

300 Heinz workers accept redundancy package Heinz means beans

By Narelle Wilson

ATTEMPTS to keep the Dandenong Heinz factory open have failed and in 32 days the gates will close for the last time.

Last Monday, representatives from the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), workers and Heinz management met for last-ditch talks.

A lock-in by disgruntled Heinz workers had failed to persuade Heinz management to keep the plant open and after tense negotiations, the workers agreed to accept a redundancy package of eight weeks' pay and \$10,000, plus, for casuals, \$750 for each year worked.

After 45 years in Dandenong, Heinz management has decided to operate out of New Zealand and country Victoria, forcing unemployment upon 300 local workers.

AMWU assistant secretary, Mr Ray Campbell, said both parties had hoped to sign off on an agreed package by last Tuesday.

"The workers were reluctant to sign as certain clauses in the package were confusing. The workers demanded the wording be changed, which has delayed the process."

Mr Campbell again slammed the State Government for having "made no attempt to listen to the workers".

"They haven't even returned our calls," he said.

He said the Heinz issue had become political and the union would continue to press the State Government to meet with the workers and the company.

Mr Campbell said that the Heinz production site, which had provided a stable income for generations of local families, would soon be a ghost town.

"We have done all we can to keep the plant open and for local workers to remain employed."

"Unfortunately management will close the plant and in a few weeks, years of hard work and production will be a memory," he said.

"A couple of cleaning staff will stay to do a final clean-up. After that it's all over," Mr Campbell said.

The second of the "giants" — H. J. Heinz Co. — made Journal headlines in July, 1951, when it announced a £2,000,000 factory with an initial area of 300,000 sq. ft., employing 800 people. Even by October, when the new factory was on the planning board, loans of £4,000,000 were being negotiated to cover the expansion program.

Once again, E. A. Watts secured the contract, and the Heinz colossus was opened by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert (then Mr) Menzies, in November, 1955, before a gathering of over 300 guests, including Mr Jack H. Heinz II.

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