

Mister Sweet Workers Vow to Continue Strike, now in its 10th Week

Unfortunately, another worker's finger was chopped off by factory machinery - this was again a worker who was injured after having been brought in to operate complex equipment - the wrapping machine - without adequate training from the Mister Sweet bosses.

SWF is disturbed that the Mister Sweet bosses are said to be paying casual workers R3000 a week or R12 000 per month to replace striking permanent workers who are earning between R6000 and R7000 per month, some after having worked at Mister Sweet for years. It means Mister Sweet has the money to offer their loyal and hardworking employees of many years standing an increase but prefers to spend the money on trying to break the strike.

The Mister Sweet bosses also collapsed wage negotiations yesterday (24 October) by saying they were seeking a discussion on a basic wage, which is one of our key demands. Instead, when the negotiations started, they stuck to their original percentage increase offer. They then offered to lend workers a few thousand rand to stop striking, saying they would deduct that loan from workers' salaries in 2025. The workers rejected this.

Mister Sweet is also engaging in potentially unlawful actions.

First, they have told striking workers that they will prevent them from accessing some of their pension funds via the two-pot system unless they return to work (workers' access to their own pension funds under the new two-pot system is not conditional on workers not striking).

Second, they have told 150 striking workers that they need to return to work because they are being transferred to the Manhattan factory about 35 kilometres away (workers cannot be compelled to return to work from a protected strike because they are being transferred).

Third, they have begun interviewing casual workers working for Workforce Labour Broker for permanent posts, even though the striking workers are still in these jobs (workers cannot be dismissed for striking).

Mister Sweet's production has continued to decline. Due to mistakes made by inexperienced workers, one truck full (eight pallets worth of sweets) was allegedly returned to the factory.

The Mister Sweet bosses have also refused to negotiate with the workers' chosen union, the Simunye Workers Forum. This is unconstitutional and a breach of the inalienable right to freedom of association.

The workers are standing very strong. Several international unions have contributed to the Strike Fund which has been used to purchase groceries for those workers in need. Every day, workers share the little food they have with each other. We have even witnessed workers who were able to access their two-pot pension funds sharing this money with other workers in need.

Factories in post-apartheid South Africa that make tens of millions of rands in profit every year cannot continue to be allowed to operate like Mister Sweet, paying workers just

R6000 per month even after 10 years. The Mister Sweet workers are striking not only for themselves but for the future factory workers of South Africa.

For comment, call SWF organisers Edgar Mokgola (071 4553500) and Jacob Potlaki (082 8106134)

This press statement was released by Casual Workers Advice Office on 25 October 2024.