

**TO: BUSINESS REPORT****FROM: SACTWU HEAD OFFICE**

Margie Inggs, recent comments regarding the problems in the clothing industry are of extreme concern to SACTWU. Many of her comments position her as an agent of the employers, rather than as an objective commentator. For example, in Business Watch (6 April 2005), she states that the bargaining council's efforts to register clothing employers "has met with little success". This is not true. In fact, the clothing bargaining council launched a serious campaign to register employers in July 2003. Since then and up to 1 March this year, the number of clothing companies registered with the bargaining council have increased by 41%. Further, in one of her recent articles, she claims that 80% of clothing employers face jail terms or may have their business closed because of non-compliance proceedings against them. In fact, bargaining council statistics show that only 39% of companies registered with the council are facing such possible compliance proceedings. It is also not true that the compliance proceedings have not been successful, as she claims further. On the contrary, since the start of the compliance proceedings late last year, of those employers against whom compliance orders were originally issued, at least 28% have since then become compliant. Further, not all the compliance orders issued are for non-compliance with council wage levels. Inggs has also recently claimed as fact that 900 Cut-Make-and-Trim employers in KZN metro areas might close their factories if the Minister again extends the clothing main agreement, and that this will cause 67 000 workers to lose their jobs. However, this information has never been empirically verified. The industry information at our disposal shows that there are nowhere near 67 000 CMT workers in the KZN metro area. Inggs also states as fact that the bargaining council system is not working, and that "perhaps small and medium businesses could be given some leeway to pay a lower rate than large companies." (Business Watch, 6 April 2005). The fact is that the bargaining council has done exactly this over the last few years. For example, as far back as 2001, the bargaining council agreement legally allowed most small and medium sized employers in KZN to pay a wage rate that was as much as 23% lower than that applicable to larger companies. Further, in March 2003, the bargaining council offered these employers a 2-year period to catch up with the applicable rates. Currently, very small clothing employers are completely exempted from all bargaining council agreements. The bargaining council has even

offered the facility of a reasonable repayment plan for arrears. In 2003, the bargaining council staff embarked on a nation-wide roadshow to explain the council assistance to these employers. The point that Inggs ignores is that we are dealing here with employers who continue, openly and defiantly, to deliberately flout the law, who act illegally, and who just simply ignore the reasonable assistance that the bargaining council has offered them. In any event, wage rates in the clothing industry are bitterly low. For example, the current starting wage rate for machinist in the non-metro area is only R222.92 per week, and that of a qualified non-metro machinist is only R282.76 per week. Workers in these areas enjoy no other benefits, such as healthcare or retirement funding. Any reasonable person will agree that these are bitterly low wages, paid to highly skilled manufacturing workers. Most of these workers are single mothers from the poorest communities, supporting an average of 6 dependants on miserable wage rates. Our society has a duty to protect vulnerable workers like these, and to advance reactionary agendas to drive their already low wages even further down. These poor workers require support, not condemnation.

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