

FOSATU WORKER NEWS

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The blame for the escalating violence in the BTR Sarmcol strike, which has already led to the death of two scabs, must surely rest on the shoulders of the company.

Throughout the legal strike which has now been on the go for over two months, Sarmcol has refused to hold any discussions with the Metal and Allied Workers Union because, the company says, it does not have any members at the Howick plant.

Within two days of the beginning of the strike, the company fired all 1 000 of its employees and began to hire scabs from nearby Pietermaritzburg to replace them. At this stage it has taken on some 800 scabs.

This blatant union bashing has understandably led to increased frustration among the strikers who under South African legislation are not protected against sacking even after having gone through the lengthy procedures required to call a legal strike.

Various laws also prevent the workers from peacefully picketing the factory.

And now they have even been prevented from holding their daily strike meetings as the local magistrate, after being approached by

the police, has banned further meetings in Mpopphomeni for 21 days from June 26.

MAWU has warned the police that this action would increase the violence as it 'will drastically undermine the union's ability to maintain some order and discipline'.

Difficulties

During the eight-weeks that the 970 workers have been out they have received no wages or strike pay. The union's ability to raise money for the strikers is severely limited by this country's Fund Raising Act.

All of the workers are experiencing difficulties because they have very little money.

A union doctor, who was asked by the shop stewards to provide a health service to the Mpopphomeni community, said that over 20 percent of the children between 2-9 years of age who had come to the clinic were suffering from chronic malnutrition.

'When I asked a mother whose child was dying of pneumonia why she didn't go to the doctor earlier her reply was, Asinimali,' the doctor said.

'The same went for those children with severe middle

ear infection and pus pouring out of their ears,' he added.

So far, the union has been able to provide each of the strikers with a food parcel containing sugar, mealie meal, tea, a cabbage, soup and tinned vegetables each week, but clearly this is not enough.

However, in spite of this suffering, the Sarmcol strikers remain committed to achieving their goal — a fair recognition agreement.

Michael Sibiyi, who has a family of six to support, told FOSATU Worker News that although the struggle was a hard one, it was an important one for workers.

'The company is going all out to break the union,' he added.

Investment

As BTR Sarmcol is a British-based multinational company, the benefits of overseas investment in South Africa has understandably become an issue in the strike.

One of the strikers' banners reads 'BTR Negotiate with our union or get out!'

Referring to Sarmcol in a recent document, MAWU says, 'Such exercises of union bashing in the South

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Sarmcol negotiate with our union or get out say striking workers



Waving placards, Sarmcol strikers march through the streets of Pietermaritzburg's Imbali township

Union questions benefits of investment

FROM PAGE ONE

African context are certainly not unknown but when they are committed by giant multinational companies one is seriously forced to question whether foreign investment is of value to the oppressed workers of our country.

'Trade unions are one of the few legitimate forms by which black workers can advance their positions. It is for that reason that trade unions come under constant attack from the State.'

'When such attacks are made worse or encouraged by multinational companies, the odds against South African black workers are massively increased,' the union argues.

In the light of the Sarmcol dispute, MAWU also questioned the benefits of the policy of constructive engagement. Multinationals' role in this policy is supposedly to challenge socially unjust legislation in South Africa and pressurise the government to dismantle apartheid.

However, far from challenging the unjust migrant labour laws, BTR Sarmcol continues to recruit migrant labourers and then houses them in 'archaic' single-sex hostels, the union argues.

And instead of upgrading

and improving workers' communities, Sarmcol is actively destroying them by

recruiting scab labour from distant parts which will leave the Howick communi-

ties without finance and people without food, it adds. 'These are the benefits of

foreign investment reaped by the employers of BTR Sarmcol,' MAWU concludes.



Facing hardship but still determined to carry on — strikers with their food parcels

Police raid lawyers' offices

AT the end of April, the police raided the offices of lawyers acting for Andries Raditsela's family and seized a confidential document dealing with the evidence of a key witness.

During the raid the police warned the lawyers not to see other witnesses they had intended to interview.

The documents were later returned when the lawyers took the Minister of Law and Order and two senior police officers to court for interfering in the 'right to confidentiality between a lawyer and his client'.

In the court, the police also agreed not to stop the lawyers interviewing people in connection with Raditsela's death.

