

Five Tidwell shop stewards get R6 000 in court settlement

IN an out-of-court settlement American multinational, Tidwell Housing, has agreed to pay out R6 000 — nearly a year's wages — to five union shop stewards who were dismissed in August last year.

The five shop stewards were sacked when workers dared to raise questions about their wages. The workers were all fired and then selectively reemployed. Tidwell refused to take back the five stewards and 15 other workers.

Tidwell Housing, which has its factory in the decentralised industrial area of Peters near Ladysmith, is quoted in union circles as a good example of why President Reagan's arguments in favour of 'constructive engagement' as opposed to disinvestment are so ludicrous.

The President of the United States of America argues that it is crucial to keep American companies in South Africa for the 'upliftment' of its people.

Tidwell Housing pays its male workers R25 per week and its women workers only R18 (a monthly income of between R77 and R107) — this is 283-432 percent lower than the current subsistence level of R410.

And the company continues to pay these poverty wages in spite of the fact that one of the 'advantages' of having a factory in a decentralised zone is that the South African government pays a subsidy of R107,50 per employee per month irrespective of the workers' wage!

A number of companies in



Tidwell shop steward, Christopher Hadebe, together with two of the other sacked stewards

other areas have taken to employing more workers in order to make huge profits out of the decentralisation 'wage incentives'.

Another hidden benefit of operating in Peters, which Tidwell has been quick to take advantage of is that South Africa's Labour Relations Act and all the Wage and Industrial Council determinations do not apply.

The reason for this is that Pe-

ters is Bantu trust land which has been earmarked for inclusion into KwaZulu but for the moment falls under neither South African legislation nor KwaZulu legislation.

So when Tidwell refused to have anything to do with the Metal and Allied Workers Union which organised the majority of the workers at the factory last year, there was little the union could do.

Under South African labour

legislation, it would have been possible to take up an unfair labour practice claim.

More recently, the company has drastically reduced its labour force from some 300 workers down to only 74.

All of these retrenchments have taken place without any consultation with MAWU which is required under South African law.

Not even the workers were consulted. They were merely

told on the day that they were to be retrenched to collect their outstanding wages.

There was also no severance pay nor any guarantee of first option on vacancies should they arise.

And all this from an American company which, according to Reagan, is helping 'uplift' the black people of South Africa and which is supposed to be setting an example to local companies. Some example!

Although most of South Africa's laws do not apply to Peters, MAWU did manage to find a little known clause in the Wage Act which did still apply.

This clause bars the victimisation of people representing a trade union when taking up wage issues. The union then proceeded to take Tidwell to the Supreme Court. The case was due to be heard on August 16.

In the settlement, CI Industries, which has now taken over a sizeable proportion of Tidwell Housing, agreed to conclude a recognition agreement with MAWU which would be similar to the agreement the union has with the company at its Pinetown factory.

CI Industries also said it would discuss the reinstatement of the five shop stewards and the position of the other 15 sacked workers with the union.

It certainly looks like a local company (CI Industries) has had to show an American multinational how to treat its workers. So, who was setting the example?

Paper council is 'useless', says union

THE Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union has called on the pulp and paper industry's industrial council to disband because 'it is being used by the bosses to avoid setting up a proper national bargaining forum where workers can participate'.

This move follows the union's resignation from the industrial council on August 19. PWAU has been a member of the council for a year.

The industrial council sets the wages and working conditions for some 10 000 workers in the pulp and paper industry.

Until last year the only parties to the industrial council were the employers and a number of white artisan unions.

A PWAU spokesperson

said for all this time the white artisan unions had agreed to 'very low wages' except for artisans' wages.

He said that PWAU had been fighting for the right to negotiate wages at plant-level.

'It has won that right at Carlton Paper and at Nampak Paper and as a result the wages at the Wadeville and Kliprivier factories are the highest in the industry,' he added.

'However, Mondi and Sappi have refused to negotiate wages outside of the council so last year PWAU decided to join in order to try and negotiate wages at a national level,' the spokesperson said.

'But we have now resigned because the union has found that the industrial council is a

useless body,' he said.

PWAU's major criticisms of the council are:

- it refused to gazette a minimum wage of R2 per hour for 1985 even though only Sappi is paying less than this.

- it failed to act as a proper national bargaining forum. PWAU, which has organised 60 percent of the industry's workers, had the same status as all the other unions which have a tiny membership.

- the bosses used PWAU's membership of the council as an excuse to avoid proper plant-level dealings with the union.

- the system of bargaining at the council made it impossible

- for workers to participate fully.
- the bosses continue to deduct

levies illegally from the workers to support the running of the industrial council. Despite the union's objection to this, the practice still continues.

The union spokesperson said PWAU would soon be holding a national pulp and paper shop stewards council to draw up wage proposals for 1986 and to decide what action to take if the employers refuse to negotiate.

In the meantime, the union reports that its strength is growing daily. It now has a clear majority at 14 out of the 18 paper mills in South Africa.

'The remaining four mills are the ones with the lowest wages. But workers from these mills are also beginning to join,' the PWAU spokesperson said.

British unions back economic sanctions

NINETY-EIGHT unions representing 9,8 million British workers voted unanimously in support of a motion calling for economic sanctions against South Africa at the recent annual conference of the Trade Union Congress (TUC).

The TUC also backed trade union moves to boycott South African goods and criticized British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher for not imposing sanctions against South Africa.

The TUC conference held on September 5 passed the motion after the Transport and Gener-

al Workers Union's former general secretary, Moss Evans told delegates that 'a determined boycott of South African goods now would drive several nails into the coffin of the apartheid regime. But the decisive blows must come from the governments.'

Mr Evans, who is chairman of the TUC's international committee, said sanctions should apply until South Africa released all political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela.

He said real changes would come only through action by

South Africans themselves.

'But we outside can certainly push Mr Botha, push him hard, and help push him over,' said Mr Evans.

The unions committed themselves to new efforts to get South African goods barred from stores.

They also said they would eliminate any shares the union pension funds had in South African companies and try to get British firms not to invest here.

Britain is the largest investor in South Africa and is the

The seaman union's leader, Mr Jim Slater said seamen and dockers would enthusiastically support efforts to keep out South African goods and added 'we may find we will have to take direct action'.

fourth biggest trading partner.

The unions said they would seek a government ban on new investment in South Africa, a strengthening of the United Nations arms embargo, an end to British bank loans to Pretoria, withdrawal of Britain's ambassador, and the expulsion of South Africa's envoy in Britain.

Uniformed foreman dismissed

A FOREMAN at a Port Elizabeth textile factory, who came to work in his SA Defence Force uniform, was recently dismissed by the company shortly after workers had complained about his behaviour.

Senior shop steward at the Cape of Good Hope, Henry Raymond, said workers had complained that the foreman was extremely rough and aggressive.

When the foreman came to work in his full army uniform the workers saw this as outright provocation particularly considering the role of the SADF in policing the townships.

Brother Raymond said the shop stewards had discussed the foreman's attitude with the general foreman who had said that he would speak to him.

But things came to a head when the foreman issued Henry Raymond with a warning for allegedly refusing to listen to the instructions of another foreman.

According to Henry Raymond, when the case came before the personnel manager the foreman who had supposedly issued the instructions admitted that he had never spoken to Brother Raymond.

'The following day management told the foreman to leave the factory,' Brother Raymond said.