

ITMA STORY

The management at the Itma textile factory seemed to be in the front when it came to employer-employee relations. They accepted the Textile Union representative, who was elected from the workers by the workers. They also introduced a new wage scale but this was unsatisfactory to the workers. They therefore asked the representative to tell the management their grievances. The manager's reply to the representative was that he knows exactly what each worker's capabilities are, and what work he does. The representative returned and asked the foreman if he could hold a report-back meeting. He was given time after lunch to do so.

THE MEETING

At the meeting the production manager arrived and was asked to explain the new wage scale. He asked four individual workers if they were satisfied with the new wage scale; all of them said no. The Production Manager then walked out of the meeting. The workers asked the foreman if he was going to return to give an answer to their grievances. The foreman then phoned the Production Manager and asked him what his answer was. The Production Manager replied - those workers who are not satisfied can leave. So once again the management, who had first established communication channels, failed to use them properly and returned to the ineffectual method of "take it or leave it".

This attitude does nothing to better the positions of both employers and employees and only serves to encourage anger and discontent. The stubbornness of the employers will be the cause of much conflict unless they change their manner.

The workers naturally found the reply of the Production Manager insulting, as it was not their intention to leave but rather to negotiate. All they wanted was a civil reply. They therefore decided to consult the Main Manager. On the way to the management's office they were confronted by the Production Manager who ordered them out of the factory and to send their representatives in. The workers left the factory and sent their representatives in.

The representatives were presented with an ultimatum to tell the workers - return to work in 15 minutes or be fired. Again no attempt was made on behalf of the management to negotiate terms, or to come to an understanding. This is not impossible to do - many other factories have successful meetings to determine wage scales.

The workers representative returned to the workers waiting outside the factory, and began to tell the workers what the management had said. Whilst they were doing this, the management arrived and made a statement to the effect that the workers must return within 5 minutes or be fired. Another example of the management failing to attempt an open discussion which would lead to a friendly settlement.

The workers pointed out to the management that it was not them who had wanted to leave in the first place - it was the management who had thrown them out. The workers asked the Production Manager if he would make himself clear, as it was he who had first ordered them out, and now seemed to be ordering them to return. All the while management was issuing these ultimatums they were angering the workers as it was a blatant example of the management failing to negotiate, which was what the workers wished for.

The Production Manager refused to say anything more and the workers were locked out of the factory. They stayed there from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m. when the night shift joined them.

At this point the Union Representative was sent to the factory in an attempt to negotiate and resolve the situation. He was told that the Union was no longer recognised. The police who had been present during the period that the workers were thrown out, then told the workers to return the next day and attempt to continue negotiations through their elected representative.

At 8 a.m. the next morning the elected representatives went into the factory with the hope of settling the dispute. Outside the gates, the police watched, while the Union representative and workers waited. While negotiations were still going on inside, a truck load of 30 workers just recruited from the Bantu Labour Office arrived and drove into the factory.

This naturally angered the workers as it showed that the management was not really negotiating with the representatives and that they had already arrived at a decision.

At this point the representatives returned and told the workers that the day shift were all fired and that the night shift could return to work. The night shift, in agreement with the grievances of the day shift, decided not to return to work unless all the workers were allowed back. They were then told to return on the Wednesday at 2 p.m. to collect their pay.

The workers arrived and so did the police. Also present was the Union representative. The management then told the workers that they could reapply for work one at a time. The workers asked if all would be re-employed? The answer was no - only those jobs that were not taken by the 30 workers who had arrived the previous day, would be vacant. This was of course not accepted by the workers as it was merely in keeping with managements attitude to labour problems - no attempt to settle with the workers but simply lay down ultimatums. The workers said that all the workers originally sent out must be allowed to return. They therefore marched to the Kwa-Zulu Office in an attempt to obtain help from Mr. Barney Dladla, the Minister of Labour for Kwa-Zulu. The Union official was warned by the Security Branch that if he addressed the workers he would be charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act.

Mr. Dladla, who had successfully negotiated terms for the workers at Danhill Textile in Durban, rushed up to Itma factory. After negotiations between him

and the management, all the workers except for 10 were accepted back. A Union lawyer is at the moment appealing against this dismissal.

It would be interesting to know why it is that management is willing to negotiate with Mr. Dladla when he represents the workers. The success of Mr. Dladla shows that negotiations and open discussion between workers elected representatives and management can and does succeed.

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REMEMBER:

You must be prepared to attend meetings whenever you are called. You must be interested in reading all the pamphlets you receive. Remember unity is strength; strength is ours. Being one, we shall overcome.

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