

Clothing sector seeks talks wrap

By Jana Marais

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Clothing manufacturers and labour union Sactwu will meet the directors-general of various government departments to try to settle a dispute over a minimum wage. Thousands of jobs are at stake.



While manufacturers will argue that a lower wages are needed in an industry that "has priced itself out of the global market", Sactwu national organising secretary Wayne van der Rhee said the union would not tolerate such talk.

The dispute, seen as a test case for the government and the union's commitment to "decent" work, arose after the industry's national bargaining council recently took action against non-compliant manufacturers. In response, 85 factories in Newcastle shut down temporarily in support of non-compliant peers and to illustrate the "unaffordability" of the minimum wage.

Change - or fail

More than 21 000 workers are employed by non-compliant manufacturers, out of total employment in the industry of around 55 000, said Leon Deetlefs, national compliance officer at the bargaining council. At a meeting called by the Free State provincial government on Monday, the parties agreed to a 30-day moratorium on action against noncompliant manufacturers.

Manufacturers will lobby for changes to the wage model, including the introduction of a lower entry wage and the allowance of piece work. "If we don't adapt, the government and union must accept that our industrial and labour policies are doomed to fail," said Johann Baard, director of the Apparel Manufacturers of South Africa (AMSA).

Van der Rhee said the union would request higher import tariffs on clothing. SA already has tariffs of 45% on a number of clothing products.

Source: The Times

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