

Sactwu Media Release :□

The SA Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) is revolted by the fact that human-trafficking is taking place in clothing factories in Newcastle. This has come to light since the Hawks raided a Newcastle-based clothing factory on Friday to free foreign trafficked workers who were allegedly locked inside the factory premises at night and held against their will. (See <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/selnewsdetails.php?nid=10116>)

We have heard whispers of this happening before. However in those cases we were not able to convince workers to step forward as witnesses. This latest finding will hopefully result in a thorough investigation by authorities into the extent of this problem in Newcastle.

In some ways we are not surprised by this latest abuse of human rights by Newcastle factories. We have long said that the town operates like the Wild West. It has the highest concentration of illegality in the clothing industry nationally, with abuses of labour and human rights occurring virtually across the board. It has its own logic and rules, and blatantly and consistently disregards the authorities. The industry regulator, the Departments of Home Affairs and Labour, and the SAPS all continuously try to enforce laws in Newcastle, but at each point the Newcastle-cowboys resist and find new means to continue their games.

These Newcastle-cowboys have even used their golden tongues to charm large portions of South Africa's political, academic and business establishment, presenting themselves as honest and hardworking heroes of a new way of doing business in South Africa.

In this particular case, workers appear to have been lured and trafficked to Newcastle from surrounding countries by the false promise of decent employment and higher wages. Yet not only did it turn out to be sweatshop employment, but the factory apparently even locked workers inside the premises at night. It is incredible that this can happen in 2017. The problem of locking workers inside factories has been repeatedly identified in the town, and it even once caused the death of two babies which were born to a mother locked up at night in one of the factories. Yet despite this problem having made national headlines at the time, and despite this issue of locking workers up having been flagged with the local industrialists many times, it has happened again.

{youtube}buV4_B0RNAk|640|360{/youtube}

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