

# Workers fight against Liaison Committee

WORKERS have scored an important victory at a fruit and vegetable freezing factory in Port Elizabeth.

Their battle for management to recognise their union, the African Food and Canning Union, and for better pay and working conditions, started earlier this year.

First contact with workers at Land Harvest Factory were made by Union representatives from East London.

Later Union officials from head office went to speak with workers at the factory.

## SLOWLY

The organising of the workers went slowly at first but later improved. The bosses got to hear about it.

They questioned certain of the workers.

The workers became anxious — they felt the Union should go directly to the bosses.

"We did what they asked and the bosses agreed to see us," explained a Union official.

## SPEAK

"We asked for permission to speak to the workers on the factory premises.

"They refused saying this would give us an unfair advantage over other unions — although we never discovered who these so-called unions were.

"He said we should first provide audited proof of our membership at the factory or that our support should be demonstrated by a vote among the workers.

## GATES

"We said in that case we would speak to the workers outside the factory gates.

"The workers streamed out to speak to us, clearly showing the support the union has. This

was on May 6 this year and from that time on we never looked back."

Soon afterwards, the workers, on their own, elected a committee and shop stewards and asked for a meeting with management — the union officials present.

The bosses replied that they wanted the union to provide proof that it had majority support of the workers.

## VOTE

The union said this could be proved by means of a vote between the AFCWU and the Factory's liaison committee.

The bosses said they were prepared to accept the outcome of such a vote because, irrespective of the vote, there

would still be a need for the liaison committee.

They insisted that the vote should be between the AFCWU and the "other Union" — which was not known by the workers.

By now the workers were on edge — after more than a month of deadlock.

On Friday June 26 the bosses called a meeting with the liaison committee.

## RELUCTANT

The committee was reluctant to meet with them as most of its members were also members of the union.

They eventually decided they could not refuse as they had been elected by the workers.

When the committee left for the meeting the workers all stopped working.

When this happened the bosses immediately started negotiating directly with the workers.

They told the workers the general manager was not in, but they should resume work and he would address them on Monday.

When the general manager spoke to the workers on the Monday he wanted to know what their main grievances were.

They said they wanted:

- the liaison committee scrapped
- recognition of their union

When he asked for a vote on this everyone

put up their hands.

He said he accepted this as proof that the union had majority support.

The workers were still not satisfied. They insisted that the manager phone the head office there and then in the presence of their committee to arrange a meeting.

He did this and only then did the workers start working again.

On Wednesday (July 1) union officials were in Port Elizabeth to meet with management together with the committee.

But the meeting was again to be delayed.

The manager said he could only meet the following day.

The workers saw this as a delaying tactic.

At a meeting with the manager in their lunch hour the workers demanded that the union officials be

allowed into the factory grounds to speak with them.

The union officials were sent for. In this way the union officials gained for the first time the right to speak to the workers on the factory premises.

At the meeting with management next day it was agreed that the union officials would have this right and the right to negotiate with management.

July 21 was set as the date for negotiations to start.

Four days later an agreement had been hammered out granting the workers a minimum pay increase to R31,50 from R16,50. The old attendance bonus of R3,50 was incorporated in the new scale.

Grievances such as hours of work and midnight dismissals were eliminated.

# Lotus River campaign brings results

THE Lotus River-Grassy Park Residents Association received a reply on July 16 from the Divisional Council after a petition demanding bus shelters in the area was delivered to the Council office on that day.

## Petition

A member of the Association said that this was indeed a surprise as Council usually took up to two weeks to acknowledge receipt of a letter and even months to reply. This was in fact why it was decided not to post the petition and accompanying letter but to deliver it by hand.

## Hired

70 residents of Grassy Park and Lotus River went with a hired bus to the Divisional Council offices in Wale Street, Cape Town. There they were met by a Security Officer who was asked to call the Secretary.

Sometime later an Assistant Secretary of Council appeared. He was given the petition and letter by one of the residents and she demanded that the matter be given Council's urgent attention.

The Official became agitated when the delegates started talking at the same time, expres-



sing the great inconvenience caused by the lack of shelters at Buck Road and other bus-

stops in the area. The Official said the he could not guarantee a favourable or early

reply from Council.

He also said he did not understand why it was necessary to send 70 people instead of

one to deliver the petition. One of the

residents retorted that the matter affected all the people rather than one.

It seems however that the residents trip to Cape Town was successful, as the Asso-

ciation received an immediate reply in writing.

The reply stated that the matter would be handled by the Works Committee of the Divisional Council, who will

work out a structure and cost of the Terminus and that Council recognised the urgency and importance of the matter.

Since then residents

in the area have noticed the Divisional Council workmen busy erecting and repairing bus shelters in the area.