

**‘THE FUTURE IS IN THE
HANDS OF THE WORKERS’
A HISTORY OF
FOSATU**

M I C H E L L E F R I E D M A N

Historical Papers Labour Archive Project



The
ATLANTIC
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WORKERS UNITE



The background of the page is a dark red color. Overlaid on this is a stylized, light red illustration of a crowd of people. Many of the figures have their right fists raised in a gesture of solidarity or protest. In the center of the crowd, a pickaxe is held high, its handle extending horizontally across the middle of the image. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century political posters.

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Several people have contributed substantially to this book.

An enormous vote of thanks goes to the writer and content developer, Michelle Friedman, who has done a magnificent job.

Special gratitude and appreciation to Dr Noor Nieftagodien and Professor Philip Bonner for all their assistance, advice and contribution to the book's content.

Without the tireless efforts of my colleague Brown Maaba, this book would not have come together.

Particular mention to my favourite archivists in Historical Papers: Gabriele Mohale, Zofia Sulej and Mphonyane Taulela, whose unrelenting support and assistance made this project a pleasure.

It has been gratifying to work with Adam Rumball from Sharkbuoys Designs. Adam worked tirelessly in visually translating the feel of the exhibition into a book and he has retained a real sense of the exhibition while giving the book its own look and its own integrity.

Thanks also to the *It's a Go!* exhibition design and installation team.

MICHELE PICKOVER
CURATOR OF MANUSCRIPTS, HISTORICAL PAPERS
THE LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
JANUARY 2011

ACRONYMS

AAWU	African Allied Workers Union	JLDF	Joint Legal Defence Fund
AFCWU	African Food and Canning Workers Union	MACWUSA	Motor Assembly and Component Workers' Union
ANC	African National Congress	MAWU	Metal and Allied Workers Union
BAWU	Black Allied Workers Union	MWASA	Media Workers' Association of South Africa
BC	Black Consciousness	NAAWU	National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
CCAWUSA	Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union	NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
CCOBTU	Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions	NUMARWOSA	National Union of Motor and Rubber Workers of South Africa
CIWW	Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand	NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa	NUTW	National Union of Textile Workers
COSAS	Congress of South African Students	PWAWU	Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions	SAAWU	South African Allied Workers Union
CTMWA	Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association	SACP	South African Communist Party
CUSA	Council of Unions of South Africa	SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
CWIU	Chemical Workers Industrial Union	SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
EAWU	Engineering & Allied Workers Union	SARMCOL	South African Rubber Manufacturing Company, Ltd
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union	SFAWU	Sweet Food & Allied Workers Union
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions	TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
FTWU	Furniture and Timber Workers Union	TUACC	Trade Union Advisory and Coordinating Council
FWN	FOSATU Worker News	TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
GAWU	Glass and Allied Workers Union	TWP	Transvaal Workers Project
GFWBF	General Factory Workers Benefit Fund	UAW	United Automobile Workers
GWU	General Workers Union	UDF	United Democratic Front
IAS	Industrial Aid Society	UTP	Urban Training Project
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions	WPMWU	Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union
IIE	Institute for Industrial Education	WPWAB	Western Province Workers Advisory Board
IMF	International Metalworkers' Federation		
JGU	Jewellers & Goldsmiths Union		

PREFACE

This book had its first incarnation as an exhibition and panel discussion, held at the University of the Witwatersrand in May 2009 to debate, commemorate and celebrate the 30 year anniversary of the 1979 founding of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU).

The aim of this book is to reproduce the exhibition in a style that retains the spirit of the exhibition but also adds further information about FOSATU. It also aims to engage trade union workers on the various issues relating to trade unions in the past and trade unions today.

With generous funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies, the FOSATU travelling exhibition and this book form part of an archival outreach endeavour conceptualised by the Historical Papers research archives unit at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, to popularise, safeguard and highlight the importance of archives in a meaningful way.

A vast archive relating to FOSATU is housed in Historical Papers.¹ One of the aims of the exhibition and subsequently, this book, was to open up and make available, in a user-friendly way, archival material relating to labour struggles in South Africa. By doing this we hoped to ensure that South Africa's hidden histories do not remain in unseen boxes kept in the deep recesses of the university's basements, but are made more easily accessible to the public. In this way, an archive such as Wits' Historical Papers plays an important role in contributing to the uncovering and critical examination of South Africa's past.

The opening night of the exhibition saw former trade unionists and activists from the 1970s and 1980s gather together in what seemed like an old school reunion. There were warm embraces, shared reminiscences of a time gone by, laughter, perhaps some tears. For most, it seemed as if those days when they struggled together through very difficult times to forge a strong trade union movement were also, paradoxically, the happiest time of their lives.

1. Historical Papers, which is part of the Wits Library, is a unique and accessible centre for human rights research serving civil society as well as scholars and researchers. It houses the largest collection of South African non-state archival material including the papers of individuals and the records of organisations. The collections date back to the seventeenth century and go up to the present. Historical Papers is the official repository of numerous organisations and institutions including the records of many human rights NGOs, trade unions, labour federations, political parties, women's organisations, churches and church bodies, and the personal papers of human rights activists. For more information on Historical Papers visit www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za

The 30-year retrospective FOSATU event to celebrate and remember the history of FOSATU drew those gathered at the exhibition back to an intense period of South African history. For the former trade unionists in attendance, it reminded them of the hard won struggles, challenges and victories that had shaped both the South African labour movement and their own lives. For the younger generation, it drew them into a world of which they knew little, yet found fascinating.

The exhibition project was implemented in consultation with the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand. Appropriately, 2009 was the 30 year anniversary of FOSATU's founding, and its history is largely unknown to a wider audience. Historians, Professor Philip Bonner and Dr Noor Nieftagodien, shared their expertise in the selection and refinement of the archival material. Their dedication to bringing the history of FOSATU to life is deeply appreciated. Jenny Grice from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa also gave many hours of her time to ensure that the selected material was meaningful and appropriate.

The transition of the FOSATU exhibition into a book has been an exciting one. Much of the material of the exhibition has been carried over into the book. The panel discussions that took place at the launch of the exhibition have also been woven into the text, thereby taking the history of the struggles of FOSATU into a more current and pertinent exploration of what the implications are for workers when labour movements enter into alliances with political parties and the problems that trade unions today face in a very different economic and political context. Through the *Making Connections* sections, readers are invited to engage with the issues of a trade union in the past and to examine their relevance in the present. In this way, trade union history is not merely of historical interest but can become an instrument of interrogation of current practices in the organised labour movement, or indeed, what current practice could be.



COSATU, which was formed in 1985, drew directly on FOSATU's traditions, practices and direction. However, the history of FOSATU has been subsumed by COSATU and those six important years of FOSATU's existence are barely acknowledged. The 30-year retrospective exhibition and this subsequent book are but a small attempt to restore this forgotten history to its rightful place.

The book is also available on the Historical Papers website – www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za

MICHELLE FRIEDMAN

MICHELE PICKOVER





SWEET, FOOD AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION STRIKE AT BAKERS BISCUITS, FEBRUARY 1985. FOSATU Archives AH268o/G51

FOREWORD

On behalf of COSATU's 2 million members, I welcome the publication of *'The Future is in the Hands of the Workers': A History of FOSATU*. I congratulate and thank Wits University's Historical Papers for their initiative in producing a book, which follows on from its exhibition on FOSATU in 2009, its 30th anniversary.

COSATU, which this year celebrates 25 years of struggle for workers' rights and socialism, drew its strength from the coming together of unions and federations from different backgrounds. This synthesis of different and sometimes opposing traditions helped us to successfully combine strong shop-floor organisation to protect our members at work, with involvement through the Alliance in broader political struggles to improve and transform the lives of all workers.

FOSATU was the biggest of the components which came together to form COSATU in 1985. It had done much to improve the living standards of thousands of workers from the level of abject poverty to which the apartheid regime condemned them. Although we live in a very different political environment from when FOSATU existed, we can still learn important lessons on how to build strong, independent and effective trade unions from their history which is recorded here.

COSATU inherited from FOSATU in particular the great tradition of worker control, which still today ensures that the unions' power lies in the hands of the workers on the shop floor. FOSATU emphasised, as we do still today, the central role of the shop steward, as the key figure in all our bargaining and negotiating structures.

As well as building the firm foundations for democracy in COSATU, FOSATU helped indirectly to establish the foundations for today's vibrant democracy in the country as a whole.

Other unions who joined COSATU were more community-based, politically aligned to the UDF and ANC, critical of FOSATU's 'workerism' and non-political stance. There were heated debates on these issues, debates from which ultimately we all benefited, when unions from each tradition came together to launch COSATU in 1985, at the height of the struggle against apartheid, armed with the best of all the traditions. From the start, COSATU blended political and workplace struggles to unify workers and build a strong and vibrant movement.

Although the context has changed since the transition to democracy, COSATU continues to combine playing a central role in shaping the political, economic and political landscape while defending and advancing the interests of workers in the workplace.

The debates that raged before the launch are still relevant today. COSATU is still frequently accused of ignoring the day-to-day problems of workers in favour of 'political grandstanding'. We utterly reject this criticism. The political campaigns more often hit the headlines, but they are no more or less important than the daily work of our shop stewards and officials in the workplace, the CCMA, the labour courts, bargaining chambers, NEDLAC and numerous other forums. This rarely receives any attention in the media but is the lifeblood of our unions.

But COSATU has never apologised, and never will, for also engaging in political and socio-economic issues, like the banning of labour broking, the fight against corruption and the struggle for a National Health Insurance system, to name just a few of today's issues, in order to improve the lives of our wider constituency – the working class and poor majority of South Africans – as well as our 2 million members.

This combination of different but related strategies has led to COSATU being one of the fastest growing union federations in the world, and certainly one of the most politically powerful and influential. It is the biggest organisation in civil society after the faith-based organisations, with a coherent and vibrant internal organisation.

It faces many challenges of course, but confronts them honestly, with sometimes brutally open debates, just like those in which FOSATU was involved in the early 1980s.

One big challenge we still face is to bring about unity between COSATU and those other federations which did not join us in 1985, but with which we are mandated to discuss, in order to make real our long-standing commitment to 'One country; One federation'.

I hope as many people as possible get to read this book, especially our members, and learn some of the important lessons that it can teach us.

ZWELINZIMA VAVI

GENERAL SECRETARY OF COSATU

The Federation of South African Trade Unions

FOSATU



INTRODUCTION

On the weekend of 14 and 15 April 1979, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) was formed. It was an exhilarating event, full of hope and anticipation, and I well remember the exultant and inspiring singing of liberation songs which surged through the assembled shop steward representatives on those two remarkable days.

FOSATU soon began living up to the expectations that surrounded its birth. It became the first genuinely national non-racial federation of trade unions to have been formed in South Africa. Those that preceded it generally were coalitions of regional groups which retained distinct regional identities. FOSATU, by contrast, succeeded in synthesising and distilling the various regional working class traditions into a common consciousness and practice. This was a first.

FOSATU accomplished that goal partly by fostering a national leadership of organic intellectuals. This was one of its prime achievements and many such leaders moved into influential positions in government and society after 1994. This in turn was achieved by the regular interaction and tight integration of local, provincial and national levels of the organisation, and by the education programme that FOSATU mounted for various levels of its leadership at different times of the year. One of the conspicuous characteristics of that leadership and of the organisation generally was a capacity to reflect, and in particular to recognise and learn from its mistakes. This was one of its hallmarks which allowed it to strategise exceptionally effectively within FOSATU and later within its successor COSATU.

The impulse to place the organisation and its struggles in context was evident from the very moment of its founding. I myself gave an introductory lecture on the history of black trade unions in South Africa. The purpose of this was to point to past failures, past mistakes and present opportunities, in order to learn from what had gone before, not only in South Africa but in Africa at large (not what academic historians are supposed to do).

History, along with industrial relations, labour law and political economy, featured centrally in all the Federation's education programmes thereafter and helped endow that organic intellectual shop steward leadership with a capacity for analytical reflection and an ability to strategise its way into a better future. Combined with strong factory floor organisation, democratic workers' control and tactical finesse, this propelled FOSATU forward to become the

foremost worker organisation in the country up until the formation of COSATU (which it played a leading role in forming) in 1986.

In one sense, FOSATU itself is now history. In another sense, however, it is not, since it has been almost wholly forgotten by trade unionists, political activists and the wider South African public. This may partly be due to the fact that its many achievements were accomplished in the short span of six years, and have in a sense been absorbed into COSATU. Beyond that, however, has been the active down-playing of the role of this internal struggle in the ANC's version of the road to freedom. With the exception of the exhibition from which this book emerged, the 30th anniversary of the forming of FOSATU was totally uncommemorated or remarked upon. Much the same was true of the 25th anniversary of the UDF a few years before. The compilers of this book hope that the story it tells will help to redress this pervasive neglect.

PROFESSOR PHILIP BONNER

NRF CHAIR OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG



WORKERS UNITE

'THE FUTURE IS IN THE HANDS OF THE WORKERS': A HISTORY OF FOSATU 15

"The women started at 7:30am and knocked off at 10:30pm, you won't believe it but at that time we were earning R6.30 a week. We had to be thankful for what the employer was giving us"

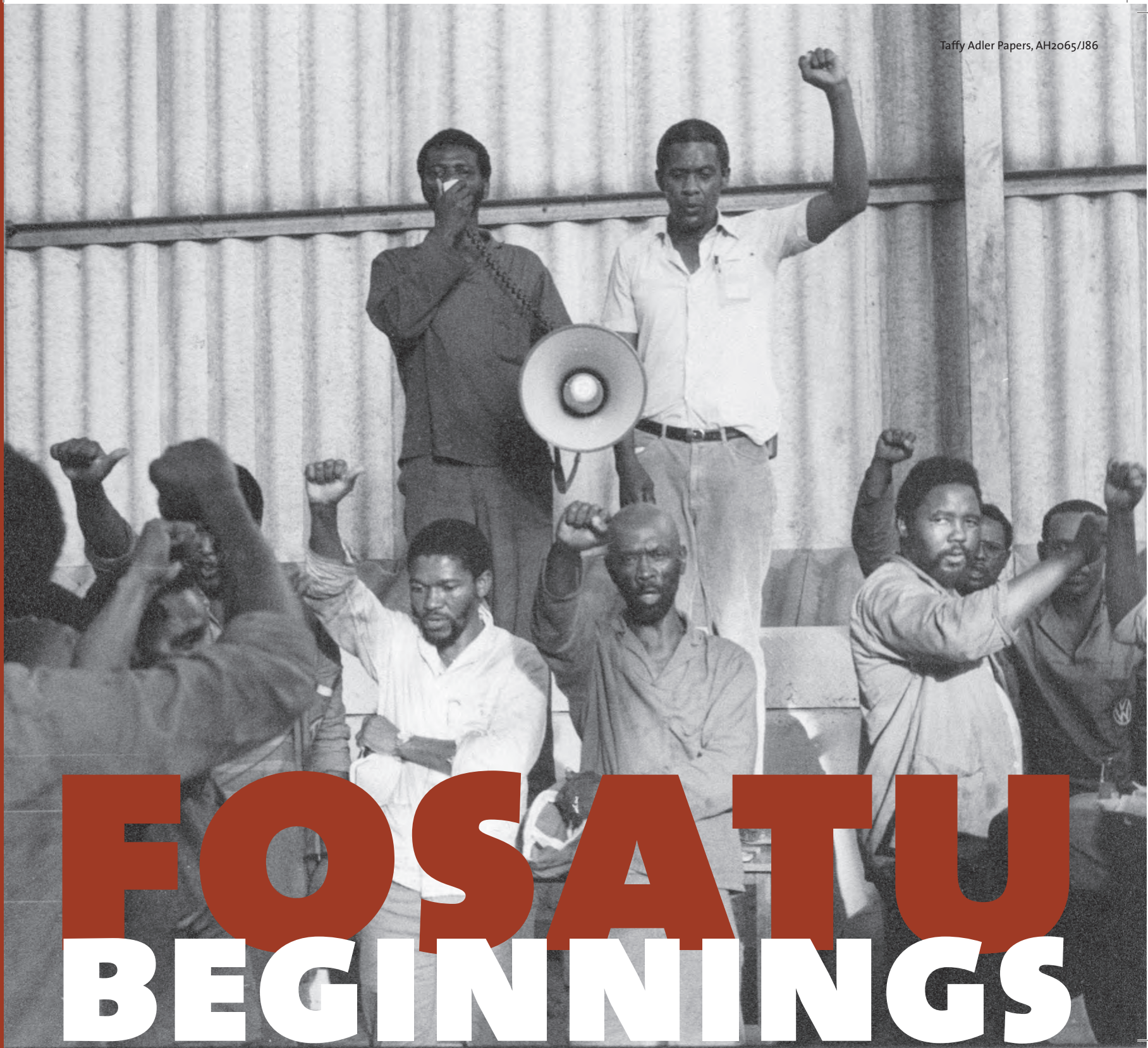
Worker at Prestige, a kitchenware factory

"During working hours, the only chance I get to sit down is on the lavatory"

Rosie, a domestic worker

"We were not happy but could not complain because if we did we were threatened with dismissal. That is why, when the union started, we decided to join"

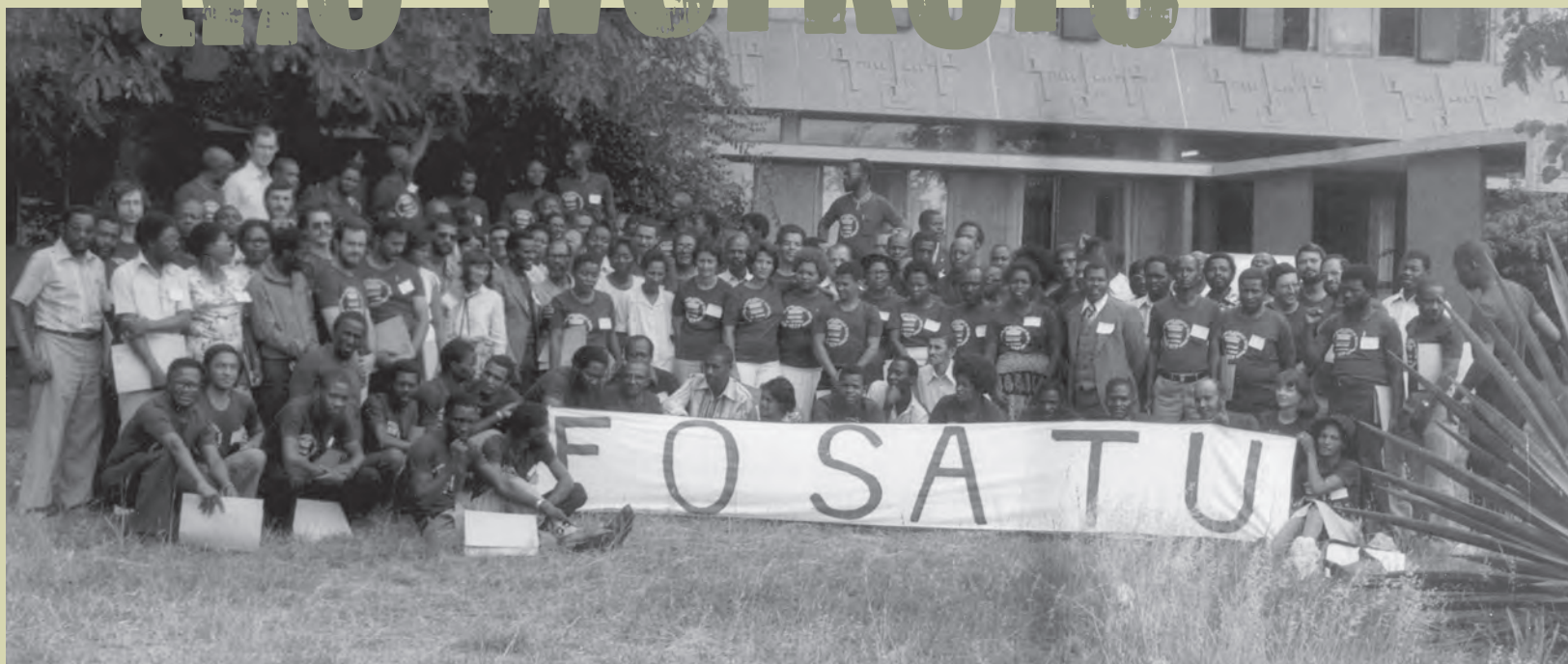
Worker at Prestige



FOSATU

BEGINNINGS

THE FIGHT FOR the workers



FOSATU WAS LAUNCHED ON 14 AND 15 APRIL 1979 AT HAMMANSKRAAL. MBU DLAMINI REMEMBERS IT WELL. "IT WAS ORGANISED, I MUST SAY. THERE WERE QUITE A NUMBER OF WORKERS FROM ALL OVER. IT WAS QUITE A BIG CONFERENCE. THE SPIRIT ... THERE WAS UNITY AMONG PEOPLE. THERE WAS ENERGY IN THE PEOPLE, A FEELING OF ONENESS, THEY BELONGED TO ONE ORGANISATION." FOSATU Archives, AH2680/A40

FOSATU was formed over 30 years ago, in April 1979. It was a trade union federation that was unique, unlike anything that had existed before. Created in a particular time in South Africa's tumultuous political and social history, it focused on the workers' struggle in which the worker was the central actor. Workers' democracy and control were the core tenets upon which FOSATU was founded.

In the six years that it was active, from 1979 to 1985, when it merged with other unions to form COSATU, FOSATU organised over 120,000 workers in 11 affiliated unions, becoming the largest non-racial, independent trade union federation of its time.

