

THE GENERAL FACTORY WORKERS BENEFIT FUND

What is a Benefit Fund for? How does it help workers?

The story of Mr Joshua Memela helps us to answer these questions.

Joshua Memela was employed by S.A.R. He had been contributing to the company Compulsory Savings Fund and on termination of his services he did not receive his contributions back. One of the Benefit Fund staff members phoned up the S.A.R. and gave a letter to Mr Memela making enquiries about the refund.

An official of the firm denied any knowledge of deductions. He wrote that at the back of the letter he had received. Later, after further enquiries had been made, S.A.R. promised to give him a refund after 10 days.

Later Mr Cheadle received a phone call from S.A.R. stating that a cheque had been sent to Mr Memela's address and requested Mr Memela to call at the office so that they could draft a letter to Johannesburg (the letter would be signed by the complainant).

The letter was then written. In this letter Mr Memela was complaining that he had not received his past contributions back.

Mr Cheadle took the letter personally to Johannesburg and lodged a complaint at the main office in Johannesburg. Sometime in November 1973 a card was received from the Chief Accountant informing the complainant that the office was still investigating the matter, after which a cheque for R36,46 was sent to Mr Memela c/o our address on the 23rd November 1973.

On 10th January 1974 Mr Davis made further enquiries from Johannesburg office as to how an amount of R36,45 was composed. A schedule dated 15th January 1974 showing the composition of this amount was received by the office and shown to the complainant.

Workers see how the Benefit Fund can help them, and its membership is growing rapidly. In the beginning we would sometimes have as many as 30 people joining in one day. But this year we have often had 60 new members joining in one day, and as many as 200 on a Saturday. More members means more work for the organisers to do and recently we had to employ two new staff members in the Benefit Fund. There is a branch of the B.F. in Pietermaritzburg as well as the main branch in Durban, and we now represent workers in more than 30 industries.

The Benefit Fund is growing, and it also helps the trade union movement to grow. It is as members of the Benefit Fund that workers at first unite together. After this unions are formed: each union unites all the workers in a certain industry. In this way six different unions have been established since the Benefit Fund was started. There are unions for workers in the following industries: textile, metal, furniture and timber, clothing and allied, transport and chemical. Meanwhile, workers in other industries continue to join the Benefit Fund. Soon it will be possible to establish unions for these workers also.

At present the B.F. provides funeral benefits and medical aid. It is hoped that in the near future it will also be able to provide a retirement benefit. The B.F. is also a watchdog which looks after the interests of individual members at their workplaces. When the B.F. receives a complaint from a member, one of the organizers telephones or writes a letter to the employer concerned. 90% of complaints

received are successfully dealt with like this. But what happens when employers refuse to do anything about complaints? In cases like this the B.F. can give legal advice to the member concerned. This is done on Saturday mornings. The B.F. also writes letters to employers to tell them that legal action will be taken if they take no notice of a just complaint. The Black Sash advice office at Bolton Hall has been established to help workers who have been wrongfully endorsed out of Durban.

At the end of January 1974 Mr David Davis, a B.F. official, was banned and placed under house arrest. He was one of the 'Bolton Hall Four' who were all banned at this time. We in the B.F. have not been intimidated or discouraged by this setback. Indeed, we now have more volunteers to help with the work than we had before.

To join the B.F. a worker pays 50 cents, and then 10 cents a week. Workers may become members by calling at Bolton Hall any weekday or Saturday.



FUNERAL CLAIMS AS AT SEPTEMBER 1972

49 - 100's	=	R4 900,00
70 - 20's	=	1 400,00
5 - 40's	=	200,00
2 - 30's	=	120,00
<u>126 claims</u>	=	<u>R6 620,00</u>

FUNERAL CLAIMS AS AT THE 1st JANUARY 1974 - 31st MARCH

18 - 100's	=	R1 800,00
15 - 20's	=	300,00
2 - 40's	=	80,00
1 - 60's	=	60,00
<u>36 claims</u>	=	<u>R2 240,00</u>

FUNERAL CLAIMS PENDING (SOME DOCUMENTS OUTSTANDING)

9 - 100's	=	R900,00
1 - 60's	=	60,00
2 - 40's	=	80,00
2 - 30's	=	60,00
25 - 20's	=	500,00
<u>39 claims</u>	=	<u>R1 600,00</u>