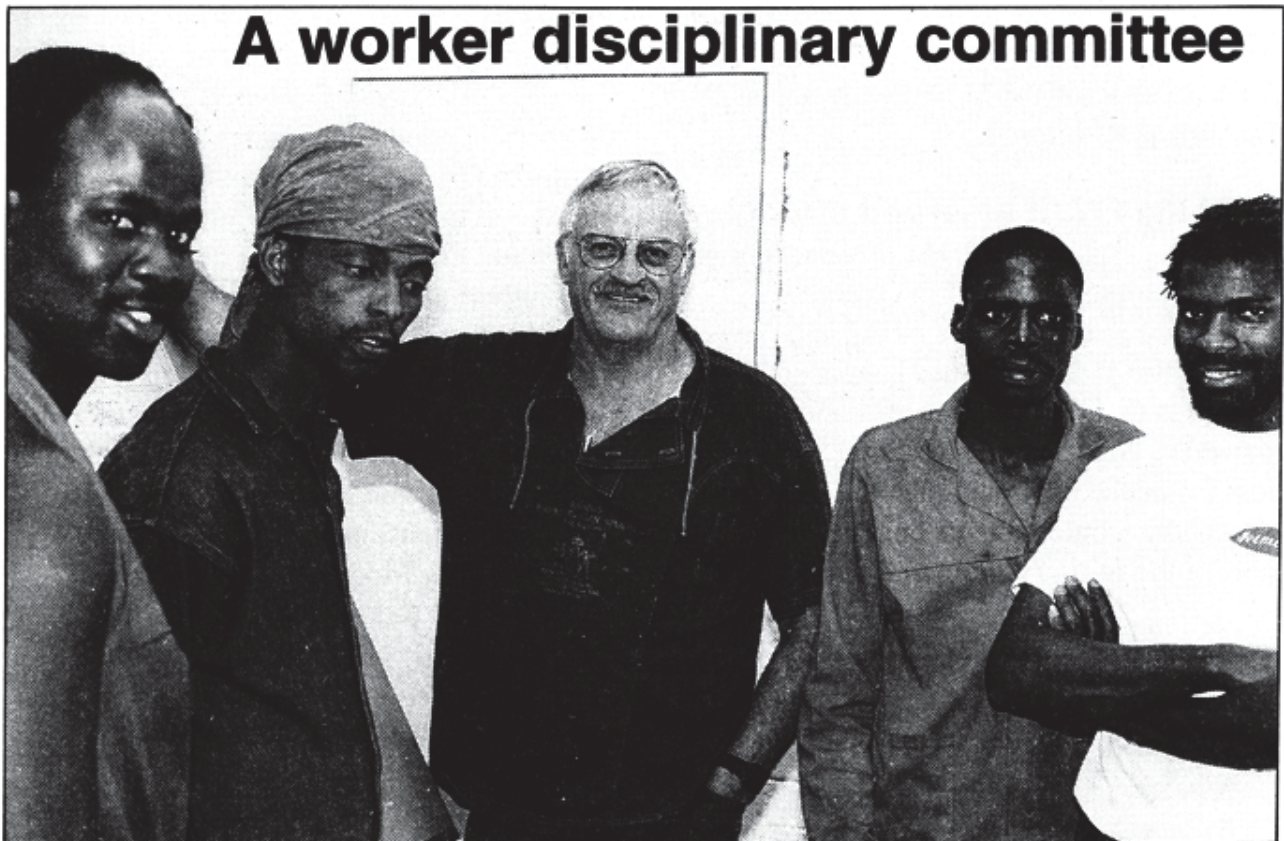


Shopstewards from Jetmaster in Industria, Johannesburg, say it is hard for the union to defend workers who lack discipline.

NUMSA shopstewards GEORGE MLAMBO, SAMUEL ZIKALALA, DANIEL KHASHANE and EDMOND FIGNEN tell SNUKI ZIKALALA their solution:



Jetmaster shopstewards with manager

**T**he recognition of NUMSA in our factory and our getting a full-time shopsteward with an office are victories for workers. Today employers cannot dismiss, insult or abuse workers as they did before. We are always behind those who elected us.

However, some of the workers take advantage. Workers expect us to fight for their rights but this cannot be done if there is a lack of discipline on their side.

Problems of excessive drinking during working hours and coming late to work without valid reasons are thorny issues. Both lower workers' productivity and make our

task very difficult.

The bosses point fingers at individuals: "He is always drunk, comes late every day. Do you still expect us to keep him? There are thousands of workers looking for jobs."

This used to annoy us as we were always on the defensive. Our meetings with management were not creative. We could not advance on other pertinent issues since we spent most of our time defending workers who behaved irresponsibly.

Then we decided to form a disciplinary committee consisting of all shopstewards. This is not a school-type disciplinary committee and we do not police workers. We

discuss and take up issues of drinking during working hours and late-coming with the individual concerned.

This clears the air during collective bargaining negotiations. Management has agreed to give us all available information on an individual's performance and problems.

We felt we could not deal with the problem of late-coming if we did not know how workers commuted. We got more information about the running order of trains. There is a problem with taxis and buses as they can be delayed by accidents and traffic congestion in the mornings.

We are now in a better position to defend workers. The managers who stay in towns and drive to work do not know the hustle and bustle of coming from a township. If a worker comes late without a valid reason, we take up the issue. We show him the importance of keeping time. We do not want workers to think we are doing management's dirty work. We want workers to behave responsibly, to be conscious of time. They should not give management unnecessary ammunition.

Employers have this prejudice that workers are lazy drunkards, irresponsible and unproductive. This really hurts us, because without our hands there will be no production nor surplus value for them.

### **Drinking and health and safety**

We work with metal and welding machines. It is a dangerous environment and a drunken worker has a 90% chance of getting hurt. If a worker is drunk, management exonerates itself. The worker and the union are left with no defence.

As we are concerned about health and safety, we must ensure workers are not intoxicated during working hours. This is a mammoth task.

We call the comrade and try to find out whether he has social problems. We show him the dangers of working when he's been drinking. If he is hurt he won't be able to support his family as the majority of our comrades are breadwinners.

Because we are firm on drinking and

late-coming, workers now run to management. Within no time there are problems with management. The worker will then show us three written warnings and expect us to defend him.

As shopstewards we do not throw him away. We vigorously take up his case and after we have secured his job, he becomes the most loyal member of the union. We accept that people make mistakes and will always have attitudes towards those who are disciplining them.

As leaders we feel we have to be exemplary. We cannot expect workers to be disciplined and productive if we ourselves do not uphold those values.

We are still part and parcel of the workers and our task is to protect them and better their working conditions. We are not part of the management team. We have been elected by workers to look after their own interests and if they feel we are being unfair and not accountable they have the right to vote us out. ☆

### **Management's view**

Jetmaster factory manager Don Smithers says: "I am happy workers have taken it upon themselves to deal with disciplinary issues. This makes both my job and theirs a lot easier. I believe the important issue here is to understand one other.

"The committee has reduced my work load. I am no longer directly responsible in the initial stages for talking to workers about their late-coming, drinking and absenteeism. This is handled by the shopstewards.

"I would gladly sit in these disciplinary hearings, to make sure there is no unfairness in dealing with individual cases. The view of the shopstewards is that they will only allow me to be present when action is to be taken against their colleagues. They provide me with all the facts and I have the right to look at both sides of the stories. I think this works much better." ❖