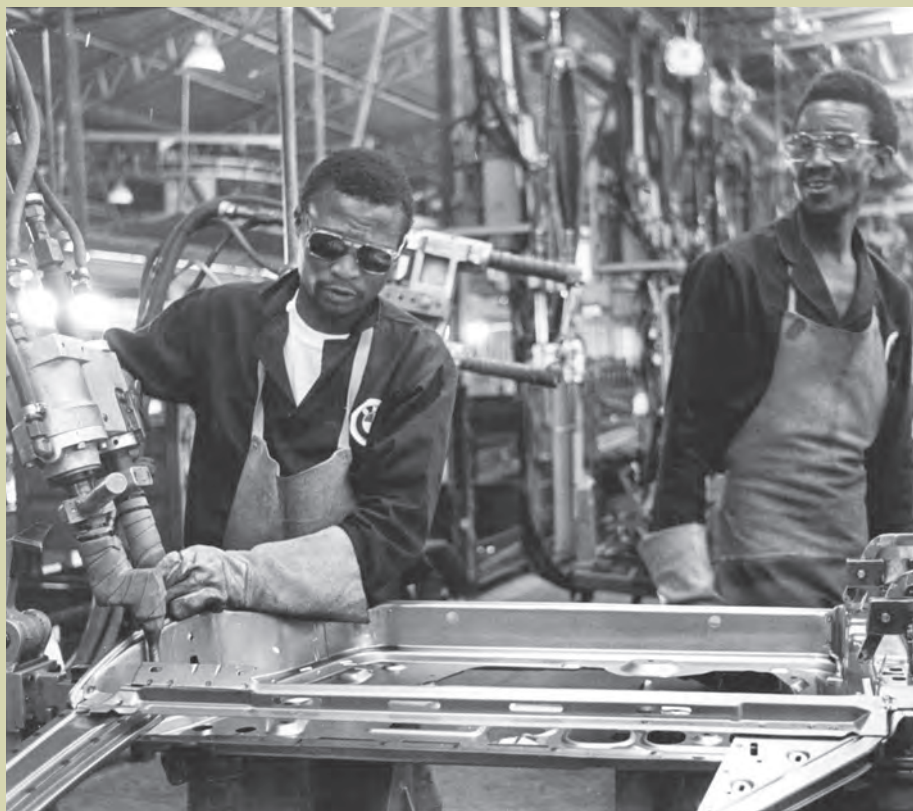


THE EXISTENCE OF A UNITED AND TIGHT FEDERATION LIKE FOSATU GAVE THE AFRICAN WORKING CLASS THE CONFIDENCE TO CHALLENGE THE EXTREME PREJUDICE AND VICTIMISATION THEY FACED ON THE FACTORY FLOOR. FOSATU Archives, AH268o/B.11o

“I am brave with FOSATU!”

THE TURMOIL of the 1970s





BMW WORKERS AT ROSSLYN PLANT, PRETORIA. MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY REQUIRED A SMALL BUT STABLE STRATUM OF AFRICAN WORKERS WHO WERE ABLE TO CARRY OUT SEMI-SKILLED LABOUR. THIS CONFLICTED WITH THE IDEOLOGY OF THE NATIONAL PARTY, WHICH PREFERRED AN UNSKILLED AND MIGRANT LABOUR FORCE. Taffy Adler Papers, AH 2065/1163

It was in the context of deepening economic and political crisis in the 1970s that FOSATU was to come into being.

The South African economy had emerged from the boom of the 1960s into a decade of economic crisis and uncertainty. Fuelled by the massive rise in world oil prices in 1973, the economy suffered bitterly as a result of the reduction in export markets and decreased foreign investment.

For African workers, the sharp rise in the cost of living with no corresponding wage increases meant that the 1970s was a period of hardship and struggle. The struggle for economic survival drove growing numbers of militant workers to join unions in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, workers' bargaining power increased considerably, due to the manufacturing boom of the sixties.

A significant factor in the rise of trade unions in the seventies was the shift in the terrain of production during the previous decade. The unprecedented boom in manufacturing in the 1960s had led to the development and rapid expansion of an industrial working class, based in factories. These changes in the labour process led to a demand for semi-skilled operators that could not be met by the existing white labour force. As a result, African workers were even more indispensable to industry, and their bargaining position improved substantially.

While the growth of semi-skilled workers was significant during this period, African women and male migrant workers were struggling with economic survival, and they swelled the number of workers joining unions in the 1970s and 1980s.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

THE CHANGING TERRAIN OF PRODUCTION TODAY

When looking at the legacy of FOSATU, it is important to acknowledge that the nature of industrial production has changed dramatically in the 21st century.

In the 1970s industrial production was essentially to support a booming domestic mining industry. Little was exported. When workers organised and made wage demands, employers could entertain these demands because the increased costs of production could be passed on to domestic consumers. By the year 2000, the world economy had become integrated and the South African economy was as much a part of this process as any other. By 2000 employers had an option when faced with rising wage demands. They could move production to another country where wage costs, for various reasons, are substantially lower. Thus for employers, the response to a wage demand has become a cold-blooded decision – distilled into the costs of foreign production plus transport plus quality control versus increased labour costs within South Africa.

In this context, the ability of national trade unions to increase workers' wages is limited today, compared with the 1970s and 1980s.

The global trend of economic liberalisation has also posed serious problems for the trade union movement today. The shift from state to private ownership in large sectors of the economy, labour

market flexibility, the casualisation of labour and outsourcing have all led to job insecurity as well as massive job losses.

HAVE THESE GLOBAL CHANGES AFFECTED COSATU'S CURRENT EMPHASIS ON PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS AND OTHER UNIONS ORGANISING THE SERVICE SECTOR OF THE ECONOMY?

ARE THERE OTHER FACTORS WHICH REDUCE THE STRENGTH OF INDUSTRIAL BARGAINING NOW, COMPARED WITH THE HEYDAY OF FOSATU?



A WOMAN WORKER PUTS FINAL TOUCHES TO CAR PAINT
Photo by Lesley Lawson, Taffy Adler Papers, AH 2065/J161

THE ROAD TO fosatu

New trade unions emerge

**“Ufil’ umuntu, ufil usadikiza – a person is dead,
but their spirit lives on.”**

In 1973 a series of spontaneous strikes broke out in Durban. These strikes took everyone by surprise – management, workers and an immature and disorganised labour movement. The Durban strikes represented a key moment in the black workers’ movement, inspiring a new confidence in workers, and generating an unprecedented growth in membership in the emerging trade unions.

As new unions sprang up from various quarters, and union membership increased dramatically, it was difficult to sustain this growth and worker militancy without some form of coordination and organisation.

It was in this context that a group of university-based Marxist academics in several centres throughout the country began to debate a way forward. In Natal, the Institute of Industrial Education (IIE) and the General Workers Benefit Fund (GFWBF) were formed. Workers linked to the GFWBF began to set up unions such as the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW). In Johannesburg, the Industrial Aid Society (IAS), founded by NUSAS, linked Wages Commission students and academics and former SACTU black trade unionists. In the Cape, UCT-based academics created the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau (WPWAB). All these bodies aimed both to educate and to organise workers.

Following the explosion of strikes in Natal, however, employer reprisals and police repression mounted. Many workers who found themselves vulnerable to dismissal or worse in this new climate left the fledgling unions. A new strategy was hammered out in response. Firstly, the unions retreated into a smaller number of factories in which department-based shop stewards played the leading role. Secondly, in October 1973, the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC) was formed to create a tight, unified and defensive structure.

The formation of TUACC marked an important step in the development of workers' democracy and workers' control. It provided a forum where workers from different trade unions could share ideas and compare tactics, and it helped them to develop common policies.

TUACC was crucial in creating a vision of a tight trade union federation which focused on the development of strong shop floor structures. Shop stewards as the key organisers on factory floors was the brainchild of TUACC. The council recognised the vulnerability of the emerging trade union movement. Without tight organisation, the unions would be unable to sustain any growth in membership. One of the key decisions of the TUACC was also to insist that only 'open' trade unions could become members. It defined 'open' trade unions as those that accepted all workers, '... regardless of race, religion or sex', challenging the widespread practice of organising black and white workers into separate 'parallel' trade unions. The TUACC unions stressed the need for democratic, non-racial trade unions, and insisted that workers at all levels control any new federation.

It was out of this thinking that FOSATU was to emerge in 1979.

With material conditions pointing towards a trade union federation, "talks about talks" began to be instituted at many levels within the unions. It took a breakaway to provide the catalyst. The National Union of Motor and Rubber Workers of South Africa (NUMARWOSA) prompted these unity talks. It was a registered coloured trade union that had broken away from the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA). It challenged the prevailing labour laws by organising African workers in a parallel trade union, the United Automobile Workers (UAW). NUMARWOSA was a well-organised union that exploited the legal system and the industrial councils to the workers' benefit. FOSATU was able to draw on these experiences.



THE PUTCO STRIKE, 1980 Photo by Paul Weinberg, South African Institute of Race Relations Records, AD 1788/11B.4

Very few of the Cape unions participated in the talks about unity and thus continued to exist as independent trade unions outside of FOSATU.

A number of CCOBTU (Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions) unions, which emerged out of the Urban Training Project (UTP) and included some parallel unions from TUCSA, affiliated themselves to the new federation.

At its launch, FOSATU claimed a membership of 45,000, with three registered unions and nine unregistered unions.

Independent Cape Unions

The independent Cape unions arose from two very divergent political currents: the General Workers' Union (GWU) developed from academics and students at the University of Cape Town. Initially they formed workers' advisory bureaux to exploit the legal opportunities to redress unfair treatment of workers. Out of these advisory bureaux, a trade union centred on stevedores in the Cape Town docks arose. Although the GWU set out to expand membership, they never really moved beyond their stevedorean base. At first they were politically independent, but later tilted strongly towards the ANC.

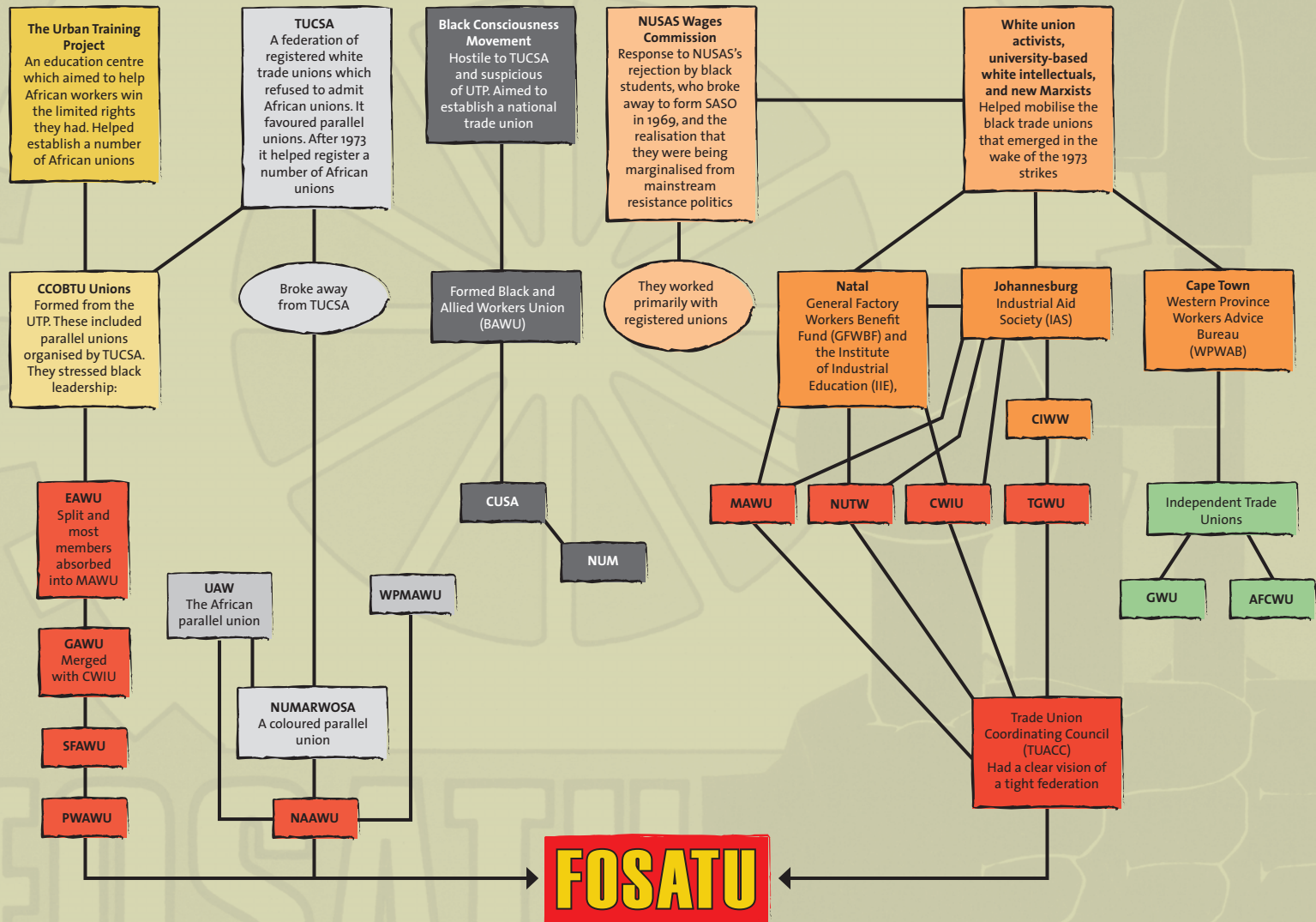
The second current, the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), was formed by the Communist Party in the early 1940s and had a strong base in the fruit and vegetable canning industry in the Western Cape. Although severely weakened by the banning of the ANC and the repression of SACTU in the 1960s, the FCWU continued to operate as a largely apolitical union until the late 1970s, when a more radical leadership emerged. Despite both FOSATU and the FCWU adopting similar tactics on the shop floor, the two groups did not unite until the founding of COSATU. The issue of registration proved to be a major bar to unity.

The Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA)

CUSA had its origins in the UTP and the CCOBTU unions which did not affiliate with FOSATU. It was launched in September 1980 with nine affiliates and a membership of 30,000. The Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA) remained independent. Unlike FOSATU, CUSA was a loosely organised coordinating body and initially did not promote militant industrial action. It recognised the need to consolidate democratic decision-making structures and to develop effective leadership.

CUSA is seen as a Black Consciousness union as it championed a policy of black leadership. This had its antecedents in the Urban Training Project which committed itself to the formation of black-run unions. Its most militant affiliate was the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which was launched in 1982.

In the 1970s various tendencies emerged within the labour movement in an attempt to harness the anger of black workers into organised trade unions.



Wiehahn and New Labour Legislation

New labour legislation also contributed to the need to develop a united front.

As part of P.W. Botha's dual strategy of repression and reform, the Riekert and the Wiehahn Commissions were appointed in 1979 to investigate the influx of Africans into the urban areas and the restrictive labour laws respectively.

The Riekert Commission divided the African workforce into urban 'insiders' whose permanence in the urban areas was recognised, and homeland 'outsiders'.

The Wiehahn Commission recommended that 'insider' Africans be brought into the industrial relations system through the recognition of African trade unions. However, the Commission insisted that the registration of unions would be on a racial basis, in a direct attempt to divide the workforce. Mine-workers would be negatively affected by the Commission as it recommended that job reservation be scrapped, except within the mining industry. And migrant workers, the majority of whom were mine-workers, would also be excluded from trade union membership.

The Wiehahn recommendations were not the cure-all that the labour movement might have hoped for. In fact, they aimed rather to stifle and divide the expanding black labour movement, which was rising up outside of state control.

It was these conditions that ultimately led to the formation of FOSATU. The majority of African trade unions viewed the Wiehahn report and the ensuing legislation with deep suspicion bred from 30 years of discrimination. The union movement argued that a coordinated and national strategy was needed to deal with this attack head-on.

It is thus possible to see the idea of FOSATU as both an organic response, growing out of the need by the union movement for an organised federation; and as a response to a hostile state, seeking to restrict the life-force of the unions.

MAKING CONNECTIONS LABOUR LAWS TODAY

In the late 1980s, not only was COSATU central in the organised struggle against the state, it also fought against an amendment of the Labour Relations Act which sought to restrict unions' right to strike, and called for new legislation that would provide full workers' rights. During the transition to democracy and later as a part of the ruling Tripartite Alliance, COSATU was able to wield enormous influence in the area of policy formulation, pushing through legislation that was favourable in terms of workers' rights. The Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995 was one such piece of labour-friendly legislation.

However, as the new labour legislation works more favourably for workers, employers have sought to offset these gains with alternative labour practices. These include the use of casual labour, which do not fall within the ambit of the LRA, outsourcing, as well as the use of labour brokers.

HOW DO UNIONS TODAY PROTECT THEIR WORKERS FROM SUCH PRACTICES AS THE CASUALISATION AND INFORMALISATION OF LABOUR?



WORKERS MEET DURING THE FIRESTONE STRIKE, AUGUST 1983
Photo by Paul Weinberg, Taffy Adler Papers, AH2065/J128

Labour Correspondent
CAPE TOWN. — South
Africa's new Rights
trade unionists yesterday
blamed Natal's strikes on

strike—union
The future is in the hands of the workers': A HISTORY OF FOSATU 29
specially an Afrikaner, can object
to leaders who canvass among
synthetic docile workers to
An American, Mr. Sterling
Tucker, director of the Nation-
al Urban League, outlined how
African
The

"When the boss liked you, he gave you an increase. But when he did not like you, no matter how hard you worked he did not give you an increase"

Jabu Ndlovu

Most Africans don't get R110 - 1975

Rand Daily Mail

"I have opened the closed gates. It's a victory comrades! We will overcome these employers. Let us be together and fight the evil employers. Amandla!"

Alfred Temba Qabula



WHAT FOSATU STOOD FOR

BUILDING A JUST AND FAIR SOCIETY controlled by the workers



FOSATU SET ITSELF UP AS A STRONG NATIONAL FEDERATION. HOWEVER, IT BELIEVED THAT UNITY IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AS A WHOLE WAS VITAL TO TRADE UNION STRENGTH. UNITY TALKS BEGAN AS EARLY AS 1981 BUT WERE SUCCESSFUL ONLY BY 1984 FOSATU Archives, AH 268o/B.82

FOSATU's unique approach to trade union organisation

FOSATU was set apart from other trade unions by its unique approach. Aside from championing workers' control and democracy within the union, FOSATU also believed that unions should be non-racial and independent of political parties. In addition, FOSATU aimed to create a national organisation with international links. It was even prepared to disband if wider trade union unity could be achieved.

It is important to remember that FOSATU was created within a specific context and time. State repression was extreme and hostility from employers was intense and consequently, trade union membership was small and organised into a tight-knit federation. It raises the question as to what extent these democratic traditions have been maintained in the 21st century as unions have had to confront new challenges within a new political dispensation and in a globalised economy.



THE FOSATU LOGO WAS DESIGNED BY FRANCO FRESCURA. THE LOGO CONSISTS OF THREE HANDS HOLDING THREE IMPLEMENTS, AN INDUSTRIAL COG AND THE NAME FOSATU. FOSATU AND THE INDUSTRIAL COG IS PRINTED IN GOLD, REPRESENTING WEALTH AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. THE BACKGROUND COLOUR IS RED, WHICH SYMBOLISES THE INTERNATIONAL STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING CLASS. THE THREE HANDS SIGNIFY THE UNITY OF WORKERS IN INDUSTRY, AS WELL AS THEIR STRENGTH IN HOLDING THE IMPLEMENTS WITH WHICH THEY WORK.

FOSATU'S CONSTITUTION

What the union stood for



FOSATU Archives, AH268o/B85



FOSATU Archives, AH268o/B54

FOSATU's unique constitution supported the following:

- **workers' control** – workers, not union officials, control and lead their organisation
- **workers' rights** – workers' rights are protected in the workplace through the recognition of the right of shop stewards to be involved in negotiating all changes, grievances and dismissals
- **non-racialism** – the unity of workers without regard to race, sex or creed
- **worker independence** – the federation makes its own decisions independent of political parties or foreign organisations or governments
- **a national movement** – to act on a national level to establish workers' rights and to remove arbitrary and unfair legislation affecting workers
- **a tight federation** – to combat the possible divisive tendencies of separation into industrial unions. FOSATU linked individual unions together closely in joint decision-making at local, provincial and national level
- **an industrial movement** – as the only effective means to negotiate worker conditions and advance worker control in industry nationwide
- **international worker solidarity** – to create and maintain links with workers on an international level, to act as a counter to multinational corporations
- **trade union unity** – FOSATU ultimately committed itself to trade union unity and was prepared to disband if wider unity could be attained.

C O N S T I T U T I O N
of the
FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS (FOSATU)

1. NAME

The name of the Organisation shall be the FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS (FOSATU), hereinafter referred to as "THE FEDERATION".

2. HEAD OFFICE

The Head Office of the Federation shall be situated at an address decided on by the Central Committee.

3. AIMS AND OBJECTS

- 3.1. To secure social justice for all workers.
- 3.2. To strive for the building of a united labour movement independent of race, colour, creed or sex.
- 3.3. To inculcate a spirit of Trade Unionism and solidarity among all workers.
- 3.4. To promote the full development of the productive forces of the country.
- 3.5. To secure decent standards of living, social security and fair conditions of work for all members of affiliated unions, and for the working class as a whole.
- 3.6. To help actively in the formation of Trade Unions in all industries and to co-ordinate the various attempts to

FOSATU'S CONSTITUTION SET OUT THE DIRECTION AND PURPOSE OF THE TRADE UNION FEDERATION. THE ORIGINAL CONSTITUTION FORMS PART OF THE FOSATU COLLECTION, HOUSED IN HISTORICAL PAPERS. FOSATU Archives, AH 1999/C1.4



Photo by Tony Smith, FOSATU Archives, AH2680/E26

Alec Erwin

Alec Erwin was a founder member of FOSATU and its first General Secretary. While studying at the University of Natal, Erwin became active in the Wages Commission of NUSAS. Later, as a lecturer at the university, he became part of the radical movement spearheaded by Rick Turner. He was regarded as one of the 'freelance' intellectuals who were not part of the emerging unions but offered them their time and expertise. In 1976, he became a full-time unionist and played a central role in worker education and communications programmes. In 1994 Erwin left the unions and became Minister of Trade and Enterprise in the Mbeki government.

