Low productivity: Put the blame where it belongs

A workers from one rubber factory interviewed by Fosatu Workers News said: "I live 30 km from Midrand in the Transvaal. I got fifteen days leave this Christmas, but spent seven days travelling."

"Not time to rest."

"I only see my family once a year and there are too many jobs to do when I get home. Because of this, I can't enjoy the Christmas days."

Committees in several factories are discussing the situation. Many feel that there are three weeks plus public holidays should be given as happens for example in the engineering factories. "Committee members in engineering factories say that it is still too late."

"Demand for leave."

"The employers' argument is that low productivity is caused by workers being inefficient. The two demands that management usually makes are:"

* Rehabilitation of absenteeism and late arrival at work.

* Bonus schemes in place of flat rate wage increases.

Recent examples of this are the Sigma Motor Corporation in Pretoria and Piggott Maskew Rubber Company in Boksburg.

Sigma has put forward a bonus scheme and low productivity as one of the major problems that workers must solve in the plant.

Piggott Maskew insisted late last year on a productivity bonus instead of any increase at all, and forced the issue before workers were able to put forward proposals for joint union and management discussion on the organisation of production.

The result was a strike, and an attempt by Piggott Maskew to cancel the union agreement.

Fosatu unions involved in these negotiations have stated that low productivity is mainly the result of poor organisation of work in the factory. They argue that workers themselves know where most of the production problems and hold-ups occur and so should be involved in joint decision-making over the organisation of production.

Shortages of parts

"At Sigma, for example, shop stewards have pointed out that shortages of parts cause the production lines to come down. The management then speed up the lines so that they can make up for lost time. Workers have to work faster and the quality of the work declines.

The workers get blamed but the fault is not theirs."

Workers are also obliged to work overtime on Saturday. But they still need time at home so they stay absent from work some time during the week.

Thus a man who is not as skilled in his job has to take his place. Again the quality and speed of production declines.

So workers say that the only real solution to the problem of absenteeism is to make the organisation of production more efficient and to have workers jointly involved in making these decisions.

Confirmed by expert

"Expert opinion confirms what workers have long felt. According to Dr Deming, an expert on motor car factories in the United States, 85% of spoilt parts are the result of management mistakes and only 15% are the workers' fault. Japanese factories have been taking his advice and improving productivity, and some American car companies are also beginning to listen."

Martin Nkhu, National Organiser in Pretoria, has said: "We aim to make more such arrangements, and to avoid workers having to go home during the week."

No wonder Transkei doesn't want unions!

The new wage levels in the manufacturing, building and civil engineering industries have been increased to 34 cents for ten hours a day for men and to 32 cents for ten hours a day for women.

This means that a man will earn R5.24 (without deduction) for a 46-hour working week, and a woman R13.72.

The determination also lays down a minimum of 15 cents an hour, and up to 32 cents an hour for women.

Mr Mngomezulu said the new wage levels were in line with his pledge to increase the wages of Transkeians in the so-called and labour sphere.

The determination also lays down a "no wonder" clause, which means that workers are not allowed to bargain in the workplace. "We want to make this determination more effective and to have workers jointly involved in making these decisions."