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Bosses use strikes for UNION BASHING!



INSTEAD of settling the dispute, many South African employers are using strikes as an opportunity to indulge in their favourite pastime – union bashing.

Two recent strikes clearly illustrate this management attitude – the one at SA Fabrics at Rosburgh and the other at BMW at Rosslyn.

Workers at SA Fabrics, a textile factory near Durban, declared a dispute at the end of last year after the company turned down their wage demand for a staggered 16 percent increase.

The National Union of Textile Workers put forward a demand for a 6 percent increase in January, 8 percent in July and a further 2 percent to be given in the form of a Christmas bonus.

The company's response was a 4 percent increase which was completely rejected by workers.

As the company refused to budge, a dispute was declared and the NUTW applied for a Conciliation Board – this now opened the way for a legal strike.

Within days of the dispute being declared, SA Fabrics told the union that it wanted to now retrench – this was seen by workers as outright provocation.

Early this year, a strike ballot was held and an overwhelming majority of the workers voted to go on strike.

Management then held meetings in all the departments and told workers that they 'may' be dismissed if they strike.

This merely further angered workers and on January 26, the entire workforce stopped work – this was the beginning of NUTW's second legal strike.

From then on the company launched its attack on the union – it threatened to sue the union in order to 'recover damages suffered by the company' and it threatened to cancel the agreement that it has with

BMW workers discuss the anti-union pamphlets dropped from a helicopter hired by the company

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Workers forced to strip

IN an out of court settlement, 14 Braitex workers have been paid R40 each by a security firm which forced them to strip naked in order to search them.

The Transvaal branch secretary of the National Union of Textile Workers, Bangi Solo said that when the workers had knocked off at 10.30 one night, they had been told to stand in a queue by new security personnel.

They then had to go into a hut where they were made to strip naked and then searched, he said.

'When the workers complained they were told to shut up by the security guards who said they hadn't got time for kaffirs,' Brother Solo said.

As well as undergoing the 'inhumane' search, Brother Solo said, the workers were late home because they had missed their transport.

The NUTW took the matter up with management the next day.

Braitex apologised and dismissed the security firm, Brother Solo said.

However, it was decided to take the SA Security Services to court for detaining the workers illegally and for making them strip.

On January 11, the security firm settled the matter out of court by agreeing to pay the workers compensation and the legal costs.

THE National Automobile and Allied Workers Union has attacked the motor industry for putting profit for shareholders before the livelihood of people.

And it has committed itself to winning job security for its members.

Already this year the motor industry has laid off over 2000 workers - 500 at Ford, 850 at Sigma and 700 at Datsun-Nissan.

NAAWU said these 'massive' retrenchments underline the inherent insecurity of workers in the automobile industry.

'Agreements need to be made to buttress workers against the financial risks of working in this industry and decent severance and unemployment pay arrangements must be made,' the union said.

SENSITIVITY

NAAWU said that such insecurity did not ease industrial relations and was a situation which needed to be handled with 'sensitivity' through constant negotiation between management and workers.

'We are currently formulating proposals which will ensure that workers in all auto plants in this country will not be at such a disadvantage through factors over which they have no control,' general secretary, Fred Sauls said.

Turning to the retrenchments, Fred Sauls said the difference between the way Sigma and Ford handled the lay-offs was startling.

Discussion between the union and Sigma had begun as early as December over the possibility of the current retrenchment, he said.

'In addition the long standing agreement between the two parties ensured that the Last In First Out principle was adhered to

Motor industry attacked for putting profits before people

and that workers who were retrenched received a week's notice, one to three month's severance



Fred Sauls

pay and a payment from the Sub Fund,' Fred Sauls said.

Whereas Ford presented exactly the opposite picture, he said.

'The union was notified on Wednesday of the retrenchments which were to take place on Friday and only at the union's request was a meeting held.'

The company even refused to consider any alternative proposals by the union and refused to delay their retrenchments until after a report back to a general meeting of workers could be held,' Brother Sauls said.

He added that this was not to say that NAAWU was satisfied with the Sigma retrenchments as the union believes that the company had not taken sufficient steps to ensure that manning levels were such that massive swings between employment and retrenchment were avoided.

The union will continue to discuss this with the company.

Brother Sauls said since 1980 Ford had been the cause of considerable conflict.

'The company must take full

responsibility for this through its refusal to consult and negotiate in good faith with its workers,' he said.

He said that it was clear that Ford was using the current state of the economy as a way of attempting to weaken and even smash unions.

'Such an attitude is strongly condemned and should be exposed as the worst sort of paternalistic exploitation,' Brother Sauls said.

'Ford will not succeed in defeating the union in its plants,' he warned.

Charges dropped!

THE charges have been dropped against seven unionists from the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union who were arrested while organising outside the Beacon Sweets factory at Moberi.

The SFAWU organisers and shop stewards were arrested by the police while signing up workers outside the factory gates and charged with 'obstructing the pavement'.

Union bashing bosses



SA Fabrics' workers cast their votes on whether to strike in their attempt to get management to come forward with a better wage offer.



The strike is on, and NUTW organiser, Elias Banda, leads the workers in song while they wait for a report-back on a meeting between the company and the union.

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NUTW.

SA Fabrics also told the press that the strike was 'illegal' and that it was not about wages at all, but about retrenchments.

This was clearly not true. The NUTW attempted to get the company to postpone the retrenchments until the wage dispute was settled but management insisted on retrenching in the middle of the strike.

Workers throughout the strike have been adamant that they will not go back until the company has come forward with a reasonable offer.

At BMW motor plant near Pretoria, about 1 500 workers went on strike when the company refused to improve its offer of a 10c an hour increase.

The day after the strike began the company shut down the plant claiming there had been 'threats and acts of violence against staff'.

Several days later BMW held 'disciplinary hearings' for 19 workers who the company claims were the 'main intimidators' - without these workers even being present. The company said the personnel officer had represented them.

The company even went as far as hiring a helicopter to drop anti-union pamphlets in three local townships.

The first pamphlet accused the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union of not informing workers

'that in the present economic climate', their demands were 'unreasonable'.

It said that the 'wild-cat strike' would not force BMW to change its position.

'We believe that NAAWU does not represent your true feelings on this matter. In future we will communicate with you directly and we are looking forward to your loyal support,' the pamphlet said.

Later the same day, BMW dropped another pamphlet inviting workers and their wives to a free party.

It said that amongst other things there would be a free video show and cold drinks.

The pamphlet said at the party there would be discussions on the strike and the closing of the plant.

This was a clear attempt to undermine the workers' representative, NAAWU, and was soundly condemned by the workers.

Worker-management relations in both these factories will undoubtedly suffer due to the companies' union bashing.

STOP PRESS: At SA Fabrics, a Conciliation Board has been appointed and workers have agreed to go back to work in the hope that the dispute will be resolved through further negotiations. BMW workers also decided to return to work when the company reopened the plant - giving the company a further chance to pay serious attention to their wage demands.