WORKERS' democracy



TO ALL FRAME WORKERS

Agenda of the meeting

1. Report on negotiations for a recognition agreement
2. Report on negotiations with the Company with regards to the retrenched workers
3. Resolutions to be taken with regards to the above.
4. Proposals with regards to death benefits

DATE: 14th July 1985

TIME: 10.00 a.m.

PLACE: KWADABEKA HALL

You are all requested to attend this meeting

Those brothers and sisters whose retrenchment case we are referring to are especially urged to attend.

Issued by the National Union of Textile Workers, 1st Floor, 42 Gillitts Road Pinetown
Printed by FOSATU Printing Unit Banshee Lane, DURBAN

“The future is in the hands of the workers”

The creation of democracy, both in principle and on the factory floor, was an onerous task and one that took time to achieve. In its first years of existence, FOSATU organisers will admit that democracy was an aspiration as much as a reality. There were accusations that white intellectuals were the driving force behind the unions. Changes in strategic direction were spear-headed by key officials (many of whom were workers). As the federation grew, it moved, sometimes rapidly, and generally unevenly, towards its democratic ideal of a strong worker-based and worker-led union.

A LEAFLET PRODUCED BY THE NATIONAL UNION OF TEXTILE WORKERS ANNOUNCING A REPORT BACK TO ITS WORKERS AT THE FRAME FACTORY. SUCH REPORT BACKS REFLECT THE STRONG SENSE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE THAT FOSATU UNIONS ENGAGED IN.

FOSATU Archives, AH 1999/C1.13.6.13

DEMOCRATIC UNIONISM

The origin of democratic unionism is widely contested. The role of white intellectuals on the one hand, and black workers on the other, occupies centre stage in this debate.

Johan Maree asserts that white intellectuals played a central role in fostering workers' democracy. They deliberately adopted a strategy to put union control into the hands of black workers. They created democratic structures at all levels of union organisation, and ultimately black workers rose through the ranks into positions of leadership.

“The force behind the democratisation of the unions was the commitment of intellectuals and other leaders to democratic practices in the unions.” Johan Maree

Sakhela Buhlungu, on the other hand, argues that the ‘lived experiences’ of black workers, and not only white intellectuals, shaped the traditions of the unions. Previous trade union experience, particularly from older members who had been involved in SACTU; the religious and traditional customs of African workers; and the negative experiences of repression, facilitated the development of a common-sense approach to democracy.

“... this [democratic] tradition is a composite of the lived experiences of black workers such as African tradition and religion, and a range of intellectual influences ...” Sakhela Buhlungu



SONQOBA SIMUNYE – WE WILL WIN AS ONE! FOSATU CALLS FOR UNITY. FOSATU Archives, AH 268o/B31

MAKING CONNECTIONS WORKERS' DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

During FOSATU's time, the unions offered the only outlet for a democratic impulse amongst its members. By the mid-1980s, civil society organisations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) had also become potential avenues for democratic interaction. And after 1994, workers were able to participate in a parliamentary democracy as



FOSATU Archives, AH 2680/B31

citizens. These processes certainly did not happen in isolation. The democratic traditions established by early trade unions made a significant contribution in the form, content and structure of civil society organs. It can also be argued that these traditions were integral to the drive for parliamentary democracy. This can be exemplified by the fact that the leading negotiators of the CODESA process, such as Cyril Ramaphosa, were drawn from the trade union movement.

The degree to which workers' democracy and workers' control still flourish in the age of COSATU is an argument that is difficult to answer conclusively. The form of organisation when a trade union federation is small, localised or regional, is very different from the situation in which a federation is national and involved in national agreements with single large employers or single groups of employers. For example, workers at a sweet factory in Johannesburg might have as a central demand in negotiations the improvement of housing benefits, while workers at a sweet factory in a small town such as Worcester might have few demands with respect to housing. It is the job of the central trade union leadership to consolidate demands into a single bargaining platform with national employers. From the perspective of the sweet-factory workers in Johannesburg, it might be assumed that their needs are being neglected by the national leadership.

Labour Correspondent
CAPE TOWN. — South
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THE FUTURE IS IN THE HANDS OF THE WORKERS': A HISTORY OF FOSATU 39
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African
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‘THE DURBAN MOMENT’

1970-1973

The ‘Durban Moment’ – where a group of radical white intellectuals at the University of Natal became centrally involved in the labour movement – was marked by the emergence of two separate ideologies.

Firstly, Black Consciousness inspired black activists to lead resistance against the apartheid state. This in effect precluded white activists and forced them to seek alternative avenues of involvement such as the union movement.

Secondly, the emergence of a new kind of Marxism in the United States and Western Europe refocused attention on an analysis of power relations in terms of class struggle. The unions, with their working-class base, provided the perfect arena for white intellectual intervention.

From Natal, this movement broadened to other universities where radical intellectuals took up the struggle. Academics organised educational workshops, seminars and training for black workers in factories. This contributed to shaping the democratic structures that emerged on the shop floor.

Ultimately, it was the dynamic relationship between union intellectuals, and the lived experiences of black workers that fuelled a powerful democratic ideology in the FOSATU unions.



Helen Joseph Papers, A1985/A9.1.346

Rick Turner

In the 1970s, Rick Turner, an academic at the University of Natal, inspired a group of radical white intellectuals to engage actively in the labour movement. Turner placed great emphasis on the role of black workers in the economy. A firm advocate of the value of participatory democracy, he believed that black people could exercise some control over their lives and influence the direction of their own lives through participation in trade unions. Rick Turner was assassinated by the apartheid state in 1978.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS IN TRADE UNIONS

The gradual replacement of what can be called the founding white intellectuals of FOSATU in the early 1990s by worker-leaders can be seen in two ways: on the one hand, the departure of academic intellectuals can only reduce the innovative capacity and hence the strength of a trade union organisation. On the other hand, this can be seen as a natural process whereby intellectuals originating outside the movement are replaced by intellectuals groomed and trained within. These leaders can be called 'organic intellectuals'.

IS COSATU TODAY STRONGER OR WEAKER AS A RESULT OF THE RISE OF ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS?

DO INTELLECTUALS, WHETHER ACADEMIC OR ORGANIC, HAVE A SIGNIFICANT ROLE TO PLAY IN HELPING FULLY DEVELOPED UNIONS CHART THE WAY FORWARD, LOOK AT ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS, OR MAKE INTERNATIONAL LINKS?



ALEC ERWIN WAS ONE OF THE WHITE INTELLECTUALS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE FOUNDING OF FOSATU. HERE HE IS SEEN WITH JUNE-ROSE NALA AT A FOSATU RALLY, HELD SIX MONTHS AFTER ITS LAUNCH, IN NORTHERN NATAL, 1980. FOSATU Archives, AH2680/D21

Labour Correspondent
CAPE TOWN. — South
African...
trade unionists yesterday
blamed Natal's strikes on

THE FUTURE IS IN THE HANDS OF THE WORKERS': A HISTORY OF FOSATU 41

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WORKERS' control



FOSATU WORKERS ATTEND A MAY DAY CELEBRATION AT SECUNDA IN 1985. FOSATU Archives, AH2680/B127

The shop steward – the voice of democracy

Workers' control was based centrally on the shop steward. The shop steward was a union member who was elected by fellow workers to represent them in negotiating with management. This meant taking up the grievances of workers on a daily basis, and setting up a stable and ongoing engagement with management.

"To be a trusted shop steward I think you need to talk to a crowd well and I could do that ... I was not afraid to take things to management that workers asked me to take, and to come and report back what management said."

Richard Ntuli, a MAWU shop steward in the early 1980s

FOSATU relied on the strength of shop-floor structures in directing union matters. It took management much longer to come to terms with the notion of shop stewards.

"The concept of the shop steward was still not understood. I can recall when Naawu organised at CDA, which is now Mercedes Benz. When we went to negotiate for shop stewards, the MD said: 'Shop stewards? What are shop stewards?' We said: 'No, those are people that are elected by other workers to represent them when they have problems.' He says: 'Problems? Workers with problems don't work in this factory!' So the concept of shop stewards had not really caught on ..."

Les Kettledas, FOSATU Regional Secretary in the Eastern Cape, 1979 - 1985

"Organisers don't own the union, workers own the union."

Bernie Fanaroff, MAWU organiser 1973 -1987



SHOP STEWARDS WERE THE MAINSTAY OF THE FOSATU UNIONS, ORGANIZING WORKERS ON THE SHOP FLOOR. SHOP STEWARDS WERE FUNDAMENTAL IN BUILDING WORKERS' CONTROL.
FOSATU Archives, AH268o/B8o



AN EXTRACT FROM A FOSATU PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTING THE DUTIES OF A SHOP STEWARD. SUCH PUBLICATIONS PROVIDED SHOP STEWARDS WITH A CLEAR SENSE OF WHAT ROLE THEY WERE EXPECTED TO PLAY ON THE SHOP FLOOR. Taffy Adler Papers, AH2065/D14.7

The duties of a shopsteward are

1. To be in close contact with workers - hear their complaints and know their opinions.
2. To represent workers to management on issues of wages and working conditions.
3. To make these wages and working conditions better through agreements with management.
4. To make workers' views known on Union policy, etc., to other shopstewards, Union organizers, Union Executive.
5. To report back to workers from all meetings.
6. To attend all meetings of factory shopstewards committee.
7. To know the laws covering their factory.
8. To inform workers of their rights in the factory in terms of the laws and schemes that operate there.
9. To recruit Union members.
10. To make sure that Union members are paying their subscriptions.
11. To elect strong leaders onto the Executive Committee.

Q HOW MANY OF THESE DUTIES DO YOU AS SHOPSTEWARDS PERFORM?

FOSATU Archives, AH1999/C1.7.3.16.2.1



From the book *Flashes in her Soul* by Jean Fairbairn

Worker's story: Jabu Ndlovu

Born in 1947, Jabulile Florence Mkhize was the third of seven children in her family. At secondary school, Jabu met, fell in love with, and married Jabulani Ndlovu. By 1974 Jabu and Jabulani had five children and in order to meet expenses, Jabu found a job as a machine operator in a kitchenware factory.

Jabu joined MAWU in 1981 and became a senior shop steward in 1985. She campaigned around issues pertinent to women, such as maternity benefits, childcare and women's health. Jabu said of herself: "I used to be just a quiet person, really, but I could get cross quickly ... When we had the first meeting, seeing that I was so cross, the workers said, 'Hey you must be a shop steward!'. Then because I was so cross I said, 'Let me take this thing!'"

Jabu, her husband Jabulani, and their daughter were killed in a cruel attack on their home during the violence between the United Democratic Front (UDF) and Inkatha in Natal in 1989. Thousands of workers stayed away from their workplaces on June 5-7 to mourn Jabu's death.

"You see, worker control means that officials can't take decisions without workers."

Joe Mahlangu, former CWIU shop steward

Shop stewards earned the trust of the workers. They acted for them, in a principled and often fearless manner. Shop stewards themselves were organised into a shop stewards' committee. Here, all shop stewards in the workplace came together to discuss and plan tactics. These committees were a new feature of South African trade unionism and set independent unions apart from the TUCSA-styled unions..

MAKING CONNECTIONS

THE ROLE OF SHOP STEWARDS AND LEADERS TODAY

If one compares the role of the shop steward in FOSATU to the role of the shop steward in COSATU, a few striking differences are apparent.

In FOSATU the shop steward was the voice of organised workers at a local level. Once national unions had been established under COSATU and growth was not the main focal point, shop stewards became the voice of the national leadership. In other words, workers grew to hear about national campaigns through their shop stewards.

Some would argue that this process has gone too far and what set FOSATU apart from all previous unions, namely that locally elected shop stewards were subject to control and recall by their membership, has declined into a system where workers receive mandates from national leadership and not the other way round.

Moreover, COSATU's move towards centralisation and its continued role as a political player in the Tripartite Alliance has had a negative effect on COSATU leaders, from shop stewards upwards. With the shift in the political dispensation after 1994, union leaders and shop stewards were given access to greater power and privilege. Large numbers of union leaders, officials and shop stewards left the unions for

'greener pastures' in government or in business. This has provided a serious challenge to COSATU as they have sought to replace several strata of leadership. For many members of COSATU, there is a perception that union leaders have sold out the workers. This suggestion has been rejected by Patrick Craven, COSATU's spokesperson (2010) who said "those who have left have been replaced by hundreds more workers who have kept up their good work."

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A LARGE TRADE UNION TO CONTINUE TO FUNCTION WITH FOSATU-STYLE SHOP STEWARDS?

IS THERE A CONTRADICTION IN A UNION FEDERATION REPRESENTING MILLIONS OF WORKERS BEING IN ALLIANCE WITH A PARTY IN GOVERNMENT WHOSE AVOWED POLICY IS ONE OF MAINTAINING THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM?

ARE WORKERS' LOCAL GRIEVANCES BEING IGNORED IN FAVOUR OF NATIONAL PRIORITIES?

HOW HAVE UNIONS DEALT WITH THE EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR MEMBERS THAT LIBERATION AND DEMOCRACY WOULD LEAD TO IMPROVED LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS?

Labour Correspondent
CAPE TOWN. — South
African
trade unionists yesterday
blamed Natal's strikes on

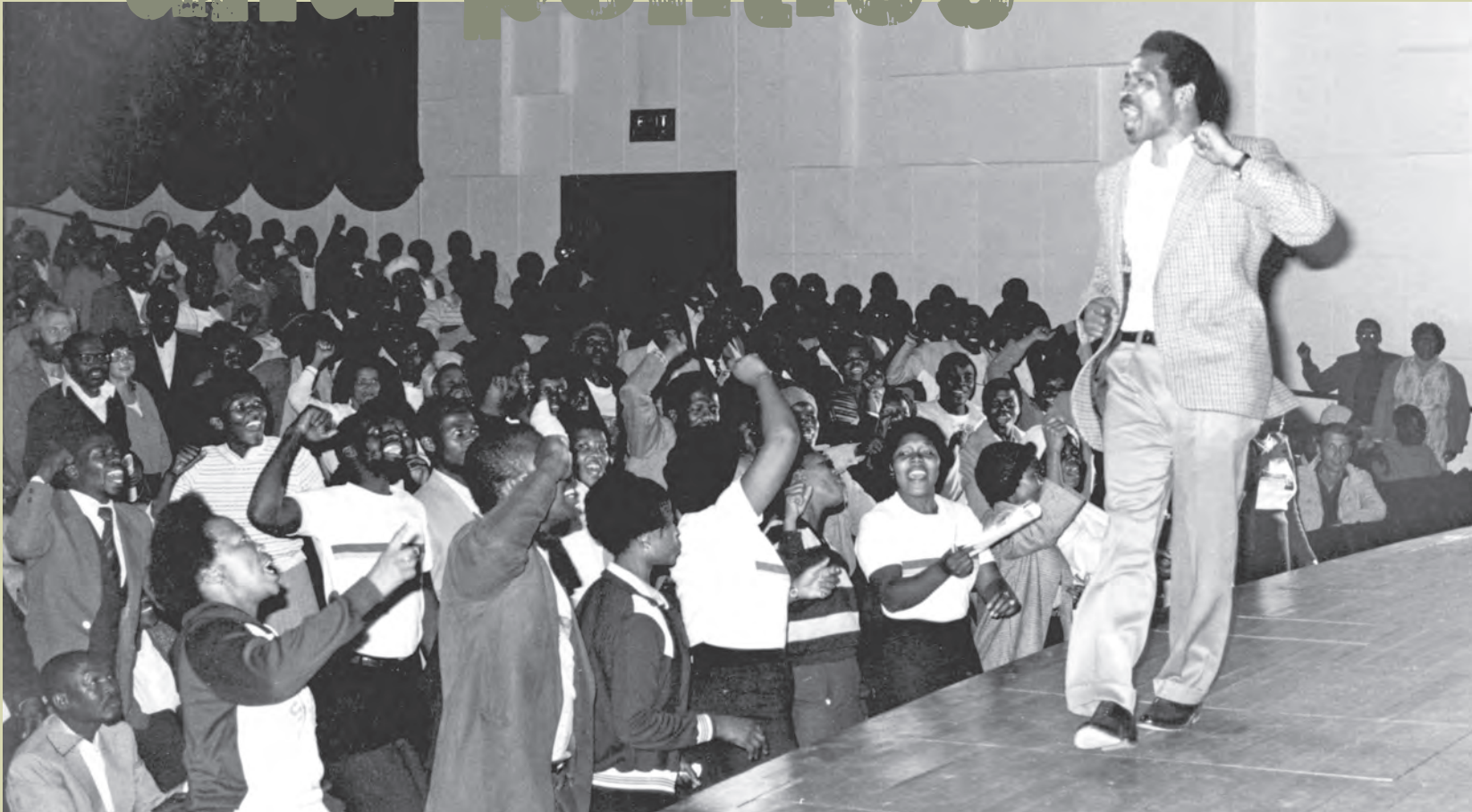
THE FUTURE IS IN THE HANDS OF THE WORKERS': A HISTORY OF FOSATU 47

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FOSATU and politics



ANDREW ZULU, THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF FOSATU ADDRESSES A MEETING OF WORKERS IN THE EAST RAND. FOSATU Archives, AH 2680/B84

"(Our goal is) To build a strong labour movement – and that's all."

Alec Erwin, FOSATU's first General Secretary

Despite being vehemently opposed to the apartheid regime, FOSATU adhered to a policy of non-involvement in national politics. This policy stemmed from two considerations and beliefs. Firstly, trade unions continued to be harassed and repressed by the authorities until the early 1980s. Their core need was to implement and entrench worker-controlled structures. Repression brought about by political engagement necessarily jeopardised this stance. Pre-occupied with simple survival, FOSATU adopted a politically abstentionist stance.

FOSATU also feared that involvement in national politics would subsume workers' interests in the name of a nationalist agenda, and thus compromise workers' democracy and control.



SHOP STEWARDS AT A FOSATU CONGRESS. FOSATU Archives, AH2680/B125

“Workers obviously have political interests, but these are best catered for by workers’ organisations. What they should not allow is to let themselves be controlled by non-worker political parties ... or they will find their interests disregarded and their organisation and power gradually cut away.”

Phil Bonner, a founder member of FOSATU

The Federation’s non-involvement in the broader political struggle was a contentious issue. While workers in the workplace recognised the strength of a focused union, many found it difficult to divorce themselves from the political struggles raging outside the factory floor. Inside the factory, they were workers; but outside, they were oppressed victims of the apartheid regime. Their identities did not begin and end as workers at the factory gates.

“You are a worker here at Volkswagen. When you come out there, something is going to happen. Maybe they beat you with the batons. So how can you not support politics? So they ought to support politics.” – A worker from Volkswagen

WHAT DID POLITICAL involvement mean?

The field of politics was open to many definitions. For some, politics meant affiliation with a political party. For others, it simply referred to any activity outside the factory floor.

While many workers argued for a political role of the federation, the majority believed that FOSATU should not affiliate to any particular political grouping. They feared that such affiliation would create splits along ideological lines. They were well aware that as a worker organisation, the union encompassed all political positions within the working class. Affiliation to a particular grouping, it was feared, would alienate those workers opposed to that organisation. FOSATU was also worried that political involvement would bring about state repression, which had been the fate of the political union, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in the 1950s.

Political Unionism: SACTU

The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was representative of political unionism. It was formed in May 1955 and was involved in a structured alliance with the Congress Movement, particularly with the African National Congress (ANC). SACTU insisted that the organisation of workers around economic conditions was inextricably bound up with the political concerns of black workers. It argued that any union movement that did not work for political emancipation alongside workers' rights was essentially useless. While it was not banned alongside the ANC in 1960, its leaders and members had to endure constant police harassment until they closed down its local operations in 1963 and went into exile.



At its Second Congress in 1982, FOSATU was more confident of its capacity to survive and grow, and now responded to the mounting community-based struggles that shaped the political landscape of the 1980s. In 1983, the range of community and student organisations would coalesce into the United Democratic Front.

By reassessing from policy of abstention in political struggles, FOSATU paid respect to the role of the ANC, and resolved to pursue a political agenda. It would engage with progressive political organisations, but would not enter into permanent structured political alliances in which workers' interests might be subordinated.



JOE FOSTER, THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF FOSATU, MADE A LANDMARK SPEECH AT FOSATU'S SECOND CONGRESS IN 1982, OUTLINING FOSATU'S SHIFT IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT. FOSATU Archives, AH2680/D17

"It is essential that that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters."

Joe Foster – *The Workers' Struggle – where does FOSATU stand?* – 1982 Congress

‘WORKERIST’ VERSUS ‘POPULIST’

The challenge facing the labour movement was whether to involve themselves in wider political and social issues. The ensuing debates around these issues led to a clear rift in the movement.

‘Workerists’ favoured a class-based analysis of the struggle and sought the independence of workers’ organisations from political and social organisation. At one point, the idea of a Workers’ Party was mooted.

‘Populists’ embraced the notion of the struggle in terms of national liberation and saw the role of trade unions as part of a broader anti-apartheid popular front. They believed in a two-stage theory; in the first, a broad national movement would overthrow the apartheid regime. This would be followed by a socialist revolution, in which a socialist society would be established.

These two positions divided the labour movement. Both often failed to recognise the space that existed in between, i.e. the role of the community and involvement in community issues.

FOSATU focused on the development of strong shop-floor structures and believed that ‘populist’ unions like the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) often compromised the principle of workers’ control by deferring to the demands of political structures.