The family, with the assistance of Chemical Workers Industrial Union lawyers, is preparing to sue the Minister of Law and Order, Louis Le Grange, for Andries' death.

CWIU also reports that the same key witness has also been harassed by the police.

'She was subjected to so many late night visits by the police that she decided to seek shelter elsewhere,' a union spokesperson said.

'And the elderly mother of Andries was also rudely awoken at 3.30 in the morning by police demanding she make a statement on the spot,' he said.

In a press statement, the CWIU 'totally' condemned this police harassment and interference.

Eight Kohler workers taken back

WORKERS at Kohler Corrugated in Brakpan recently won the reinstatement of eight workers dismissed for attending the funeral of Andries Raditsela and the scrapping of final written warnings given to another 134.

The Kohler workers, who live in Tsakane the home of Raditsela, felt that they must pay tribute to a FOSATU leader who was also an organiser, a comrade and a friend, by attending his funeral.

Especially, as Andries Raditsela had helped them organise their factory into the

Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union.

However, when the workers returned to work after the funeral the company fired eight and gave the rest final warnings.

Workers opposed this. They held two short stoppages. On June 3, after many negotiation meetings, the company finally gave in.

The Kohler workers' demands were also supported by FOSATU's Transvaal Region where many shop stewards put pressure on their own management.

The Tsakane Residents Association also supported their struggle. They said that if Kohler tried to dismiss all the workers then they would discourage Tsakane residents from scabbing.

Meanwhile, at Nettex, a textile factory at Bellville in the Western Cape, workers called an overtime boycott after their management refused to pay them for the two hours they took off in remembrance of Andries Raditsela.

Prior to the memorial stoppage, the Nettex management told workers that they were

only prepared to allow them 15 minutes. However, the workers decided to go ahead with the full two hours.

'The workers refused to accept that this time would be unpaid, so they refused to work any overtime and to work on public holidays until management agreed to pay them,' National Union of Textile Workers organiser, Mike Abrahams said.

They called off their boycott after the company agreed to pay them for half of the two hour stoppage, he added.

Dorbyl workers to decide whether to go on strike at four Transvaal factories

OVER 2 000 workers at four Dorbyl factories in the Germiston/Wadeville area will soon decide whether to take legal strike action in support of wage and other demands.

And it is likely that other Dorbyl factories where the Metal and Allied Workers Union is represented will follow suit.

The union began separate negotiations with management of the four factories — Dorbyl Railway Products, Dorbyl Railway Products Forging Division, Dorbyl Structural Products and Dorbyl Structures Erection — in April this year.

The workers have demanded a R3 an hour increase on top of the present R1,73 minimum wage, a long service bonus of 20c for each hour worked and an agreed severance pay of one month's wages for each year of

service.

Significantly, housing has also been raised as an issue in the Dorbyl talks. Workers have demanded that the company provide proper family accommodation for all its employees close to the place of work.

The talks have deadlocked on all the demands apart from the issue of housing. On this, the company has asked the union to come forward with more concrete proposals.

Dorbyl said it was not prepared to negotiate on any monetary matter, like the wage and long service demand, outside of the industrial council. This position has been opposed by MAWU on the grounds that while the minimums are set at council level, improvements to these should be negotiated at plant level.

The company also said it would not discuss severance pay arguing that this should only be negotiated when retrenchments are about to occur.

The shop stewards of the four factories recently decided to hold strike ballots to test whether workers are prepared to stop work in support of their demands. It is likely that they will support legal strike action.

Meanwhile, at a Dorbyl shop stewards council, the other MAWU factories decided to raise the same demands with their management.

MAWU sources predict that management's reaction will be the same as it was at the Germiston/Wadeville factories.

This could lead to a legal strike at all eight of the Dorbyl factories in the Transvaal where the union is represented.

New attempt to break deadlock

FURTHER talks between unions and the Eastern Cape motor bosses were held on June 18 in an attempt to break the long-standing deadlock over wages and working conditions.

A new industrial council agreement should have come into operation at the beginning of this year, but ever since November last year, when the talks began, the unions and employers have been unable to reach agreement.

At the recent meeting the employers presented new proposals, however it is unlikely that these will break the deadlock.

At meetings on June 20 the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union shop steward committees at Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen rejected the new proposals. They are now being discussed by general membership.