

The Namibian Take-Away

A NORMAL economy works like a take-away. The customer pays and takes away something to eat or to drink. The shop itself belongs to an owner who employs a manager and the rest of the staff. They are responsible for the running of the outfit. If they do not perform, they have to leave. They are controlled daily. If the shop does not earn money for the owner, it will be closed. A factory does not function differently.

But the Namibian economy is different. It should be called Give-Away. Here the taxpayer pays the unknown bill in advance or later, and some customers or some manager or some employees run away with the goods or the service or the salary without delivering an adequate compensation.

This has been exercised in many different outfits, which are created and sponsored by the government of the day. Managerial posts are filled with sometimes unfit, but tested and loyal party cadres.

The Ramatex complex has so far consumed several hundred million N\$ from the taxpayer.

After complaints from some members of the frustrated workforce, conflicting and confusing signals were given by a certain lawyer and a Government Department, with no name given, who was responsible for the attack on the enquiring public. The answers given are very funny to read but also very con-

fusing and consist of statements which no normal company would give. One wonders why a government department, which uses the word 'we' when speaking of Ramatex Namibia, or a lawyer answers to such normal complaints about the conduct of a private company. Is Ramatex Namibia also a parastatal or party-company? One would expect a prompt and short reaction from the Ramatex management through a press release from their public relations department to avoid such pompous statements.

Anyhow, the two unwanted statements reveal the following:

1. Ramatex is not a mining company, which mines radioactive mineral

2. Ramatex has not started the knitting process and is not cutting garments. But they are packing finished garments. (Question: Manufactured by whom and where?)

3. Ramatex has a strong code of conduct with an independent verification and public reporting. (Remark: This is certainly up to now not true for the Namibian taxpayer)

4. Ramatex has pegged the workers wages to a minimum amount, sufficient to meet the basic needs of the personnel. This is a result of a company study. The hourly wage was fixed at N\$3. If the company cannot organise continuous work, there is no pay and therefore no fulfilment of basic needs. (Remark: No comment, all

this is legal)

5. Ramatex has an organised system of record keeping on the number of hours each employee works.etc.etc.

6. What is the difference between a Ramatex working shift and a walking shift with new shoes? (Answer: None, it hurts)

What the management of Ramatex was not told is that the previously disadvantaged Namibian workforce expects certain things. Any traditional leader, previously advantaged farmer, private employer or any government department has this experience: They have, for example, to wear protective clothes, safety boots, safety goggles, gloves and helmets, to be shielded from occupational hazards. You should be responsible for: AIDS education, housing allowance, Christmas bonus, organise transport, training, you have to arrange a loan scheme, so that the employees do not fall in the hands of loan sharks. This is of course an exaggeration, but only slightly.

The Investment Centre has not told the Ramatex management that they are right now conducting a unique sociological experi-

ment on a large scale in Namibia by trying to operate such a factory. You will already have noticed that Asian work ethics are not very widespread in Namibia. A payment scheme - for example - which pays each individual differently after its achieved results, is unknown here and can only be implemented against stiff resistance. The garment industry worldwide works as a sweatshop with very tight rules for all participants, because the profit margin is very thin. To overcome the socio-cultural hiccups, a sound concept with sober and honest advisors is necessary. Ignorant party partisans inflict only more unnecessary damage. This cannot be done without the cooperation of a union, which could also serve as a buffer and a mediator. Nobody wants the Ramatex Namibia project to go down the drain. But one has to point out that there are homegrown reasons why a country with abundant natural resources has such a large idle workforce. Up to now the Ramatex train is puffing more than moving.

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Readers Note: We are trying to encourage writers to put their names to their views; and to discourage the use of pseudonyms except for legitimate reasons. Many have written about the 'jobs-for-comrades' issue, but want their names withheld because of affiliation to the ruling party or jobs in Government. We again exhort writers not to hide behind anonymity but to make use of the right to free speech granted to us all in terms of our Constitution - Ed

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