MAKING CONNECTIONS POLITICS AND TRADE UNIONS TODAY

With the benefit of hindsight, during the 1980s as the apartheid state clung to power with increasing repression of workers and non-workers, it would have been impossible for a trade union movement to remain aloof from the broad-based liberation struggles of the time. As community-based organisations like the UDF took centre stage, FOSATU and other independent trade unions naturally had to shift their political position.

In a post-apartheid democratic South Africa, the political context within which trade unions operate is very different. Political participation has been normalised. Yet after 1994, COSATU became involved in government as part of the Tripartite Alliance, with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

Critics of COSATU's current involvement in a political alliance suggest that COSATU has sacrificed organisational strength for strong political influence. On the other hand, COSATU's increased political power has enabled the passage of favourable labour legislation as well as industrial institutions which provide workers with improved security in the workplace.

However, from the early 1990s, the growth of unions led to a centralising effect, which had a harmful impact on local-level structures. COSATU itself spoke

of its "abandonment of the shop floor" as it engaged more and more with national initiatives. It also led to a greater reliance on leaders who were perhaps becoming increasingly alienated from its own members.

HOW HAS THIS AFFECTED THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY?

UNIONS BY NATURE UNITE WORKERS AT THE WORKPLACE AND PERMIT POLITICAL DIVERSITY. IS IT THEN NECESSARY, IN ORDER TO MAXIMISE SHOP FLOOR STRENGTH, THAT UNIONS MAINTAIN POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE?

CAN IT BE ARGUED THAT WHERE A TRADE UNION SUPPORTS A POLITICAL PARTY, THAT PARTY SHOULD BE OF ITS OWN CREATION AND UNDER ITS OWN CONTROL?

IN A CAPITALIST ECONOMY, IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A TRADE UNION TO GAIN BENEFITS FROM AN ALLIANCE WITH THE RULING PARTY?

DO THE EXAMPLES OF BRITAIN IN THE 1970s AND BRAZIL IN THE 2000s SHED ANY LIGHT ON THIS DEBATE?

Labour Correspondent
CAPE TOWN. — South
Africa's long-
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THE FUTURE IS IN THE HANDS OF THE WORKERS': A HISTORY OF FOSATU 53

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE of black workers

“The apartheid workplace was a place of white power and black powerlessness.”

Black workers experienced the world from a position of powerlessness. The authoritarian nature of apartheid denied them basic human rights and placed them in a brutal system that affected their lives on a daily basis. This oppression was duplicated on the factory floor. It was this condition of powerlessness that the union had first to overcome in order to become a potent industrial force.

The lived experiences of workers played a critical role in shaping the trade union traditions that emerged. They were also a powerful force in drawing workers to the union movement.

“We joined the trade unions because of the way we were treated.”

The capriciousness of white bosses, managers and especially foremen, was a deeply felt grievance. Foremen wielded unchecked power, particularly over the most basic factory processes, and controlled access to training and promotion.

“When he [a white man] gets employed they say he knows the work. When he is inside the firm I teach him. That made me cry. I didn’t get the money which he is getting, but am supposed to be his teacher.”

Mandlenkosi Makhoba, a worker at Rely Precision Castings

Low wages, job grading and training also led to a deeply felt sense of injustice. Underqualified white workers were placed in senior positions ahead of their more experienced black counterparts.



THE POSTMASTER GENERAL, LOUIS RIVE, ADDRESSES 700 STRIKING POST AND TELEGRAPH WORKERS IN DURBAN, MAY 1974. *The Daily News*, May 1974, FOSATU Archives, AH 2680/G41

“When the boss liked you, he gave you an increase. But when he did not like you, no matter how hard you worked he did not give you an increase.”

Jabu Ndlovu



A FURNACE WORKER AT THE EMAMEZWAKE FACTORY IN BOTSHABELO. Photo by Eric Miller, FOSATU Archives, AH 268o/F54

Health and safety conditions in many factories were deplorable.

"We were not given proper safety boots and overalls ... There are many accidents at the furnace when we pour and when we carry pots. Very often the molten metal falls out of the pots and burns us. It can burn you from the waist down, mostly on the legs ... There is no way you can escape the danger of burning ... I have been burned so many times I can't count."

Mandlenkosi Makhoza

It was important that workers felt that they were part of FOSATU, that it was their union and that they were heard. It was commonplace for workers to write letters to FOSATU, expressing their grievances, asking for advice, and looking to the join the union. FOSATU attempted to respond to these letters wherever possible.

SUGAR TRANSPORT SERVICE
P.O. ILLOVO 4150
19 JANUARY, 1982.

T. AND G. WORKERS UNION
ISICELO KU MANAGER

1. SICELA IHLOLO ILEKHUSHULWA KUISIZINI
EZAYO HIBE UR2.60, NGOBA UR1.30
MIXAME ANGEKE SIKWAZI UKUGCINA
IZINDLEKO IZITOLO ZINABIZA ABANTWANA
BAFUNDA IZINDLEKO ZINKULLU.

2. SICELA UKUSEBENZA AMAHORA ANGU 8 ;
AMAHORA ANGU 12 AYASINDA ANGAPHEZULU
KWAMANDLA ETHU. IKOKHULUKAZI SIKHUSHUKE
UKUTHI ASAZI UKUTHI SISEBENZA KANJANI
NGOBA SIBUYE SISEBENZE 8hrs SIBUYE
SISEBENZE 12hrs SIFUNA UKUSEBENZA
INTO EYOLWA USHRS KUPHILA.
Siyabonga
IZISEBENZI ZE S.T.S.

IN THIS LETTER, THE WORKERS OF THE SUGAR TRANSPORT SERVICE HAVE WRITTEN TO THE MANAGER ASKING FOR AN INCREASE IN SALARY FROM R1.30 TO R2.60 AS THEY ARE NOT ABLE TO SURVIVE ON SUCH WAGES. THEY ALSO EXPRESS CONCERN THAT THEY OFTEN WORK A 12-HOUR SHIFT BUT ARE ONLY PAID FOR 8 HOURS.

Statement.

Company No. 934
Strap Metals, Prospecton
Bay Road.

I was at working
the Indian, he called
me that my clock
has been taken upstairs by
a white girl. I asked him the
reason for this and he said he
did not know but they have said
I was being dismissed. At that
time I went to wash myself and
gave my overall to Isaac and
went away.

I was not signed off and paid
on my dismissal.

HERE, A WORKER ASKS FOSATU FOR HELP AS A RESULT OF BEING DISMISSED UNFAIRLY. FOSATU Archives, AH1999/B10.2

VICTIMISATION



BEFORE AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS WERE RECOGNISED, WEARING A UNION T-SHIRT ON THE FACTORY FLOOR WAS OFTEN CAUSE FOR DISMISSAL. THIS FEAR OF VICTIMISATION MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR UNIONISED FACTORY WORKERS AND SHOP STEWARDS TO ORGANISE IN THE WORKPLACE. OFTEN THIS HAD TO BE CARRIED OUT IN SECRET, AFTER WORK, AND ON A ONE-TO-ONE BASIS. THIS MADE UNION ORGANISATION A SLOW AND OFTEN ARDUOUS TASK IN THE EARLY YEARS. Taffy Adler Papers, AH2065/J44

Victimisation was a huge issue for workers involved in union activities. When management was unable to contain the demands and resistance of organised workers, the security police and the Department of Labour were often called in.

"You know, the situation here is politicised, racialised ... You suffer in this set-up. You must just be moderate. And then you get the right chances for moving up ... If you have definite political inclinations, chances of advancing are minimal. It is like that."

A worker at Volkswagen

Because victimisation strongly hampered the ability of unions to organise in factories, FOSATU placed a major emphasis on recognition agreements. It was only through recognition that a space opened up for organisation without victimisation.

VICTIMIZATION — EMPLOYER FOUND GUILTY

Finally workers have succeeded in getting at least one employer convicted of victimisation. For years workers have suffered from victimisation but the Department of Manpower Utilization either refused to investigate, or took too long to do so or the attorney generals would not prosecute or the case failed because the law favours employers in victimisation cases.

However, hard work, good labour lawyers and the truth finally won the day after years of trying. In 1977 Angel Makhanya was dismissed by S.A.G. Ceramics on the East Rand. At that time she was a member of an Urban Training Project union. However, they did not take the case up and she turned to FOSATU's Industrial Aid Society.

The first round was lost when a magistrate dismissed the case. However this was taken on appeal to the Supreme Court where we won. The case then went back to a magistrates court as a private prosecution - that

is Makhanya and not the State was prosecuting S.-A.G. Ceramics even though victimisation is a criminal offence. This in itself was a rare procedure.

The trial had its stormy moments. At one stage the magistrate ruled that the trial should be in camera and that even Makhanya should leave the court because she may intimidate witnesses. When she threatened to withdraw her lawyers from the court the ruling was changed.

The final verdict was welcome but even that showed up the weakness of the victimisation laws. S.A.G.-Ceramics was fined R100. However, the State has to pay Makhanya's costs and the costs of the appeal. Makhanya also has a civil claim for damages.

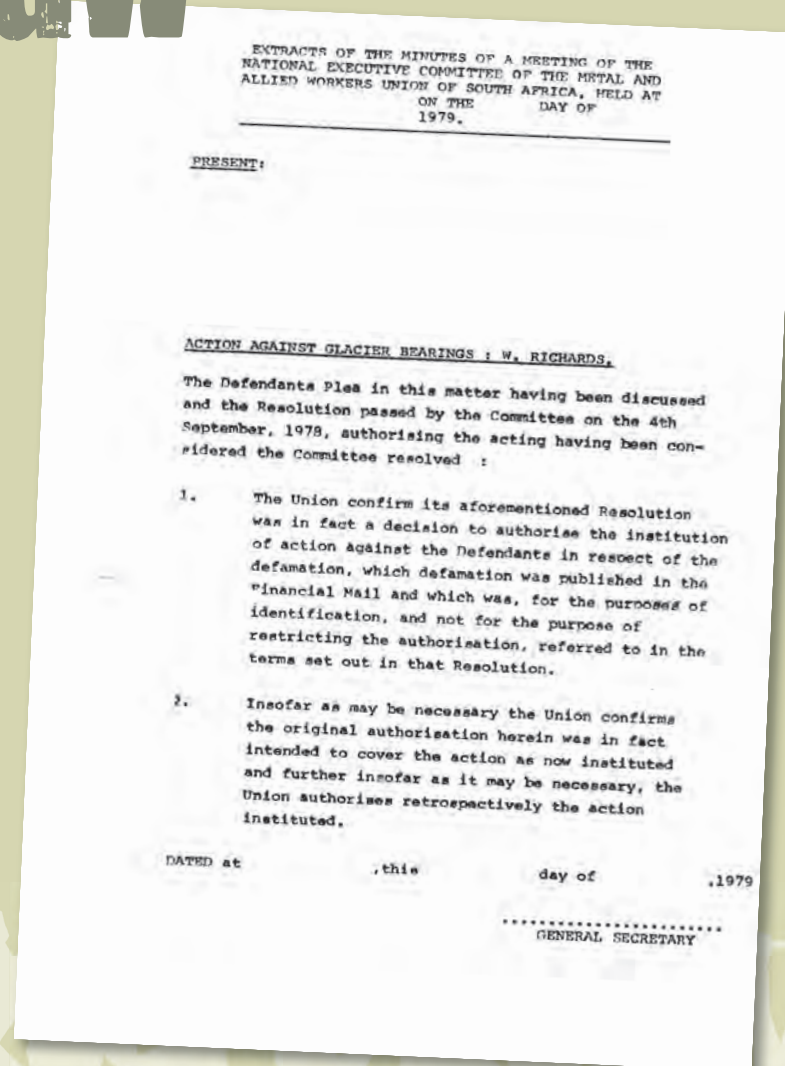
After three years only FOSATU's resources and the experience of their labour lawyers won the day. But it only goes to show that an individual worker has absolutely no legal protection against victimisation. Organisation is the only answer.

AN ARTICLE ON THE TRIAL OF ANGEL MAKHANYA WHO CHARGED S.A.G CERAMICS OF DISMISSING HER AS A RESULT OF VICTIMIZATION. FOSATU Archives, FOSATU Worker News, 9th Ed. December 1980

FOSATU's INFLUENCE on the law

At first the emerging unions were suspicious of the legal system set up by the apartheid government. This was reflected in the unions' initial reluctance to comply with registration procedures or to participate in industrial councils. However, increasingly, FOSATU's legal advisers began to use the law to challenge existing labour laws and to create new ones. A major victory for FOSATU was its successful Supreme Court action in 1983 whereby the government lost the right to register unions on a racial basis. This opened the way for FOSATU unions to register.

FOSATU's legal advisers used the courts to challenge significant unfair labour practices. The courts often ruled in favour of labour, and established guidelines in such areas as dismissals, victimisation, retrenchment and union recognition. A whole new area of labour law was created and there is no denying that the contribution of these labour lawyers to industrial relations practice has been profound.



AN EXTRACT OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF MAWU REGARDING LEGAL ACTION INSTITUTED BY MAWU AGAINST GLACIER BEARINGS. FOSATU Archives, AH1999/C1.7.4.6.6

Ravi Joshi
Legal Advice Office
1 Central Court
Gale Street
DURBAN
4001

Shepstone & Wylie

ATTORNEYS · NOTARIES · CONVEYANCERS

SCOTSWOOD HOUSE
41 ADULTY STREET
DURBAN
4001
SOUTH AFRICA

☎ 206 AND 1287
DURBAN 4000
☎ 0310 322 581
☎ "SHEPSTON" & "WYLIE"
☎ TELEX:
SHIPPING 6 2980DN
GENERAL 6 0343

Our ref: N. Haysom/ed
Your ref:

27 February 1981

Dear Sir

re: VICTIMISATION - MINTEX S.A. (PTY) LIMITED

Acting on instructions from Mr Mchunu of your Pinetown office we investigated the complaint of victimisation against members of the Mintex work force. We advised Mr Mchunu there was at that stage insufficient evidence for an int against victimisation and further that such an action we have the effect of re-instating the dismissed employees.

We report further for your information as follows:-

1. We have submitted a complaint to the Department of power Utilisation that the said employees have been victimised by the said company. We lodged with the complaint an affidavit by one Petros Msoni, a copy letter from the Metal and Allied Workers Union to S.A. (Pty) Limited and a copy of a letter from our S.A. (Pty) Limited tendering the service to Mintex S.A. (Pty) Limited. We have ourselves received a from Mintex rejecting our offer and informing us that do not intend to provide work for our clients now any time in the future.
2. We have consulted with the Department of Manpower tion in connection with the prospects of securing tion quo order. However this would require an applicat quo order. We remark that on the lodging of a com for a Conciliation Board and the lodging of a com with the Industrial Council. We remark that on the at hand the chances of a successful application for status quo order were not high.

2./ 3. We ..

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DURBAN
ALSO AT: P.O. BOX 100 PRETORIA
DURBAN
ALSO AT: P.O. BOX 100 PRETORIA

CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO A CASE BROUGHT AGAINST
MINTEX S.A. FOR VICTIMISATION OF AN EMPLOYEE.

FOSATU Archives, AH1999/C1.7.4.6.1

THE LAW OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS -

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

- Halton Cheadle

Let's put the clock back to 1973. The Labour Relations Act was then the far more familiar Industrial Conciliation Act. Blacks were excluded from the operation of the official collective bargaining system by restricting the definition of 'employee' to whites and coloureds. Although blacks were outsiders to this official system, they were nevertheless permitted to form trade unions of their own and there were no legal obstacles for employers to recognize them and deal with them. One or two progressive employers took them seriously and attempted to engage in a joint collective bargaining venture. Only Smith & Nephew entered into an agreement with one of these trade unions. It was the fore-runner of the pattern that was to be stamped with such rigour and forcefulness in the years 1979-1980. But apart from such employers (and there were few of them), these unions met outright hostility, pre-emptively formed works and liaison committees and the victimization of their workers. Refuge was sought in low key organizations and the use of the courts in 'victimization' cases. How were conditions at the factory level determined. They were unilaterally imposed by the employer or by regulation (i.e. agreement) over which they had no hand in determining. In fact and in law black workers had no part in determining their wages and working conditions. Managerial prerogatives of hiring, promoting, training and dismissal were without limitation. Employers succeeded by and large in dismissing 'agitators' for union activities in bold defiance of the law. The official

2/

HALTON CHEADLE, ONE OF THE MANY LAWYERS WHO WORKED FOR FOSATU EXAMINES THE LEGAL OBSTACLES THAT FACED THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN THE PAST AND THE PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE IN AN ARTICLE ENTITLED 'THE LAW OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT'. AH1999/C1.7.3.16.2.3

Date Stamp: 29th September 1978
R1,00 REVENUE STAMP
Clerk of the Court
No. 2 SUMMONS COMMENCING ACTION (ORDINARY)
Sued out by: S/O GOVENDER, MOOLA, SINGH AND ASSOCIATES
Suits 19/71 N.B.S. Centre,
Mill Street,
PINETOWN.
Postal Address: as above
Signature of Plaintiff's Attorney: [Signature]
Ref: _____
In the Magistrate's Court for the District of PINETOWN held at PINETOWN
BETWEEN TANSANQA GARDINER GLADILE Plaintiff
and CONSOLIDATED COTTON CORPORATION (PTY) LIMITED trading as FRAMETEX LIMITED Defendant
TO CONSOLIDATED COTTON CORPORATION (PTY) LIMITED trading as FRAMETEX LIMITED, a Company duly incorporated with limited liability according to the Company Laws of the Republic of South Africa and carrying on business as FRAMETEX LIMITED at Richmond Avenue, New Germany, Natal. I hereby summon that you do within FOUR (4) days of the service of this summons appear at the address specified herein a notice in writing of your intention to defend this action or cause to be delivered to the Clerk of the aforesaid Court and also the plaintiff or his attorney at the address specified herein a notice in writing of your intention to defend this action.

Plaintiff herein, for R See Particulars and costs, particulars whereof are endorsed hereunder
Particulars
The claim against defendant is for payment of the sum/balance of R See Particulars hereunder.

See Particulars of Claim annexed hereto.

The plaintiff prays for judgment against defendant in the said sum, with costs. If the action is undefended, will be as follows:-

	Summons	Judgment
Attorney's charges	R 13.00	R 11.00
Writ fees	R 1.00	R -
Plaintiff's fees	R -	R -
Plaintiff's fees on re-issue	R -	R -
Totals	R -	R -

Total R

A SUMMONS IN THE CASE OF T.G. GLADILE AND
CONSOLIDATED COTTON CORPORATION PTY LTD,
TRADING AS FRAMETEX LTD. FOSATU Archives, AH1999/
C1.7.4.6.5



Comrade Moss, Learn and Teach, May 1989

Worker's story: Moses Mayekiso

Moses Mayekiso, called “Moss” by his friends, was born in the Transkei in 1948. He was the firstborn of 12 children in his family. Mayekiso initially had dreams of becoming a teacher, but his education was constantly interrupted by duties at home or lack of money for school fees. When Mayekiso could not find a job close to home, and since he did not have a properly endorsed ‘pass’ to work in Cape Town or Johannesburg, his only other option was to go and work on the gold mines. Mayekiso worked for only three months at the Welkom mines before deserting – but this short and profound time had provided him with the experiences of racism and exploitation that were faced by most black workers in South Africa. This resulted ultimately in his being at the forefront of the workers’ struggle. He later worked at Toyota in Kew and it was here that he joined the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU). Mayekiso soon proved his leadership abilities when he was elected a shop steward. However, he was ultimately fired from Toyota because of his union activities.

In 1987, while Mayekiso was in jail facing a trial for treason, MAWU joined with other unions in the metal sector to form NUMSA, the giant union of which Mayekiso was elected General Secretary.

FOSATU and Women



WOMEN WORKERS ON STRIKE ARE BOTH DEFIANT AND JOYFUL Photo by I. Bissell, South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union Records, AH2196/K2.2



WOMEN WORKERS ARE SEEN PERFORMING A TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED JOB. WHILE THIS MIGHT APPEAR TO REPRESENT EQUALITY AND LIBERATION FOR WOMEN, THE TRUTH IS THAT EMPLOYERS PREFERRED TO USE FEMALE LABOUR AS THEY FELT THEY COULD PAY THEM LESS. Photo by Jan Macintosh, FOSATU Archives, AH268o/F38

Women workers experienced triple oppression. They were exploited in the workplace, they were exploited at home and were discriminated against as African women.

FOSATU had from the outset a very clear idea of their approach to women workers on the shop floor. The federation recognised that management constantly sought to emphasise the differences between workers in order to weaken the organisation; and hence a fighting trade union needed constantly to engender class unity by emphasising workers' common experiences and common source of exploitation.

Three phases can be recognised within women's struggles in FOSATU:

1. The end to 'special duties' within the unions. It was common in South African trade unions before FOSATU to expect women delegates to do women's work at union meetings – that is to make tea and tidy up afterwards. A conscious effort by all delegates to share such duties put an end to this practice.
2. Women's demands to employers. The struggle for maternity rights (guaranteed jobs, paid leave and later, leave allowances for fathers) was a major platform for FOSATU in the early years and was broadly successful. By 1981 two plants had a negotiated maternity-leave policy in place and in 1984, an industry-wide agreement applied to all women in the motor industry. In 1987 an agreement was negotiated for the entire metal industry.
3. The double shift. At various meetings of FOSATU, women put forward the complaint that they worked a double shift – on the factory floor and at home caring for children and the house. Although to some extent this reflected European-feminist thinking,

the charges occasioned lively debate. At a 1983 FOSATU conference, one male worker spoke from the floor: “That women are exploited in the factory I’ll agree. But to say that to make food and fire for her husband and children is exploitation, I cannot agree. It is tradition among our people. It is unacceptable ... that a man should look after the children and do the washing.”



