

# Prolonged transport strike sparks panic buying, cash crisis

## Some ATMs nearly empty as union digs in its heels

**SHEREE BEGA AND  
THABISO THAKALI**

**C**ASH is running out at ATMs and there could be further shortages as consumers “panic buy” because of the ongoing transport strike, experts have warned.

Yesterday, as the Road Freight Employers Association (RFEA) was granted an interdict forbidding further violence and intimidation, Capitec sent an SMS to its clients warning of limited cash at ATMs.

“Each ATM has an amount of cash in it and you basically have to refill it on a continuous basis,” explained Charl Nel, the bank’s spokesman. “Those needed to be refilled after the strike started, now there is no money in them. It’s not only us being affected, it’s the whole cash-in-transit sector affected.

“On the one side you don’t get cash from the ATM, and on the other side, retailers do not get their cash collected from them. The impact is risk. The cycle of money is being disrupted by this strike.”

The bank had advised its clients to buy and pay accounts by card as well as draw cash at supermarkets. “Either swipe your card and help retailers by drawing money from the tills. That can help solve the prob-

lem in a small way.”

Russell Berman, of Spark ATM systems, agreed. “We sit in a dangerous situation. It’s month-end and people have been paid their salaries, but can’t get access to cash to pay school fees or food.”

The Labour Court granted an interim interdict prohibiting violence by striking freight logistics workers, as talks continued last night to end the strike. Further arguments will take place on Monday.

Penwell Lunga, the chairman of the RFEA, said it was pleased its interdict was successful. “We saw that lives were going to be lost and we had to prevent these incidents from happening.

“What the relief granted means now is that it gives police more authority to tell striking workers not to gather where they are prohibited. This will assist us in a great deal because the police will have a stronger hand on public roads to clear them so deliveries can take place.”

Lunga said the employers had given themselves a deadline to have some wage agreement by Monday.

But the SA Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu), who is leading the 20 000-strong workforce, opposed the urgent application.

Its spokesman, Vincent Masoro, said: “There is nothing unlawful in what we’re doing as Satawu. We remain lawful, orderly, peaceful, in our protest.”

The workers have been on strike over wages since Monday after employers and unions deadlocked in wage negotiations.

Unions demand a 12 percent pay rise while the RFEA had proposed a staggered increase of 8.5 percent effective from March, and a further 0.5 percent from September next year.

But Neren Rau, the chief executive of the SA Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has warned if the strike continued next week, “panic buying” would set in.

“We saw that with perishables there was an impact this week. But in the first week of a strike like this, the economy can continue to generally function.

“Businesses have contingency plans that carry them through for the first few days. But once we enter week two, we start to see those inventories get to low levels, we also see panic set in among consumers... the irrational behaviour of consumers and panic buying of fuel and the withdrawal of cash.”