages at factory-level.

When negotiations for the Cables Sector at the Industrial Council broke down, the Board of Directors of Scottish Cables agreed to talk wages with the union at plant level.

But it has now backed off from this agreement - seemingly under pressure from other cable manufacturers.