A WOMAN WORKER DOING PEDESTAL WELDING AT SAMCOL. Photo by Lesley Lawson, Taffy Adler Papers, AH2065/J 158

To change some worker militants’ attitude to women was not a struggle won overnight. Women still encountered sexism and sexist practices within the unions. There were only a few women who occupied leadership positions, and meetings were dominated by men. Some women complained of sexual harassment by men in union structures. Many felt that their opinions were not taken seriously because they were women.



A WOMAN ADDRESSES CONDITIONS DURING A STRIKE AT INMANN PLASTICS. FOSATU Archives, AH 2680/G38

MAKING CONNECTIONS WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE TODAY

COSATU has continued to bring women's struggles to the fore.

While workers generally are undermined by modern production processes such as casualisation and outsourcing, women, as the most vulnerable members of the working class, face the full brunt of these attacks. Another threat that women face presently in the workplace (as women) is the sex-for-jobs or sex-for-promotion practice. This is widely practised by men in authority – including,

shamefully, within the trade union movement. This is a sobering example of patriarchy in the workplace.

CAN ANYTHING BE DONE TO STAMP OUT SEXIST PRACTICES?

IS IT POSSIBLE TO RUN A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN SIMILAR TO THE MATERNITY LEAVE CAMPAIGN DURING THE 1980s, TO CAMPAIGN FOR LEAVE FOR HIV TREATMENT, ILLNESS AND RECOVERY?



South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union Records, AH2196/K1.17

A NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL UNION, a tight federation

"... There was a vision of strong industrial unions where a national worker unity and worker identity could be forged."

Kally Forrest

In the years leading up to the formation of FOSATU, a debate had raged in worker and intellectual circles about the most desirable and effective form of trade union organisation. The debate centred primarily on industrial versus general unions.

At its launch in April 1979, it became clear that FOSATU was nothing like its predecessors. It established its identity comprised of both industrial and national unions, and at its core was a clear policy of trade union unity. Another critical feature was that it was a tight federation.

INDUSTRIAL VERSUS GENERAL UNIONS

General unions aimed to organise all workers in a given locality, irrespective of the industry in which they worked, into a single union. Those supporting general unions claimed industrial unions divided workers by industrial sector. General unions were more inclined to work closely with community groups and to be more revolutionary and political.

Those supporting industrial unions believed community and political struggles could be successfully engaged in only from a position of strength, and this was only available to black factory workers. Thus to truly wield power, black workers could not just organise in single factories but had to control entire industrial sectors. They nevertheless recognised that industrial unions could divide workers. To construct a working class movement, therefore, required a tight federation. TUACC was the prototype of this, and FOSATU took over this structure.



FOSATU's OFFICES AT CENTRAL COURT, DURBAN. FOSATU Archives, AH268o/D4

"We used to share organisers. The FOSATU secretary in each region was the organiser of last resort ... it was share and share alike, we shared photocopiers, benches, desks, cars, organising, strikes."

Bernie Fanaroff

WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE A TIGHT FEDERATION?

FOSATU unions shared a common vision and a common strategy and were expected to implement a common policy. In return, FOSATU shared its resources with affiliates, making it possible for unions to strengthen their shop-floor structures. In particular, the shared education workshops were critical in building a FOSATU identity. As a tight federation, it intervened in its members' affairs. Unions that failed to adhere to policy were disciplined.

WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE AN INDUSTRIAL UNION?

FOSATU established itself as a federation of industrial unions. This involved the recruitment of members on an industry-by-industry basis, in order to establish strong shop-floor organisation and create democratic worker-controlled structures.

WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE A NATIONAL UNION?

In the 1970s, a range of different unions emerged, both industrial and general, and these existed alongside racially exclusive unions such as the TUCSA unions. These divisions within the trade union movement encouraged TUACC, and later FOSATU, to begin thinking in terms of trade union unity within the various industrial sectors. They believed that the creation of one unified national union would add strength and restrict the employers' ability to exploit racial and regional differences.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

OUTSOURCING

One of the weapons that employers have developed in the last 20 years is outsourcing. Outsourcing refers to the contracting of elements of the production process to an outside, usually specialised, company. For example, a railway workers union organises all workers on the railways. But what if the railways outsources food catering to a catering company? Are catering workers then organised by the railway union or the catering union? On the one hand it makes more sense to be organised by the railway union. On the other hand, the interests of catering

workers might be very different from those of railway workers. In addition, because they have different employers, their conditions of service may be completely different.

HOW DO CURRENT EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AFFECT THE ABILITY OF TRADE UNIONS TO ORGANISE?

HOW CAN TRADE UNIONS TODAY ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS?



AUTOPLASTIC WORKERS ON STRIKE. Taffy Adler Papers, AH 2065/J142

FOSATU's international relations

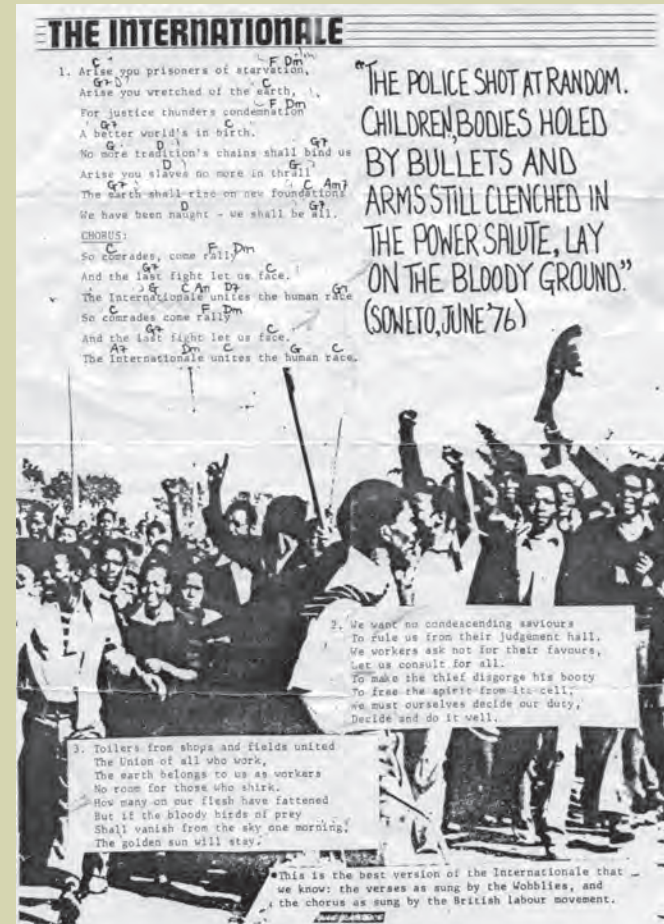


HENKEL WORKERS ON STRIKE. Taffy Adler Papers, AH2o65/J6o

FOSATU soon recognised the importance of establishing links with international trade union movements. The federation believed that they could learn from the experiences of others and use international contacts to advance their own struggles.

A common tactic of FOSATU was to rally the support of international unions. This made sense, given that many South African factories had been established by multinational corporations. FOSATU would embarrass publicly the South African subsidiary by highlighting its appalling wage structures and conditions to the parent company. It was also able to draw on the expertise and considerable resources of the international union to fight its battles with the parent company.

FOSATU was also committed to the socialist idea of building international workers' solidarity. From the early 1980s, it saw its international campaigns as part of the global anti-apartheid movement.



FOSATU AIMED TO BUILD INTERNATIONAL WORKER SOLIDARITY IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL OPPRESSION OF WORKERS. *THE INTERNATIONALE* WAS THE INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED SONG OF WORKER STRUGGLE.

The Henkel recognition battle

In 1978 the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) approached Henkel SA, a German multinational, for union recognition. Management ignored the demands of CWIU. In 1982, the workers went on strike, following management's decision to walk out of wage negotiations and increase working hours. Striking workers were fired and scabs hired.

Workers from IG Chemie, the Henkel workers' union in Germany, put pressure on its parent company. They called for a consumer boycott of Henkel's detergents and glues. The International Chemical and Energy Federation also threatened to call an international boycott. As a result of this pressure, Henkel eventually agreed to recognise CWIU.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY TODAY

As the trade union movement has declined internationally, so too has the incidence of international solidarity. One of the most notable exceptions in recent times was COSATU's picketing of the Mexican football team in 2010 World Cup. COSATU responded to requests for help by the

Mexican Trade Union Federation in its ongoing struggles primarily with multinational corporations that had moved production from the USA to sweatshops in Mexico. To this end the Mexican government has actively encouraged multinational exploitation of Mexican workers.



IN AN AGE OF GLOBALISATION, IS INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY STILL POSSIBLE? IF YES, THEN DOES IT FACILITATE OR RETARD INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AMONG WORKERS?

ALTERNATIVELY, DOES THE SPEED WITH WHICH PRODUCTION CAN BE MOVED FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY MEAN THAT INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGNS CAN ONLY EXPECT SHORT-TERM SUCCESS?

Photo by Billy Paddock,
FOSATU Archives, AH268o/G32

Labour Correspondent
CAPE TOWN. — South
Africans has Blaming
trade unionists yesterday
blamed Natal's strikes on

esially an Afrikaner, can object
to leaders who canvass among
sympathetic docile workers to

An American, Mr. Sterling
Tucker, director of the Nation-
al Urban League, outlined how

African
The

**“And when you are out of a job,
you realise that the boss and the
government have the power to
condemn you to death”**

Mandienkosi Makhoba

**“We contract people are different;
we do the rough work while the
location people do the easy work”**

A migrant worker

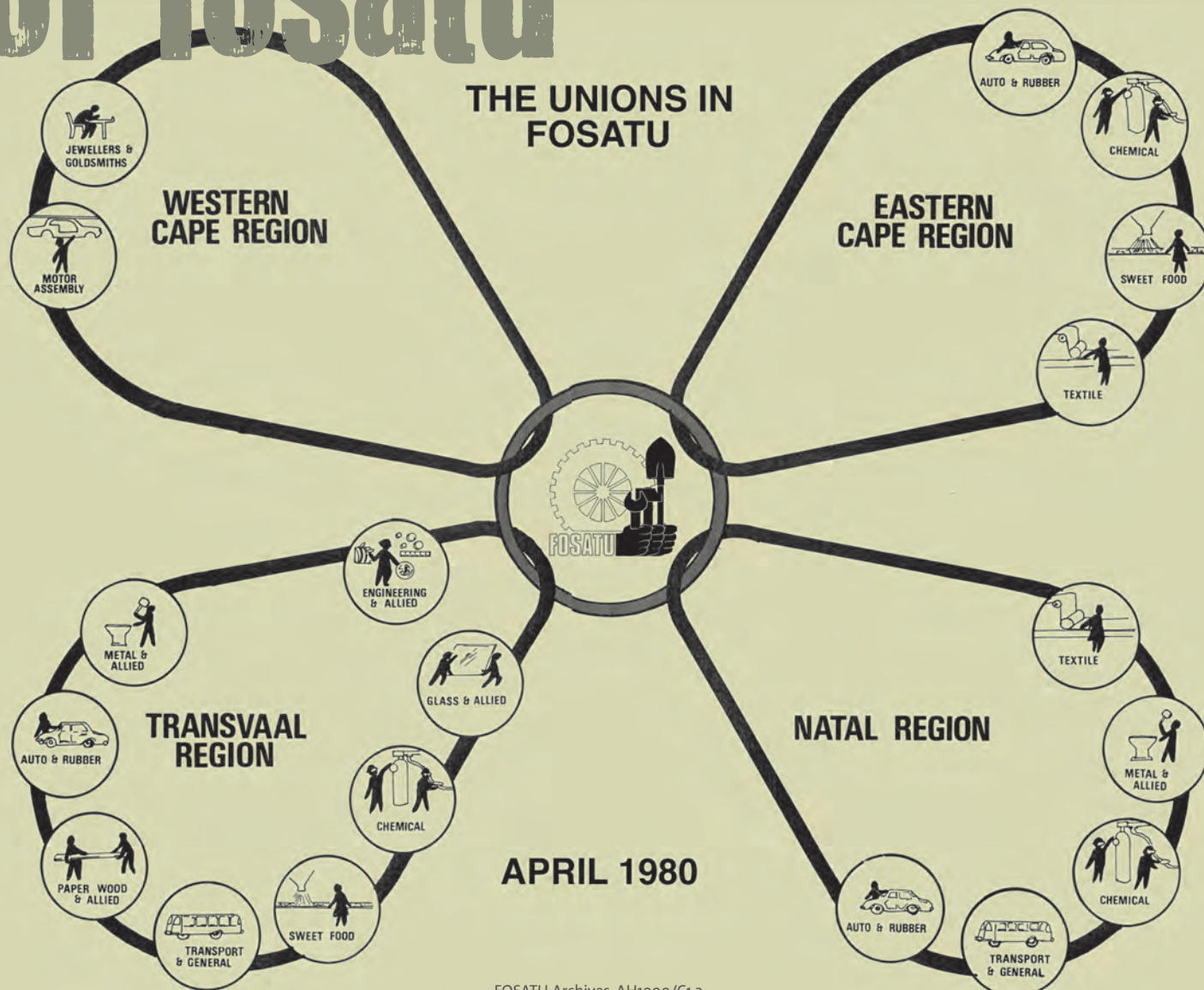
**“I joined the union because
workers are not treated like
humans by management”**

A migrant worker



FOSATU
IN ACTION

THE STRUCTURE of fosatu



FOSATU affiliates

By 1984, as a result of a number of consolidations and amalgamations of unions, the number of FOSATU affiliates stood at eight.



MAWU

In April 1973, the Metal Allied Workers Union (MAWU) was established with the assistance of the Benefit Fund. In June it set up its first branch in Pietermaritzburg and a second branch was formed in Durban shortly thereafter among the Leyland workers. MAWU organised in the electrical engineering, electronic equipment, cables, motor, rubber, non-ferrous metals, iron and steel, and heavy engineering sectors. It soon established a reputation as a courageous trade union that was prepared to fight for its members' rights.

MAWU was prepared to work with registered trade unions such as the white Engineering and Allied Workers Union (EAWU) and others associated with the Urban Training Project (UTP), but operated as an independent, non-racial trade union. This became an important principle for the new trade unions. MAWU and NUTW were the founding members of the Trade Union Advisory Council (TUACC) which was formed in October 1973.



NUTW

NUTW

In September 1973, the Benefit Fund helped to form the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) with 500 workers, many of whom were women. By October, its numbers had climbed to 1 300 members. Like MAWU, it soon became well-known as a dynamic and fearless trade union. It was a co-founder of TUACC. By mid-1974, it had 5 000 members. It won a major victory when Smith and Nephew, an international pharmaceutical company based in Durban, formally recognised it. This enabled the trade union to organise its workers 'in-depth', building up a system based on shop stewards and factory-floor organisation that became the defining characteristic of the new trade unions.



TGWU

Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)

The Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) was founded in 1973. It organised in the passenger transport, goods transport, stevedores, motor ferry, municipality, cement products, hospitals, cleaning and security sectors. It affiliated itself to TUACC in 1974. By 1984 the TGWU had a membership of 11 080.



CWIU

CWIU

In 1973, workers from a Johannesburg company called African Explosives and Chemical Industries joined the Benefit Fund and, with its help, began to recruit Durban chemical workers from AE&CI and Chrome Chemicals into the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU). It was launched in November 1974 with 1 000 members. It organised workers in the sectors handling chemicals, plastic, rubber, glass, industrial minerals, petroleum and coal products, gas, candles, oils and fats. It affiliated to TUACC in 1974.



NAAWU
NAAWU

National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU)

The National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) was an amalgamation of the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa (NUMARWOSA) and its African parallel, the United Automobile Workers Union (UAW). Initially NUMARWOSA was affiliated to the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) and was registered as a union for coloured workers only. In 1976 NUMARWOSA withdrew from TUCSA because of its refusal to organise unions on a non-racial basis. Leadership recognised that whatever the legal restrictions were, it was vital to organise all workers in the motor and allied industry. By 1980, at the time of the merger, NAAWU had 12 000 members and was recognised as the most representative union in the automobile assembly industry. It had an established presence in the tyre manufacturing plants and was beginning to organize in the motor component plants.

Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU)

The Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU) was established in 1974 with the help of the Urban Training Project (UTP). It was based in Durban where it organised in the sugar, milling, biscuits, bakeries, dairies, brewing, sweets and chocolate sectors. By 1977 it had expanded into northern and southern Natal and the Transvaal. By 1982, SFAWU had succeeded in organising 100 per cent of the workers in the factories that fell within its sector. SFAWU was one of the two CCOBTU unions that broke away and affiliated with FOSATU.



SFAWU

Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAU)

PWAU was also established with the help of the Urban Training Project. It was founded in 1974. It organised workers in the paper and pulp, paper printing and packaging, wood, sawmills and furniture sectors. It had branches in the Transvaal, Natal and the Western Cape. PWAU was successful in breaking down ethnic divisions between Mpondo and Zulu workers in Natal.



PWAU

Jewellers and Goldsmiths Union (JGU)

The Jewellers and Goldsmiths Union (JGU) was the smallest of FOSATU's affiliate unions with a membership of 470 in 1984.



JGU

FOSATU – a tightly run organisation



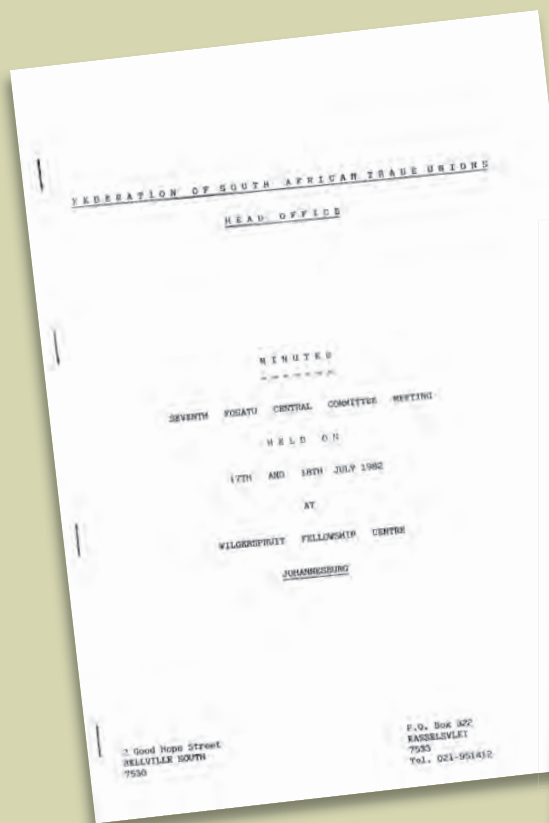
THE FOSATU EXECUTIVE AT WILGESPRUIT: **BACK LEFT** – J. MTHINYANE (N NATAL); J. DAMPIES (W PROVINCE); J. NTULI (TRANSSVAAL); A. ZULU (VICE PRESIDENT); J. FOSTER (GENERAL SECRETARY); C. DLAMINI (PRESIDENT); A. ERWIN (EDUCATION SECRETARY); F. SAULS (E PROVINCE); J. GOMMOMO (E PROVINCE); **MIDDLE LEFT** – T. MCKENNA (W PROVINCE); A. WILSON (W PROVINCE); T. DLADLA (N. NATAL); N. BUTHELEZI (N NATAL); R. MOFOKENG (TRANSSVAAL); J. MKALIPi (E PROVINCE); N. GANTANA (TREASURER) **FRONT** – E. MABASO (NATAL); J. MAWBAY (NATAL), FOSATU Archives, 2680/D.38. FOSATU Archives, AH2680/D38

“Some people claimed unions like NUMA and WOSA were bureaucratic because they were well run, but we began to see that a union didn’t have to lose its militancy if it was run properly. We believed we could learn from their style of unionism.”

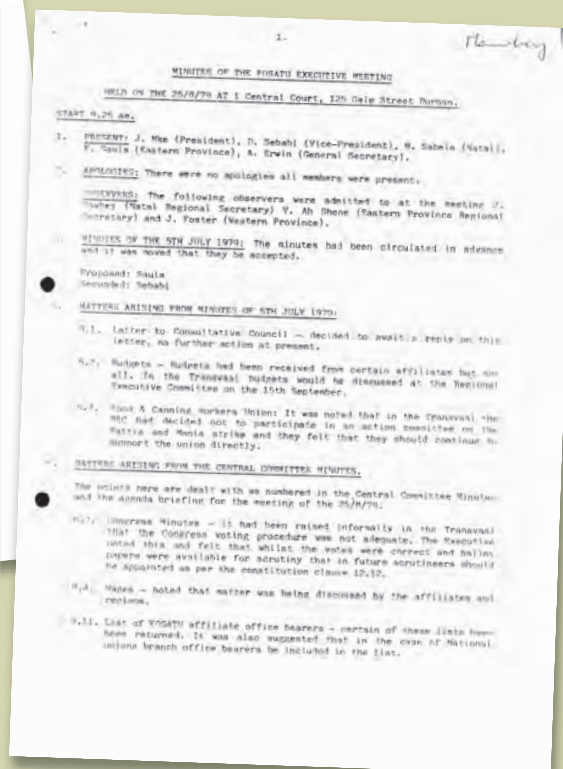
Alec Erwin, first General Secretary of FOSATU

FOSATU recognised that a key aspect to success was to ensure that it was a tight organisation in which sound financial and administrative procedures were maintained. FOSATU drew on the bureaucratic tradition and administrative successes of NUMARWOSA as part of the challenge to develop a strong and militant trade union movement. It recognised that membership growth and the extension of its influence needed to take place hand-in-hand with a well-administered and tightly run federation.

