

135 WORKERS AT MISTER SWEETS DEMAND R16 000 BASIC SALARY NOW OR THEY WILL STRIKE!

By: Casual Workers Advice Office and Simunye Workers' Forum
28 February 2024

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The CWAO/SWF is taking Mister Sweet, owned by Premier Foods, to the CCMA on 29 February, after several months of the company refusing to pay workers a basic salary.

Mister Sweet makes sweets and supplies Spar and Woolworths, among other shops. It has very poor health and safety practices and workers often get injured there.

The case we are bringing is conciliation in terms of Section 64 (1) 134 (disputes about matters of mutual interest case), on behalf of 135 workers. If the employer refuses to settle the case, we are hoping the CCMA will issue a certificate for a strike.

This very large group of workers has been working at Mister Sweet for over a decade. They were originally hired through labour brokers, and illegally kept by Mister Sweet as temporary and casual workers for years.

They became deemed permanent employees of Mister Sweet in 2018. This was three years after the Labour Relations Act changed (in 2015) to say that any labour broker worker who had been working for the same employer for more than three months, automatically became a permanent employee of that company.

However, since 2018, the deemed permanent workers have never been given a basic salary. The workers are instead paid R6000 per month, or R7000 or R8000 - this amount is just imposed on them, and the workers are not allowed by Mister Sweet to have any negotiations around this.

The SWF and CWAO, the organisations that the workers belong to, tried to negotiate a basic wage but Mister Sweet refused to bargain with SWF or CWAO. They promised to negotiate directly with the workers if they elected four representatives, which the workers did, but Mister Sweet still refused to negotiate.

There is also a Human Resources officer called Andrew who harasses the workers. The SWF and CWAO condemn this. The workers have the right to organise and negotiate. This is no longer the 19th century or the days of apartheid when workers' organisations were banned.

There are almost no health and safety standards at the workplace. Workers who are injured on duty are made to return to work too soon, before they are healed and, in some cases, still have to lift heavy equipment even though they are injured. Even a worker who was permanently injured and reassigned, after a long struggle to light duty, is still being made to lift heavy things.

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For comment, please call CWAO and SWF organiser Jacob Potlaki on 082 810 6134

(The Mister Sweet Human Resources manager is Bongani Mdlalose - available on 082 411 0583

This press statement was released by Casual Workers Advice Office and Simunye Workers Forum on 28 February 2024.