

THE STRUGGLE OF THE B & S WORKERS

Video, VHS or Numatic. Colour. 45min. 1983.
Made by Georgina Jaffee with the B&S Workers.
Produced by the Centre of Applied Legal
Studies and the Central Television Unit at the
University of the Witwatersrand.

This video is not a documentary. It does not intend to explore or interpret either chronologically or systematically the complex set of circumstances which constitute an event.

Instead, an attempt has been made to make available to workers the means whereby they themselves can construct their history. In this case the story is about the development of an extraordinary level of unity amongst workers who were resisting selective reinstatement and awaiting a court hearing. The 270 workers were all reinstated after an out-of-court settlement a year later. The experience not only transformed their individual lives but also an entire community.

Each day these workers met in the Roman Catholic Church hall in Brits. They gained a broader understanding from discussing the struggles and current issues of fellow workers in other parts of the country which appeared in reports from general and union newspapers.

This video has been made with the intention of enabling these workers to share their experience of this event and the broader questions with workers in other parts of the country.

The choice of content was decided on with the Union Committee. There was a concerted attempt made not to impose a script but rather to let it emerge through a series of discussions. None of the interviews were rehearsed and members of the Committee decided who should tell particular aspects of the story. In the final stages two of the Committee members participated in editing the material.

This project should be seen as an experiment in using video technology as one means of control over the interpretation of events by the people themselves.

The making of the video ran parallel with an investigation into the strategies of survival adopted by these workers when they faced dismissal and unemployment. This study was conducted by myself and Prof. J. Keenan. In this investigation the workers also participated in the formulation and administering of a questionnaire. Some of the information is made available in the video.

It is hoped that this video will generate ideas and criticism which in the future will contribute towards overcoming the various technical and language problems apparent in this presentation.

Georgina Jaffee

(Copies available at a negotiated price from Mr A Blake at the Central Television Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand. Telephone 716-3659.