FOSATU WAS A WELL ORGANIZED FEDERATION. IT KEPT RECORDS OF ALL ITS MEETINGS FROM NATIONAL TO REGIONAL TO LOCAL LEVELS. AS A RESULT OF THIS STRONG ADMINISTRATIVE FOCUS, THE HISTORICAL PAPERS ARCHIVE IS ABLE TO HOUSE SUCH A SOLID COLLECTION OF MATERIAL ON FOSATU



MINUTES OF THE SEVENTH FOSATU CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING, JULY 1982
FOSATU Archives, AH1999/C1.7.1.1

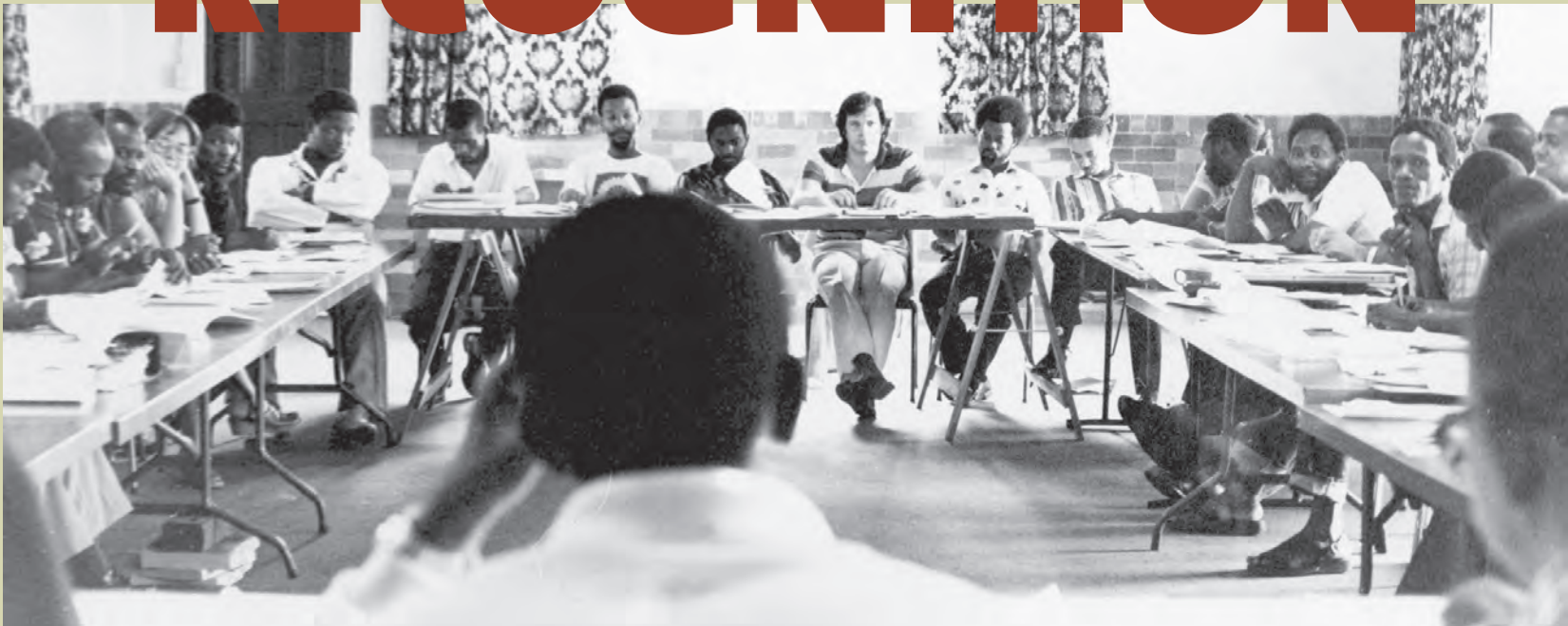


MINUTES OF THE FOSATU EXECUTIVE MEETING, AUGUST 1971.
FOSATU Archives, AH1999/C1.7.2

FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS		
INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED		
20 APRIL 1979 TO 31 DECEMBER 1979		
INCOME		
Grants & Subsidies		104 491,47
Levies	102 477,61	
	2 013,86	
LESS: EXPENSES		
Auditors Remuneration	400,00	22 524,54
Bank Charges	49,28	
Depreciation	928,45	
Donations	250,00	
Electricity	61,63	
General Expenses	48,74	
Meeting Expenses	5 651,08	
Printing, Postage & Stationery	6 549,97	
Rent	700,00	
Telephone	436,63	
Transport	74,86	
Travelling Expenses	6 407,87	
Wages	946,03	
NET SURPLUS FOR THE PERIOD		R 81 966,93

A FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD OF APRIL TO DECEMBER 1979 REFLECTS EXPENSES OF R33 524.54.
FOSATU Archives, AH1999/C1.1.5

RECOGNITION



FOSATU'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETS IN APRIL 1983. FOSATU Archives, AH2680/B83

In the early years of union organisation, recognition was crucial if unions were to survive. It was a defensive tool that would protect the worker. Without recognition, union organisers were subject to harassment, victimisation and arbitrary dismissal. Under such circumstances, it was impossible to build a union.

What does recognition mean?

- The union has the right to represent its members and negotiate wages and working conditions
- Recognition of shop stewards
- Union access to the workplace
- The right to negotiate grievance and dismissal procedures
- These rights were enshrined in a Recognition Agreement negotiated between employers and the union. For the first time, the two parties negotiated as equals at factory level.



JOHN COPELYN SIGNS THE SMITH AND NEPHEW RECOGNITION AGREEMENT. Photo by Tony Smith, FOSATU Archives, AH 268o/E28

Smith and Nephew recognition agreement

In 1974, the emerging union – the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) – was recognised by the British-owned textile company, Smith and Nephew. This was a watershed moment. It was the first South African union to be recognised. Usually factory bosses were extremely hostile to recognition agreements and often, protracted battles were fought with unions to prevent them from operating.

THE COLGATE STRIKE: the battle for recognition



The Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) engaged in a long struggle to gain recognition from the giant multinational Colgate-Palmolive.

In February 1980, CWIU requested a union recognition agreement. The Colgate management refused, agreeing to negotiate only with the liaison committee.

THE LIAISON COMMITTEE

The Liaison Committee is an institution of apartheid. In 1953, while the Nationalist Government recognized white unions, it tried to impose an inferior committee system on African workers. The Nationalist Ministers instituted the system to 'bleed the African unions to death'. The committee at Colgate is one of these committees. It is made up of four elected members (two of whom are supervisors) and four management members. The Chairman is Mr Dyson, the Personnel Director. He has the casting vote.

Workers reject this second-class institution because:

1. **It is toothless.** The constitution only empowers the committee to 'consider matters of mutual interest' and 'to make recommendations.' It is merely 'a medium of communication' because 'Management still retains the right to make final decisions.' (Minutes, 21 May 1980).
2. **The workers have no say.** The meetings are in secret and the minutes are confidential. In the most important issue it has discussed, namely the issue of trade union recognition, the Liaison Committee discussions were confidential (Minutes, 20 February 1980). The Committee never asked the workers' opinion. Another example is the fact that the Committee alters its constitution without reference to workers (Minutes, 27 February 1980).
3. **It is used as a tool against the Union.** Colgate consistently used the liaison committee to block the Union in the factory.

An important feature of the struggle was the decision by CWIU to use international pressure. The union accused Colgate of violating the 'Sullivan Code' which required all American companies in South Africa to recognise a trade union whether it was registered or not. The struggle dragged on and in 1981, CWIU called for a boycott of all Colgate products. This was one of the earliest examples of workers' struggles being taken into the homes of black workers outside the factory gates.

A huge campaign was launched, with posters and stickers pasted everywhere urging workers to boycott Colgate. It was so successful that management decided to back down. The managers subsequently changed their minds and refused to negotiate, so CWIU workers came out for a two-day strike. Finally, a recognition agreement was signed on 21 August 1981.


FOSATU VIEWED LIAISON COMMITTEES AS TOOTHLESS COMMITTEES THAT HAD NO POWER AND IN WHICH THE WORKERS HAD NO SAY

“When Colgate caved in and agreed that we should negotiate at plant level it was a very big victory for us because ... it made our battle easier in terms of facing employers ... [for] the right to negotiate wages and conditions on the shop floor”.

Dusty Ngwane

Recognition was inextricably bound up with the issue of registration. However, as FOSATU grew in strength, and its shop-floor structures became more solid, it recognised that it was quite possible to organise without recognition.

PART OF THE
COLLECTION OF
POSTERS AND
STICKERS THAT
WERE PRODUCED
CALLING FOR
A BOYCOTT
OF COLGATE'S
PRODUCTS
FOSATU Archives,
AH1999/C1.13.1.13.7



Workers at COLGATE PALMOLIVE, Boksburg, appeal to their fellow workers and to the Community to

BOYCOTT COLGATE PALMOLIVE

Don't buy these products:

<u>Soap powders and detergents</u>	<u>Toothpastes</u>
PUNCH	COLGATE TOOTHPASTE
BINGO	ULTRA BRITE
COLD POWER	DENTAGARD
STA SOFT	FLUOROGUARD
AJAX	
<u>Toilet Soaps</u>	<u>Toilet articles</u>
PALMOLIVE	COLGATE SHAMPOO
SKIN MIST	COLGATE SHAVING CREAM
NORDIKA	RAPID SHAVE
CHOICE	GLYCERINE
	HOUR AFTER HOUR
	DEODORANT

Published by the CHEMICAL WORKERS INDUSTRIAL UNION, 9 Tuyn Building, 24 Voortrekker Road, Boksburg




WHY ARE WORKERS CALLING FOR A BOYCOTT?

Workers at Colgate Palmolive in Boksburg have been struggling for well over a year to get Management to recognise their Trade Union – the CHEMICAL WORKERS INDUSTRIAL UNION – an affiliate of FOSATU.

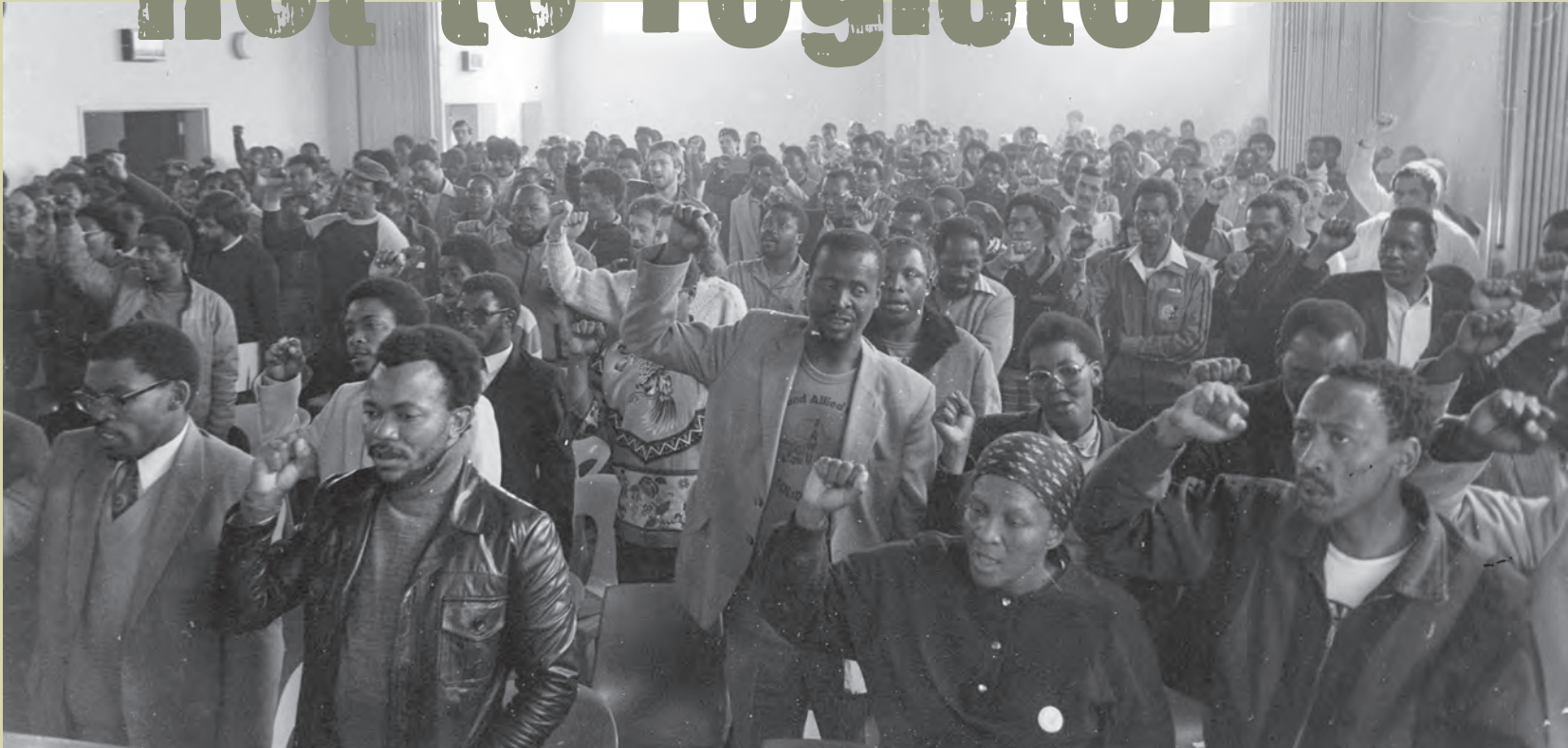
For over a year Management blocked all attempts by the workers to gain basic trade union rights in the factory. After a year of pressure Management offered a THIRD CLASS RECOGNITION – recognition without its most important part, THE RIGHT OF WORKERS TO NEGOTIATE WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS THROUGH THEIR UNION. That is why workers joined the Union.

Workers are sick and tired of being handed out inferior institutions. They demand FULL RIGHTS not THIRD CLASS RIGHTS.
Nothing less is enough.

Colgate is an American Company. Colgate workers in South Africa want the same rights as Colgate workers in America – THE RIGHT TO FULL UNION RECOGNITION, WITH THE RIGHT TO NEGOTIATE WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS.

TO REGISTER OR not to register



Taffy Adler Papers, AH2065/J103

“We believe that the law would divide workers by race.”

FOSATU Worker News, Feb 1980

The Wiehahn Commission opened up a space for the recognition of the emerging unions of the 1970s. Registration offered unions legitimacy, but it imposed restrictive measures on the unions. Most importantly, it excluded migrants from joining unions and disallowed racially mixed unions.

The FOSATU unions were faced with a difficult choice. Either they registered and accepted the government restrictions imposed on them. Or they chose not to register and faced problems of recognition, losing their rights to use the Industrial Councils. These councils had been invaluable to white unions in improving wages and working conditions.

Initially the emerging unions refused to register. However, after a few months, NUMARWOSA, a FOSATU affiliate, applied for registration on the understanding that they would be allowed to operate on a non-racial basis. This opened the space for FOSATU to engage with the issue of registration. The federation agreed to register on the condition that no racial restrictions were imposed on the unions, and that migrant workers were allowed to join.

Eventually in 1983 the state gave way, leading to explosive trade union growth and major shop-floor gains for unionised workers.

"I always thought Wiehahn would give us new openings. Registration and the other controls could not tie us up if we were strong in the factories. They needed blunter instruments to do that, and because they said they were reforming, they couldn't use them."

Alec Erwin, first General Secretary of FOSATU

The registration issue split the emerging unions. The independent Cape unions refused to register, arguing that they would not place themselves under state control. They also believed that the registration mechanism could only be reformed if unions did not register. FOSATU, however, saw registration as an issue of tactics and not of principle. The federation believed that registration would make it more difficult for companies to refuse recognition. It also believed that it would strengthen the unions' bargaining power and reduce employer and state favouritism for dealing with registered unions. FOSATU was also keen to get stop-order facilities to collect members' subscriptions. The state tied stop-orders to registration.

ORGANISATION AND recruitment



RECRUITMENT WAS ALSO A PERSONALISED INTERACTION AS SHOP STEWARDS WOULD VISIT WORKERS AT HOME IN THE TOWNSHIPS. FOSATU Archives, AH 2680/E72

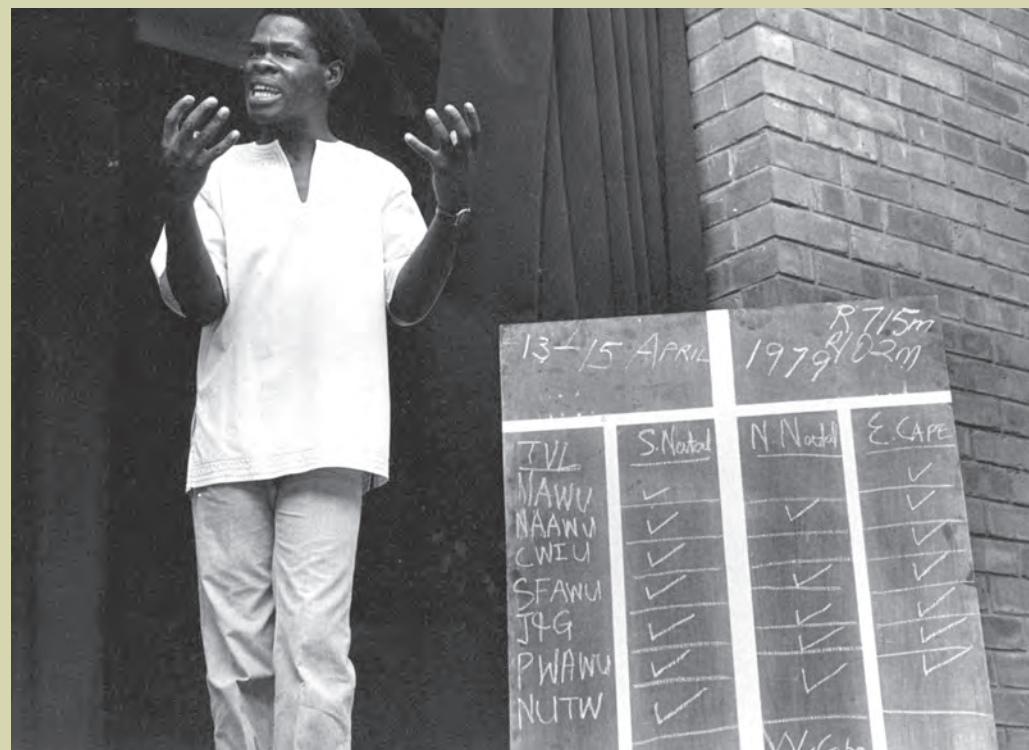
It was essential for the FOSATU trade unions to grow their numbers. Strength through numbers was what would give the unions their power to challenge employers.

Of course, growth in numbers brought with it its own contradictions. The FOSATU unions had committed themselves to consolidating their organisational strength in a limited number of factories. They had to secure a balance between strong internal organisation and solid workplace structures on the one hand, and growth in numbers to present a united front that would be difficult to ignore on the other hand.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the FOSATU unions were small. Initially, the unions faced enormous difficulties in trying to recruit union members. More often than not, recruitment took on a clandestine nature. Visible union work within a factory could result in instant dismissal. Unionists would recruit 'behind bushes outside factories or in secret cells across company departments'. It was also a personalised interaction as shop stewards would visit workers at home in the townships.



INFORMING FOSATU MEMBERS OF NEW RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION.



THE REGIONAL BRANCHES OF THE FOSATU TRADE UNIONS ARE INDICATED ON THE BOARD AS A WORKER LEADER TALKS PASSIONATELY ABOUT AN ISSUE. FOSATU Archives, AH268o/B1o6

It was only during the 1980s that the FOSATU unions began to grow in numbers. A number of factors made this growth possible. After Wiehahn, recruitment was able to take place more openly. The economic hardships confronting workers also contributed to union growth. Rising inflation led to a continued attack on their living standards.

“Employers for about a year weren’t quite sure how to deal with us. Some of them went over the other way, they were so accommodating – after refusing to talk to us for years! It took about two years for them to realise they didn’t have to say much to us, then they reverted.”

Bernie Fanaroff, a MAWU organiser

MAKING CONNECTIONS ORGANISATION STRENGTH IN UNIONS TODAY

In general, trade unions tread a path between being a smaller more democratic organisation and a large more centralised one. As growth takes place, as it must, in order to increase bargaining power, the trend internationally has been one of increasing centralisation and thus increasing distance between leadership and the rank and file.

Professor Sakela Buhlungu makes a different point. He refers to a 'paradox of victory' wherein COSATU gained political power at the expense of organisational strength.

IS THIS A VALID CRITICISM OF COSATU'S POSITION TODAY?



WORKERS XOLISI, JOE AND JOHN READING AN ISSUE OF ISISEBENZI. FOSATU Archives, AH2680/D30

MIGRANTS BUILD fosatu

A great deal of successful union recruitment took place in migrant hostels. Migrant workers were the most vulnerable, coming from impoverished homelands, and facing pressures from an ongoing attack by the state, which aimed to exclude them from the urban areas. Living in hostels, they were able to develop a collective understanding of trade union organisation. The Vosloorus Hostel on the East Rand, which housed 15 000 men, serves as an example.

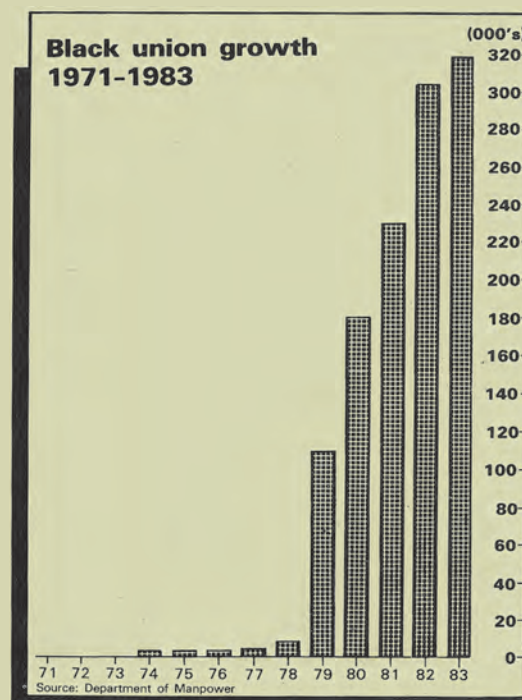
"The hostels have been good places to talk and learn about trade unions and the struggles in the factory. Meetings are easy to organise because everybody lives together. We live close to fellow workers of other factories. We share our experiences, and the victories and defeats in one factory become lessons for a large number of people."

