

ISI SEBENZI

NO. 1. APRIL 1974.
(ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

SORROWS IN THE RAILWAYS

On Thursday 14.2.74 workers of the S.A.R. & H., employed at Shop 9, Mechanical Section, Pietermaritzburg, were asked to work overtime. Half of the workers wanted to know what the overtime rates were to be. Because they asked this question they were suspended from work. Two workers from the other half of workers who had not been suspended asked that the suspended workers be re-instated. They said that they would not work until this was done. This was not done so they refused to work. The police were called in, which is the normal routine of employers who have no effective means of communicating with the workers.

The workers claimed that they had never refused to work but had simply asked what the overtime rates were. They wanted those who had been suspended for asking this, to be re-instated with pay and all charges lifted.

On the following Saturday a meeting was called at the Metal & Allied Workers' Union Office and a memorandum was drawn up. This memorandum is as follows, and was signed by the workers and is endorsed by all the S.A.R. & H. workers.

MEMORANDUM

17.2.74

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We, the undersigned employees of the S.A.R. & H. employed in Shop 9, Mechanical Section, Pietermaritzburg, do hereby enumerate the several problems that we consider call for relief, and bring to your attention, so as to ensure peaceful and satisfactory labour relations:

1. That certain workers on Thursday, February, 14th, 1974, refused to work overtime, and consequently were suspended from duty without pay. On the same day, fellow workers who had not been affected by the suspension order, approached two foremen and requested that the suspended workers be re-instated. Until they were re-instated, the workers were not prepared to work. Since we considered it unjust for the Railway authorities in the first place, not to have considerations applicable to overtime work, more specifically the exact rate of pay for overtime, and the method of calculation thereof.

We hereby call upon the Administration to state clearly in writing to all workers:

- (a) The overtime rate and method of calculation thereof.
- (b) Whether or not overtime work is optional or compulsory.

- (c) That the pay slips must clearly state the number of hours worked, the hourly rate, the number of hours overtime and the rate paid for overtime.
- (d) The authority for the above.

2. We further wish to state that the present wage is insufficient in the light of the escalating cost of living. We ask the Railway authorities to advise us immediately when the wages will be reviewed, and to give us an undertaking that we will be consulted in this regard.

We further ask the Administration to state clearly in writing the deductions made, and the reasons for the deductions made.

3. We further request that we be given written advice as to the terms and conditions under which workers may be suspended and that copies of the relevant legislation be made available. We respectfully call for the establishment of a judicial enquiry into the whole question of hiring and dismissal of employees, and to all relevant matters concerning workers, so that we might have the opportunity of explaining our position.
4. We call on the Administration to refrain from victimising our leaders, to recognise our democratically elected leaders, and to permit them to operate on Administration properties.

We categorically state that under no circumstances are we prepared to accept the workers who are our so-called representatives recognised by the Administration at present. We wish to know under which law these elections are held, the constitution governing the present worker-management communication system, and whether minutes of their meetings are kept. If so, we call for copies thereof.

5. We call upon the Administration to issue to all workers, copies, in English and Zulu, of the rules and regulations governing the pension scheme operated by the S.A.R. & H.
6. That workers injured on duty have to wait a long time for Workers' Compensation to be paid.
7. We wish to know the regulations governing sick leave and sick pay; in particular we wish to know whether we have the right to visit our own doctors and whether the Administration will nevertheless pay sick pay in terms of the regulations.

We consider this one of our major grievances, other than the whole question of wages, since the Railway doctor in Pietermaritzburg does not really attend to workers, and we do not get paid for the time spent away from work due to illness.

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On the Monday the workers assembled at work and presented the Memorandum. It was received by an official of the Railway C.I.D. It was later returned with the instructions that its contents were understood but that it was unacceptable. You may judge for yourself whether you feel the proposals to be unacceptable or not.

The officials claimed that they could do nothing but they said Pretoria, Head Office, was looking into the matter. It was believed that an official had arrived from Pretoria. The workers therefore decided to return to work on the belief that the memorandum was being examined and a reply would be given. Thus it is evident that the workers did not wish to cause unnecessary trouble and were content to wait for an answer.

We, the Administrating Officials of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union and the General Workers' Benefit Society, sent a draft of the memorandum to the Systems Manager, for Natal, Mr. Engelbrecht. At the time of writing, the 20.3.74, no reply had been received.

As a result of the problem encountered by the workers, they decided to hold a meeting at Umbali on the 12.2.74. About 300 workers turned up to voice their grievances and elect representatives. The General Workers' Benefit Society was asked to chair the meeting, with the police present.

