

Victory for Clothing Workers

In Natal many women work in clothing factories. In most of these factories conditions of work are very bad and the pay is just as bad. This is often how women workers are treated until they organise to fight against such conditions.

But the trouble is that there is a union that all workers in clothing factories are forced to join. They are forced to join the Garment Workers Industrial Union. This Garment Workers Union has a 'closed shop' agreement with all bosses of clothing factories. This means that bosses won't employ a worker unless she or he joins the Garment Workers Union first.

Workers at a factory in Pinetown, James North Africa, were not happy with this union which did not do anything much for them. They could see around them that factories which were organised by FOSATU unions (The Federation of South African Trade Unions) were really winning good demands. So, they asked the National Union of Textile Workers, which is a FOSATU union, to organise them.

About 80% of the workers at James North joined the Textile Workers Union and the union signed a recognition agreement with the bosses. This meant that James North bosses agreed now to talk to the Textile Workers Union as the union representing the workers. But that wasn't the end of their struggle.



Once this happened, the Garment Workers Union became angry that their members had joined another union.

* They tried to stop the Textile Workers Union from joining the Garment Workers Industrial Council which is where unions and bosses decide on wages and conditions of work.



* Soon after they organised a meeting at Curries Fountain and tried to tell the workers that other unions are bad because they divide the Garment workers.

* They then changed the Garment Workers Union constitution to say that any workers who join the Textile Workers Union would be expelled from the Garment Workers Union and this would mean that the bosses would have to fire the workers because of the 'closed shop' agreement.

* In the factory they tried to put fear into workers by calling them in one by one asking them if they were members of the Textile Workers Union.

* The Garment Workers Union accused the bosses at James North of not counting the votes for the Textile Workers Union properly.

Eventually this case was taken to the Industrial Court where these sort of disputes sometimes get sorted out. It was here that the Textile Workers Union got an exemption which allowed workers at James North Africa to legally join any union they wanted. So the workers won their struggle.

The Textile Workers Union is now applying for an exemption like this in 5 other factories where most of the workers have chosen to join the Textile Workers Union. Clothing workers at these factories can at last join a union which workers control. So, now they can really fight for what they want.

SHARE 'SPEAK'...



...WHENEVER YOU CAN.