Mandienkosi Makhoba, a worker at Rely Precision Foundry

Unions also gained the trust and loyalty of their migrants when they saw how hard FOSATU fought for the rights of migrant workers. FOSATU vociferously opposed the Wiehahn regulations that attacked the migrant workers' right to belong to registered unions. It was through this initiative that the state finally conceded on the issue.

However, at the end of the day, migrant workers were the casualties of a state-inspired onslaught. Through wide-scale retrenchments, migrants ultimately were lost to the union cause, and it was urban African workers who were to become the mainstay of the unions.

In the 1980s, the FOSATU unions moved towards mass recruiting and their numbers increased dramatically.



Department of Manpower



VICTORY FOR WORKERS! FOSATU Archives, AH2680/G30

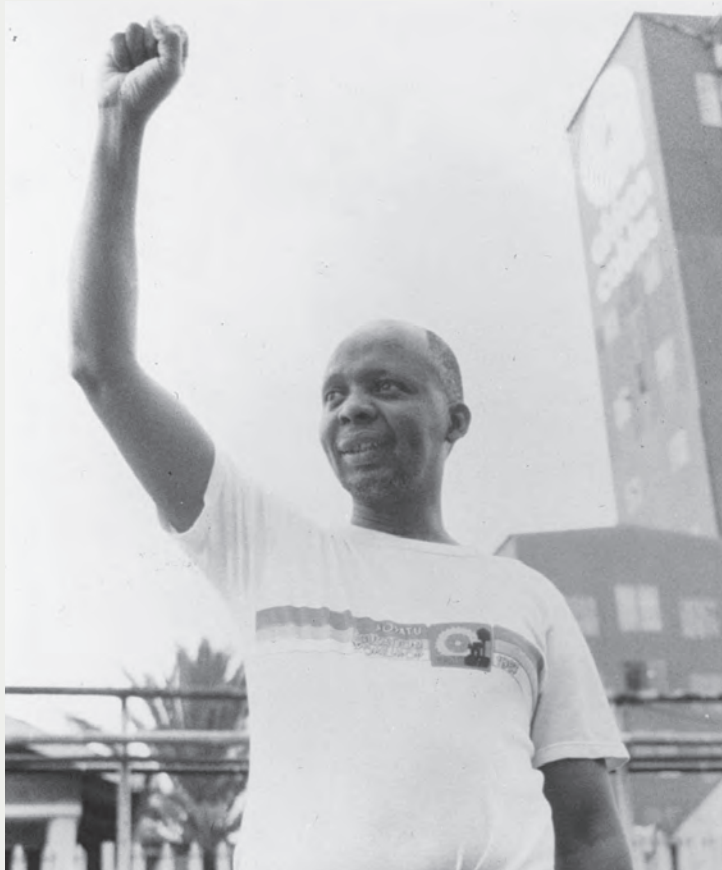
Victory at SASOL

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) wanted to organise the workers in the chemical giant SASOL. However, this oil-from-coal company was a national key point and trade unions were forbidden. The CWIU got around the strict security by pretending to be visitors and organising the workers at the hostel.

The key to CWIU's success was its willingness to use black clerks to recruit workers. They were the best recruiters because they worked in the personnel departments and thus had access to workers' files. The CWIU held a huge rally and workers signed up in droves.

By February 1984, the CWIU had recruited 4 000 workers, about half of the total workers at SASOL. The company finally conceded defeat and granted CWIU stop-order facilities for union subscriptions. SASOL had to deal directly with the trade union in the years that followed.

This was an impressive victory, achieved in spite of considerable hardships for organisers.



FOSATU Archives, AH 2680/D27

Worker's story: Petrus Tom

Petrus Boy Tom was born in 1935 in Top Location near Vereeniging. As a boy, Tom drew water for a blacksmith, tended gardens in white suburbs, and looked after bicycles and carried shopping for customers at OK Bazaars to help his mother and grandmother make ends meet. He first joined a union shortly after starting work at a bakery. Later on, at African Cables, where Tom started working in 1956, he was involved in challenging the management on various issues: such as getting paid the shift allowance that white workers were already receiving, introducing a canteen for African workers, and organising a system where workers did not have to queue for their pay. Tom was involved in the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) during the 1960s. In the early 1980s Tom joined the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and later became an organiser in Vereeniging.



MAKING CONNECTIONS HARD-TO-ORGANISE WORKERS

It can be argued that the strength of FOSATU was related to the organisation being embraced by migrant workers. In previous bursts of trade union activity in the 20th century, migrants had been regarded as difficult to organise, or the forgotten workers. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, some other grades of workers were regarded as too difficult to organise. Largely, these workers remain unorganised even today. The hard-to-organise workers included domestic workers, farm workers, foreign workers, casual workers, workers at home, informal traders and sex workers.

ARE THESE GRADES OF WORKERS FOREVER UNREACHABLE BY A TRADE UNION ORGANISATION?

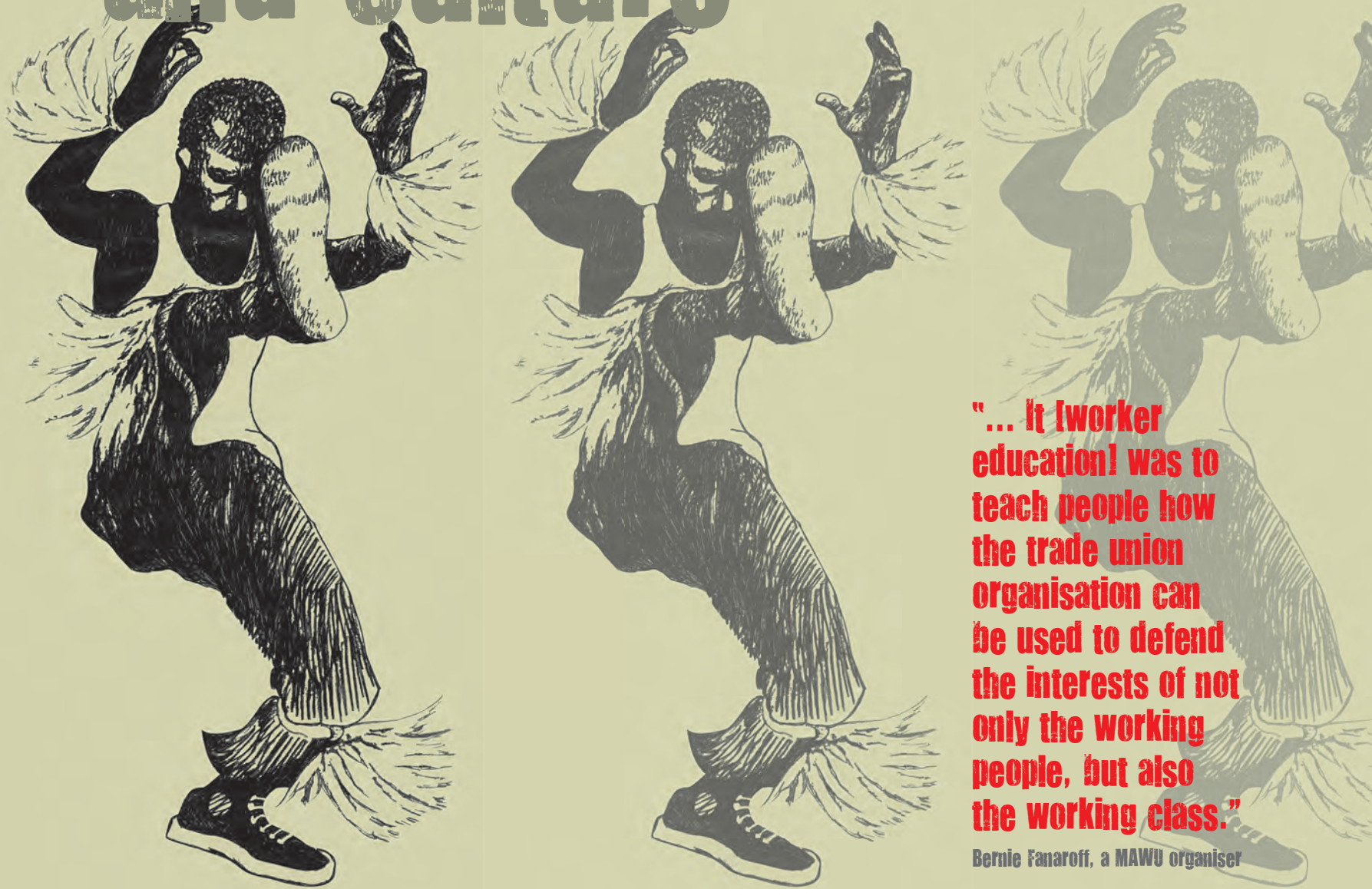
ALTERNATIVELY, IS IT POSSIBLE TO ADAPT ORGANISING TACTICS TO INCLUDE THESE FORGOTTEN WORKERS?

CRITICS OFTEN REFER TO ORGANISED COSATU PLANTS AS A 'LABOUR ARISTOCRACY' COMPARED TO THE UNORGANISED, WHOSE WORKING CONDITIONS ARE SO MUCH WORSE. IS THIS A VALID POINT? ARE WE SEEING TWO FRACTIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS WITH DIFFERENT INTERESTS FORMING?



Taffy Adler Papers, AH2065/J126

WORKERS' EDUCATION and culture



"... It [worker education] was to teach people how the trade union organisation can be used to defend the interests of not only the working people, but also the working class."

Bernie Fanaroff, a MAWU organiser

Workers' education was fundamental to the growth and development of the union movement under FOSATU. The nature of educational interventions was rich and varied, and encompassed both formal structures and informal overtures.



FOSATU Worker News

FOSATU recognised the vital role of education in promoting workers' control and the democratic principles of the Federation. As a result, FOSATU unions produced a large number of publications that aimed to educate workers on their rights and to highlight the vital role of workers in working class struggles. *FOSATU Worker News* was one such publication. It was written with workers in mind, sensitive to the low literacy levels of many workers. It also published Sotho and Zulu editions. The publication provided workers with news of the various affiliates' activities, FOSATU campaigns, and new labour laws that emerged. It also informed workers of the unions' policies and provided histories of working class struggles. It was a vital educational tool for workers, and one that was highly valued.

The Health and Safety campaigns launched by FOSATU were sustained through booklets which aimed to empower workers by providing them with information about the special dangers of their jobs. They also taught workers how to use the information to negotiate with management for rights and better conditions.

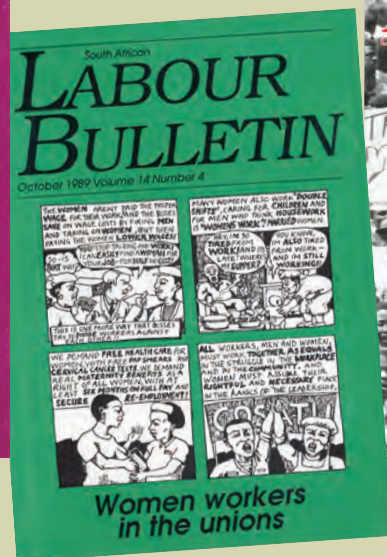
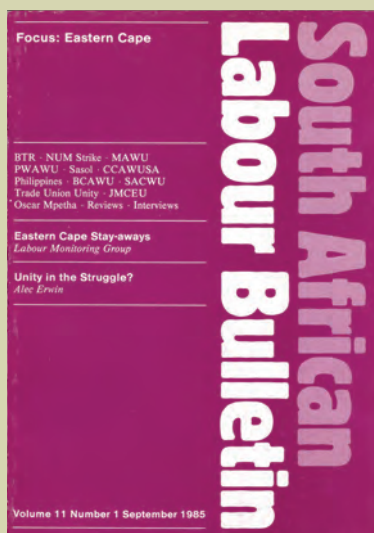
The booklets were created with painstaking attention to detail. In an era of limited technology, information was typed, and the documents were put together by hand.

"[In order] to exercise power, you have to understand the issues."

Enoch Godongwana, MAWU organiser and later NUMSA general secretary



EDITIONS OF THE PUBLICATION *FOSATU WORKER NEWS*



THE ISSUES RAISED IN THE SALB WERE DIRECTLY LINKED TO THE EMERGING LABOUR MOVEMENT. THE JOURNAL RECORDED ITS STRUGGLES AND SERVED ITS NEEDS.

FOSATU booklets covered a range of topics and issues.

A number of labour academics who were not formally employed by FOSATU offered their intellectual services as lawyers, teachers and researchers. They were mostly white and middle class. These so-called 'freelance intellectuals' established a number of initiatives such as the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) and the South African Labour Bulletin.

The Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) was created by a group of Durban-based academics in 1973. It began as a correspondence course to help workers understand the social and economic situations under which they operated. The Institute produced study books for union activists in both English and Zulu. It aimed to introduce them to the notions of accountability and the importance of a mandate.

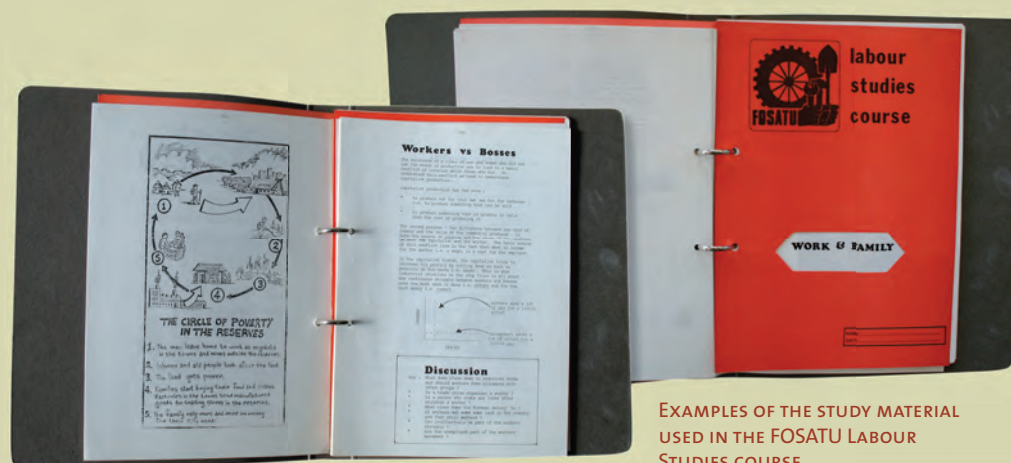
The *South African Labour Bulletin* is a journal on labour that emerged out of the IIE. The journal addresses general matters on trade unions, both at home and abroad, and includes topical discussions and analyses of economic trends.

FOSATU Labour Studies course, 1980 – 1985

The FOSATU Labour Studies Courses was run by labour academics at the University of the Witwatersrand for two weeks at a time for the advanced worker leadership of FOSATU. There were modules on labour law, labour history, the labour process and worker organisation, and contemporary political economy. They were taught by Halton Cheadle, Phil Bonner, Eddie Webster and Duncan Innes. These courses were popular and well-attended by shop stewards and union organisers. They also had the added advantage of bringing worker leaders together for two weeks at a time, and helped to build a cohesive national worker leadership.

The courses began in 1980 and ran for two years at Wits until the University Council terminated the contract with FOSATU on the grounds that the contract breached academic freedom, as it was only for FOSATU and not for any other trade union federation. Both the academics and FOSATU were outraged as it was both hypocritical of Wits, as they were running specific courses for Anglo American, and short-sighted, as Wits lost an opportunity to pioneer university-based trade union education in South Africa. The academics continued to teach the course off-campus at St Peters in Rosettenville until 1985, when the initiative was terminated with the formation of COSATU.

Did this group of academics wield power in the labour movement? Eddie Webster, a labour academic, believes not. He stated: 'These freelance intellectuals did help define worker interests and clarify the direction of the union, but they did not have any organisational power inside the movement.'



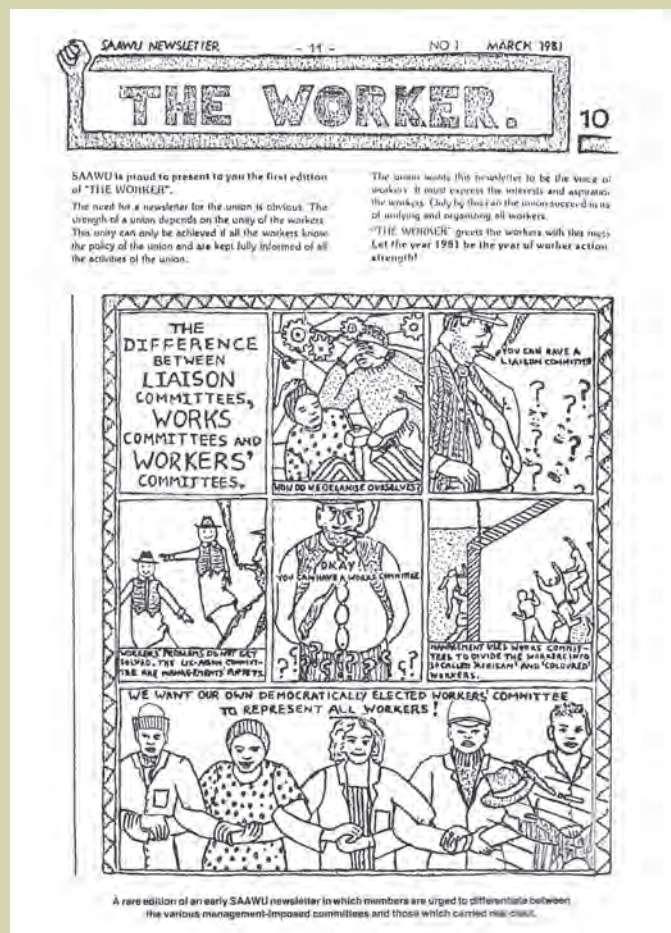
EXAMPLES OF THE STUDY MATERIAL
USED IN THE FOSATU LABOUR
STUDIES COURSE

FOSATU Archives, AH1999/E17.4

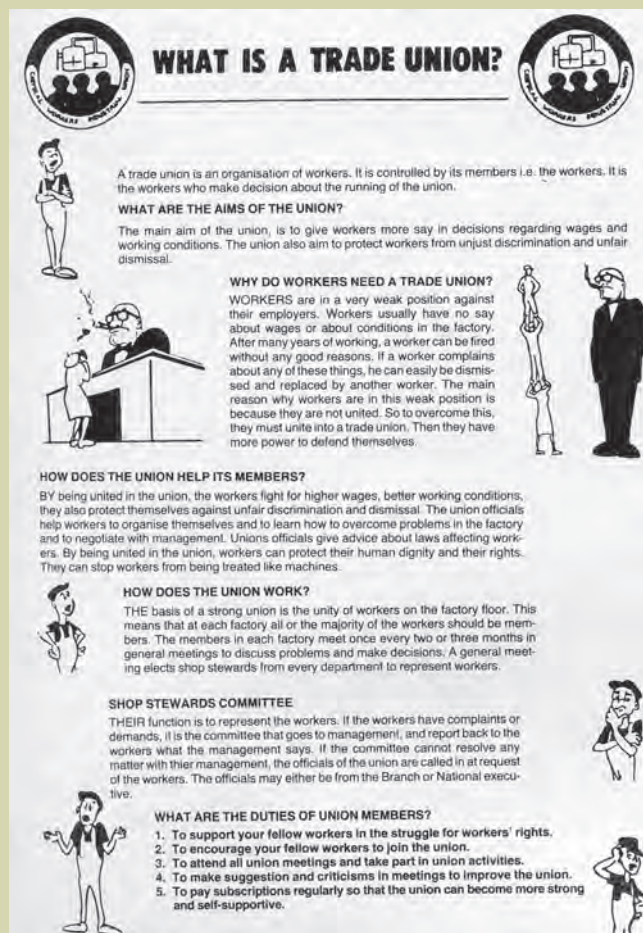
Trade union members were eager to absorb as much knowledge as possible, and demonstrated enormous commitment to the various educational avenues open to them. One such innovation was the 'siyalalas' (literally 'we sleep'). These were educational training sessions that would continue through the night.

"We would call a siyalala and meet at the office on Friday night after work. We would talk all night, and they were well attended. The debate, the manner in which people conducted themselves was good. People were committed to this union."

Elias Monage recalls the participation in the siyalalas



AN EDUCATIONAL PAMPHLET PRINTED BY SAAWU TO HIGHLIGHT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LIAISON COMMITTEES AND WORKER COMMITTEES. FOSATU Archives, AH1999/C1.13.8.7



INDIVIDUAL UNIONS PRINTED EDUCATIONAL PAMPHLETS TO EDUCATE THEIR MEMBERS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF JOINING A TRADE UNION. FOSATU Archives, AH1999/C1.14

“History and society as the workers see it!”

More organic forms of worker education also played an important role in the unions. Cultural activities went hand in hand with education workshops, and workers used these opportunities to convey their experience and understanding of society.

“A play about a strike is shown to the very workers involved in that strike. That process makes activists more determined and grooms them ... our plays, poems and paintings have the potential of popularising our worker politics”.

Worker poet, Mi S'Dumo Hlatswayo

“When he introduced us to labour politics he started with the activities of SACTU ... We did not have anything to look at as a mirror, except the oral history that Manci had given us ... We were introduced by Manci to the Industrial Aid Society ...”

Sipho Kubheka reflects on how the experience of older unionists helped shape his own understanding of unions

Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi S'Dumo Hlatswayo and Lawrence Zondi were some of the worker poets who passed on traditions and memories of struggle through the use of the traditional Nguni *imbongi* – praise poetry. The context and performance of worker poetry added further substance and meaning to the poems. They were often performed at May Day rallies and at workers' funerals, further inspiring their audiences in the spirit of the moment.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning also played a critical role in educating workers. This was learning on the shop floor, and immediate and valuable lessons were drawn. Evaluation of tactics and failures, gaining information and debating future projects were an ongoing process that engaged the membership at all levels, from union organisers to shop stewards and their committees, and the workers themselves.