MORE SORROWS

The S.A.R. workers employed at the Municipal market, reported at the staff office to complain about the bus fare increases. The workers spend an average of 56 cents a day which makes about R13.00 per month on travel alone. This must be paid from an average salary of about R54.00. What angered the workers, was the fact that two years ago they were promised a travel allowance because the market was moved.

What the workers wanted was for the S.A.R. to provide transport from the main station to the market. This was refused, so every day the workers appeared at the Staff Office to complain. They were issued an ultimatum - go to work or be fired - this was the S.A.R. method of negotiating. The workers therefore presented a memorandum on 7.3.74 to the Systems Manager. At the time of writing nothing has been done (20.3.74).

Another incident occurred with the workers of Y-Section Stores of the S.A.R. & H. The Stores Superintendent suspended 30 workers for 7 days, after he had demanded that they report to him with their clock cards at 12.25 p.m. and they had refused.

asking him to state his reasons and to present the ruling which required them to do this. The police were called in as they were approaching a foreman as a body and asked him about this ruling. He said he would only speak to the elected representative. The workers pointed out that the elected representative was no longer working with them and so they had come as a body. The foreman did not listen to their case and charged the workers for being absent from work from the time they first went to the foreman.

The workers appealed to the Administrators of the General Benefit Society. They in turn contacted a lawyer who wrote to the S.A.R. Officials wanting to know the regulations which required the workers to clock in at lunch time and what the charge of suspension was.

The S.A.R. Officials replied that the workers had adequate, competent channels through which they could air their grievances and that they must use them.

The workers were then informed that they were suspended for 7 days with no pay. They were charged and found guilty of not following proper instructions from competent authorities. They were each fined R3.00.

Here we can see the manner in which the S.A.R. Officials negotiate with workers. No attempt seems to be made to insure that both sides are given a fair hearing.

The S.A.R. Officials repeatedly insisted that the workers in the S.A.R. have an adequate system of communication and the right to air grievances to elected officials who would communicate them to the proper authorities. They claimed that all cases were handled with sympathy and prompt action was taken. By the above facts of what occurred it would seem that this is not the case.

Firstly, in the majority of cases the representative was elected by the foreman, not the workers and that the workers had to vote for the nominated man. The workers claimed that no one listened to their grievances as the representative was not truly representative. Therefore they held the meeting to elect their own true representatives.

The workers are angered because the white workers are allowed trade unions through which they can negotiate wages and air grievances. The black workers are not allowed trade unions and therefore have no effective voice in the management of their affairs. Another complaint of the workers is that no matter what their qualifications they are classified as labourers. The wage scale is as follows:

| | | | |
|------------------|---|--------|--------------------|
| 1st year of work | - | R45.00 | (lowest) |
| 2nd | " | " | " - R48.00 |
| 3rd | " | " | " - R54.00 |
| 4th | " | " | " - R57.00 |
| 5th | " | " | " - R60.00 onwards |

Would the man who works as a shunter be classified as a labourer? Or the Operator, would he be classified as labourer? The black workers receive approximately 5 cents an hour overtime, whilst Saturday is not considered as overtime.

However the major complaint of the workers is the treatment or rather lack of treatment given by the doctor. The sick room has no attendants or nurses to look after the men who are sick and they have to be attended by their fellow workers. This seems to be a fault of the management, who should see to it that the health of their workers is cared for. Perhaps the S.A.R. Officials will look to this matter and provide adequate facilities.

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The unemployment Insurance Act is a law which gives the following benefits to workers who are entitled to it:

1. Money if they are unemployed.
2. Money if they are off work due to illness.
3. Money if they are off work due to pregnancy.
4. Money to the widow and dependent children of a worker who has died.

The Unemployment Insurance Act covers all workers earning less than R82.00 per week. It covers all African factory/shop or office workers whose basic wage - (i.e. without overtime or bonuses) - is more than R10.50 per week. Those Africans earning less are not covered by the Unemployment Insurance Act, also farm labourers, workers in rural areas (except factory workers) domestic servants and government employees.

HOW UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT WORKS

Money is deducted each week from workers who qualify for unemployment insurance and their employers, and this money goes into an Unemployment Insurance Fund. The Government pays into this fund as well. The money is used to pay out the above mentioned unemployment benefits.

All workers who are covered by the Unemployment Insurance Act must be registered by the employer, with the Unemployment Fund Office in Pretoria. The employer must do so within one month of his labourer beginning to earn more than R10.50 per week. The law demands that the employer carries this out.

When a worker has been registered, an Unemployment Insurance Fund contributor's card (blue Unemployment Insurance Fund card) is made out for him. This is sent to the employer who keeps it until the worker leaves his service; then the card must be given to the worker. It is against the law for an employer to keep the workers blue Unemployment Insurance Fund card after he has left his services. If an employer does not give the card, then the worker must report it to the Department of Labour immediately.