

116 put off at Sperry New Holland

By LYNNE PATTERSON

MANY of 116 workers sacked by Sperry New Holland in Cranbourne may face financial chaos.

Despite being given what a union official describes as "attractive retrenchment packages", some workers could be in trouble paying off family homes and cars.

This is the opinion of union representative, Mr Wally Sharpe, who said the majority of workers were from the Dandenong area from

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which the farm machinery company transferred two years ago.

He said workers, particularly those over 40, faced dubious employment prospects.

Between 60 and 70 of the men and women dismissed have chosen the retrenchment package and already left the company. Others plan to accept early retirement packages.

Mr Sharpe said an over-surplus of stock, which caused the stand-downs, resulted from machinery plants in America closing down and their stocks being bought "for a song" and brought to Australia, creating an over abundance of stock at Cranbourne.

He said the new machinery had been arriving over the past few months.

Mr Sharpe said the company would have foreseen what was coming and could have avoided the "heartless" manner in which workers were told of impending unemployment.

He said: "At 2pm on the Wednesday prior to Easter, the general manager, Mr Nelson Craige, an American, called all workers together and said his piece about the economic conditions and announced 116 workers

were to be immediately stood down.

"Everyone was in shock. We'd been asking for some time about the company's future and were told everything was 'sweet'.

"I'd like to know what they think 'sweet' is.

"The company was forced to rescind the stand-downs the following day when told the nature of retrenchments breached a new Federal award.

Protest

"Sackings are across-the-board and include assembly workers, office staff, managers, supervisors and engineers."

Workers held a protest meeting at the office of the MHR for Holt, Mr Duffy, complaining about the Federal Government allowing "huge imports" of harvesters into the country.

Mr Sharpe said: "The new machinery obviously drained the collateral in the Australian company and it was told to cut back."

(The company is understood to have bought 140 harvesters valued at about \$140,000 each).

He said: "Farmers can't afford to buy the machines now in the yard and there is

enough here to satisfy farmers and dealers for at least 12 months.

"I told the workers to hang on as long as they can but the company has us over a barrel. There's not much we can do.

"Fifty-eight workers from the shop floor have to go and 58 from the office staff.

"Some retrenched workers have been with the company 20 years, some only 12 months. The retrenchment package is worked on years of service, how long the person has been in superannuation and the worker's age.

"Anyone over 55 gets the early retirement package as an extra bonus."

Mr John Blackwell, head of the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union, said it should be the responsibility of the Federal Government not to allow such large imports into Australia at the expense of local employment.

He said he received a "sympathetic hearing" from Mr Duffy who intends taking up the matter with the appropriate Minister.

A spokesman for the company was unavailable for comment as this edition went to press.