WORKER POET, MI S'DUMO HLATSHWAY PERFORMS HIS PRAISE POEM 'BLACK MAMBA RISING' AT THE MAY DAY RALLY IN 1985. HE LATER BECAME COSATU'S CULTURAL CO-ORDINATOR. FOSATU Archives, AH 268o/C28

Worker's story: Mi S'dumo Hlatshway

Mi S'dumo Hlatshway was born in 1951 and grew up as an illegitimate child in a working-class household. The family's poverty stopped his education in Standard 7 – an event that traumatised him – and forced him into the labour market

at the age of 15. Hlatshway recalls: "... I wanted to be a poet, to control words, many words, that I may woo our multicultural South Africa into a single society. I wanted to be a historian, of a good deal of history; that I may harness our past group hostilities into a single South African ... history ... After 34 years of hunger, suffering, struggles, learning to hope, I am only a driver for a rubber company ...' Hlatshway continued his own education by reading whatever material came his way. In 1984 Hlatshway's poem, 'Black Mamba Rising', celebrating the Dunlop workers' struggle and victory, caused a sensation beyond union circles. This poem contributed both to the revival and transformation of *imbongi* poetry and to the political struggle by expressing the issues and challenges that the workers were experiencing.

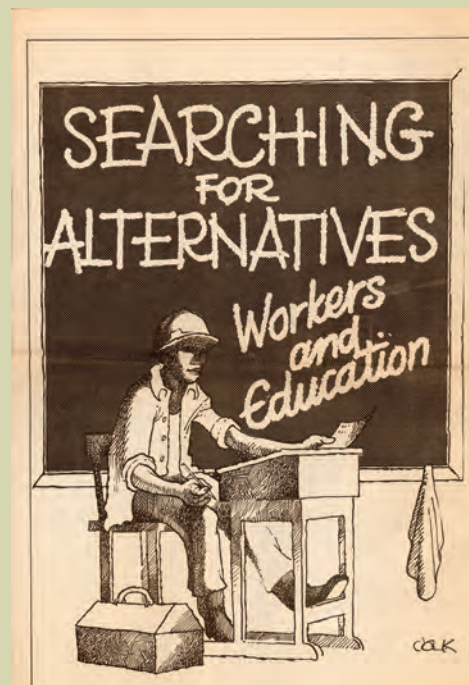


ALFRED TEMBA QABULA PERFORMS HIS FOSATU PRAISE POEM AT MAWU'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING IN DURBAN. QABULA'S PERFORMANCES INITIATED A REVIVAL OF *IMBONGI* POETRY THROUGHOUT SOUTH AFRICA, AS WORKERS HAVE USED THIS TRADITION POWERFULLY TO EXPRESS THEIR HARDSHIPS.

FOSATU Archives, AH 268o/C22



A FOSATU WORKERS' EDUCATION WORKSHOP. FOSATU Archives, AH268o/D37



NUMSA Records, AH2555/F13

1985 FOSATU EDUCATION WORKSHOP

**CHOIRS
UNION STALLS
FOOD FOR SALE
POETRY COMPETITION**

**PLAYS
BOOKS FOR SALE
WORKER LECTURES
CHILDRENS EVENTS**

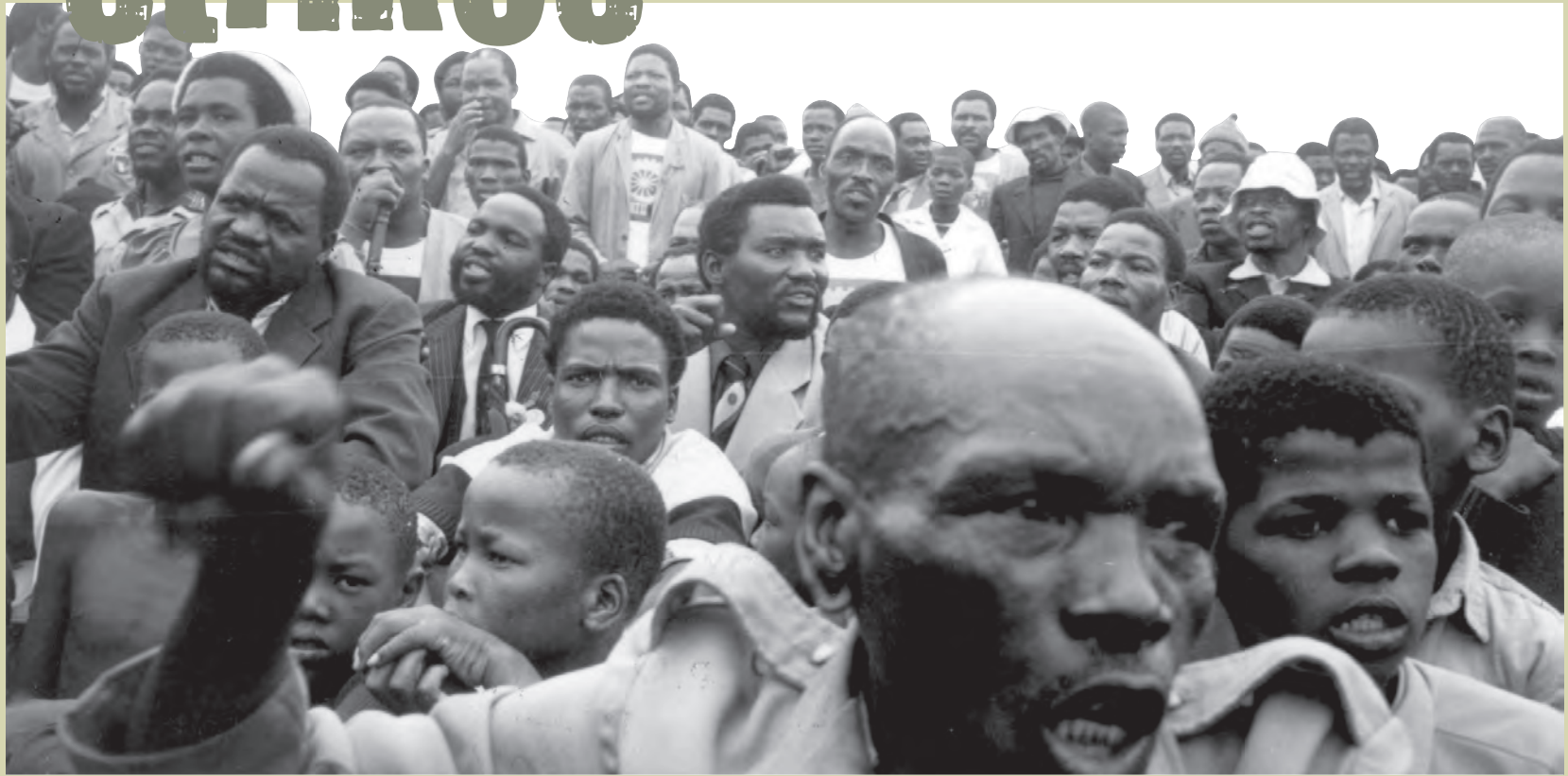
**JABULANI AMPHITHEATRE
SOWETO**

20th JULY 10am. to 5-30pm.



A LARGE NUMBER OF CHOIRS SPRANG UP IN FOSATU FACTORIES. THESE CHOIRS USED TUNES FROM CHURCH SONGS, BUT CHANGED THE WORDS TO CELEBRATE WORKERS' NEWLY DISCOVERED POWER. THE FOSATU CHOIRS WERE SO POPULAR THAT THEY OFTEN COMPETED TO GAIN A SPOT TO PERFORM AT THE EDUCATION WORKSHOPS. FOSATU Archives, AH 268o/H5

KEY strikes



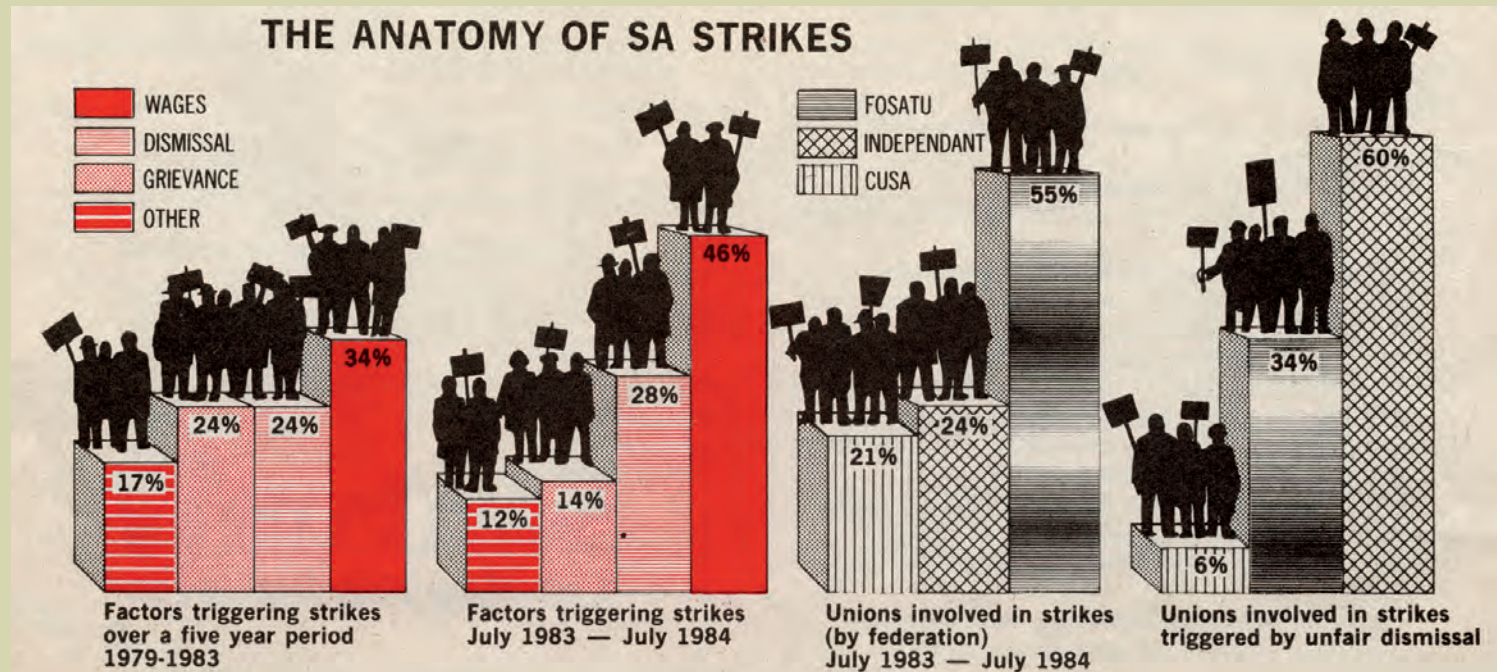
THE UNPRECEDENTED NUMBER OF STRIKES IN THE EARLY 1980s REFLECTED WORKERS DETERMINATION TO NEGOTIATE THEIR OWN WAGES AND CONDITIONS IN THE FACE OF THE HARSH CONDITIONS IMPOSED UPON THEM BY EMPLOYERS. FOSATU Archives, AH268o/C2

“... it is the strike weapon, the ability to withdraw labour, that lies at the basis of trade union power.”

Kally Forrest

Strike action was fundamental to the growing success of FOSATU. With each victory, workers were empowered; with each setback, there were important lessons to be learnt.

Many of the early strikes of the FOSATU affiliates were spontaneous outbursts, and the unions were taken by surprise. However, it was testament to FOSATU's tight organisational structures that it was able to turn these strikes to its advantage.



Andrew Levy and Associates

"We are commanding. We are commanding. The workers are commanding now. No more the police or the Labour Relations Department."

Vuyo Kwinana, a Volkswagen union activist, echoed the sense of empowerment and victory that the workers felt

The Frame Strike, 1980



VIOLENCE BROKE OUT WHEN POLICE CONFRONTED FRAME WORKERS ON 22 MAY 1980. POLICE TRIED TO DISPERSE WORKERS WITH TEARGAS. IT SPREAD QUICKLY TO THE NEARBY CLERMONT TOWNSHIP, WHICH RAPIDLY BECAME A WAR ZONE. *Natal Mercury*, South African Institute of Race Relations Records, AD1788/11B2



S. CELE (RIGHT), J. GWALA, M. NZAMA. ON 11 JULY 1980, SAMSON CELE WAS SHOT DEAD BY A MASKED GUNMAN AS HE WAITED AT A CLERMONT BUS RANK. HE HAD WORKED AT THE FRAMETEX MILL IN NEW GERMANY SINCE 1974. HE SERVED AS A SHOP STEWARD FOR FOUR YEARS AND WAS ONE OF THE THREE WORKER LEADERS ARRESTED AS THEY LEFT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE DURING THE FRAME STRIKE

The Daily News, July 1980, AH 2680/G36

The Frame strike was the first strike that centred around the demand for a living wage. It is notable for the extreme violence that it generated from the state.

Workers at the Frame Mills, centred in Durban and Pinetown, demanded wage increases in accordance with a living wage. Within five days, 6 000 workers were on strike. Frame fired them all. Amid growing violent confrontations with the police and Frame security guards, the workers stayed out for a week. Frame was forced to grant a 15% increase on top of the 10% pay rise it had already implemented. Some 117 workers were fired after the strike, most of them shop stewards.

Volkswagen Strike in Uitenhage, 1980

The Volkswagen factory, in Uitenhage, had been well-organised by UAW/NUMARWOSA in the late 1970s. Recognition had been achieved in 1977 and the Liaison Committee scrapped.

On the anniversary of the Soweto Uprising, June 16 1980, 4 000 black workers at Volkswagen went on strike after failing to reach an agreement with management on a living wage. The strike quickly expanded into a general strike of most of the workers in Uitenhage. The strike lasted for three weeks. From the outset, the union gained support from the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) and IG Metall – the German metal union. It was an IMF negotiator that finally brought the strike to an end, demonstrating the importance of international links.

The workers refused to give up until their demands were met. Ultimately, they returned to the Volkswagen factory with their jobs intact and their union strengthened. The strike established the union in the eyes of management and in the eyes of the workers themselves. For the first time, coloured and African workers joined together to challenge management and secure their demands. Ultimately, Volkswagen became the best organised factory in the union.



THE VOLKSWAGEN STRIKE IN UITENHAGE RAPIDLY TURNED INTO A GENERAL STRIKE. Taffy Adler Papers, AH2065/J147

The East Rand Strikes, 1981 – 1982

During 1981 and 1982, an unprecedented wave of strikes within the metal industry rocked the East Rand. Significantly, these strikes were spontaneous in nature, but MAWU stepped into the breach and considerable gains were made for workers and for the union.

Workers went on strike for varied reasons. Some demanded wage increases, but it was the unfairness of the apartheid workplace that bound workers in ongoing struggles with management. Arbitrary dismissals, unfair retrenchments and unjust treatment by white foremen were at the heart of these struggles.

In each instance the workers became more aware of the role of the trade unions, and the power of the strike. The strikes on the East Rand strengthened MAWU considerably.



A DUNLOP
STRIKE MEETING,
SEPTEMBER 1984
FOSATU Archives,
AH 2680/G22

The Rely Precision Strike

“Our struggle at Rely was important ... We showed how even a small group of workers can stand up against the bosses.”

Mandlenkosi Makhoba, a worker at Rely Precision, reflects on the impact of the Rely strike.

When a worker was unfairly dismissed at the Rely Precision factory in Boksburg, the workers went on strike. Management promptly fired them. MAWU encouraged the workers to develop a play about their experience, which they went on to perform all over the East Rand.

Union involvement was invaluable for the Rely workers, but it also demonstrated to other workers just how far the union was prepared to go to support its workers. MAWU sued the Minister of Police, gaining a monetary pay-out for its workers for police assault. It paid the fines of workers who were found guilty of striking illegally. MAWU demonstrated in a very real way that they were there for the workers!

MAWU had demonstrated its commitment to the workers' struggle and its numbers increased dramatically. However with mass membership came problems of organisation. MAWU did not have adequate organisational structures in place to cope with its support, and the union began to suffer setbacks with management. MAWU was forced to adapt. One of its strategies was to join the Industrial Council in 1983. MAWU had suffered defeat at the hands of Anglo-American who had insisted on dealing only with the Industrial Councils.

Another significant strike was at Hall Longmore, where workers demanded a wage increase. They went on strike and won! When news of this victory spread to other workers on



A PANEL FROM ARTIST LOU ALMON'S ARTWORK ENTITLED *MAWU EAST RAND STRUGGLES*. Image from *Red and Black: the Story of the South African Poster Movement* by Judy Seidman

the East Rand, this was, according to Moss Mayekiso, the ‘beginning of the wave of strikes that took place on the East Rand’.

Shop Steward Councils

The shop steward councils played a vital role in mobilising workers and coordinating strategies. They inspired a unity of action, and demonstrated the value of organisation.

THE STORY OF ONE TELLS THE STRUGGLE OF ALL

‘Benoni, Boksburg, Springs, Egoli,
we make you rich.
We hostel people make you rich.
You send us back home to die with empty
pockets,
empty dreams and dust in our lungs,
chopped-off hands and your machines grinding
in our brain.

Benoni, Boksburg, Springs, Egoli,
we workers make you rich.
Dayshift, nightshift, overalls and sweat
keep the foundries pumping steel,
casting steel and casting money.

Don’t worry brother,
don’t give up hope.
The sun shall rise for the workers.
Benoni, Boksburg, Springs, Egoli,
we shall make the people, all the people
rich.’

A POEM WRITTEN
BY A MIGRANT
WORKER DESCRIBING
THE HARSH LIFE OF
MIGRANT WORKERS
ON THE EAST RAND.

From *The Sun Shall Rise
for the Workers* by M.
Mandlenkosi

Shop Steward Council

It was during the battles on the East Rand that workers in FOSATU began to organise a new committee to increase their power – the shop stewards council.

Shop stewards from different factories on the East Rand came together to discuss common problems and ways of building their organisations. They also believed in playing an active role, not only in the workplace, but in areas where workers were affected in general. In 1982, the shop stewards council played a leadership role in protesting against the demolition of shacks by the East Rand Administration Board.

FOSATU’s constitution did not envisage shop steward councils. However, these councils spread to all areas where FOSATU had a presence. In 1982, FOSATU changed its constitution to allow for shop steward councils.

These councils played a crucial role in developing worker leadership in FOSATU. They became the foundations of the federation and often took the lead in fighting for workers’ rights, both inside and out of the factory.



Courtesy of Mr Andrew Zulu

Worker's story: Andrew Zulu – a worker leader

Andrew Zulu was one of a number of worker activists who came to prominence as a result of his work on the shop steward councils during the strikes on the East Rand.

Andrew was born in Nqutu in Zululand. His schooling came to an end when his father was unable to afford his school fees. Being a star soccer player, Zulu was recommended to a Johannesburg-based club, where he played for about 12 years. In 1974, he registered and began to work in factories around Germiston. In 1977, when Zulu heard via a friend about MAWU, he was immediately interested, joined the union, and began trying to recruit other workers. Zulu recalls initially feeling suspicious of white involvement in the unions, but realised through experience that 'in the real worker struggle there is no place for racism'. In his role as FOSATU's Vice President, Zulu fostered future worker leadership so that workers' children could benefit from the struggle.



MAKING CONNECTIONS STRIKE ACTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Traditionally, strikes are the sharpest weapon in the armoury of the working class. The withdrawal of labour can cause an absolute shut-down of any enterprise. In the 1980s, in the time of Reagan, the US President and Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, employers overseas hit back and developed a series of strategies to minimise both the possibility of strikes and the strength of the organised working class. South Africa has not been immune to these new tactics.

The strategies included:

- Shifting production elsewhere in the world where labour is cheaper (most notably, China)
- Outsourcing: the division of production into discrete units, with each unit being the responsibility of a small manufacturer, has fragmented what was previously the sites of large concentrations of labour.
- Casualisation: employers frequently refuse to award permanent status to continual employees. Under this system, workers remain casuals for the duration of their working life. In this way, employers avoid the costs of workmen's compensation, sick leave, annual leave, retrenchment, pension and other benefits that organised workers have fought for. A well-known example in South Africa is a chain of supermarkets, Woolworths.
- Contracting: this is similar to outsourcing, except the outsourced unit of production is carved out

of the existing force. An example is breweries and bottled mineral factories who sell delivery trucks to the drivers, sometimes at terms favourable to the drivers, and contract the drivers to deliver the firm's product. In this way, the driver becomes a small businessman who owns his own truck and employs his own delivery crew, none of which are unionised. At a stroke, employers reduce the amount of labour they directly employ and shift human resource responsibilities on to other people.

But perhaps the strongest weapon employers have used against strikes in a country like South Africa is an ideological one, where production for export or domestic consumption is regarded as a national goal. Strikes are equated in the newspapers and in popular belief to national treachery or betrayal. An example of this was in 2010 where a threatened strike by power workers was branded treasonous because it threatened the power supply to the World Cup soccer matches.

IN THE 21ST CENTURY, ARE STRIKES STILL THE MAJOR WEAPONS OF ORGANISED LABOUR?

IS IT POSSIBLE TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO COMBAT THESE INITIATIVES BY EMPLOYERS? (FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS NEITHER IMPOSSIBLE NOR ILLEGAL TO ORGANISE CASUAL LABOUR, BUT IT IS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT THAN ORGANISING REGISTERED WORKERS.) THE QUESTION IS, CAN A MODERN TRADE UNION AFFORD TO TURN ITS BACK ON CASUAL WORKERS?

REPRESSION

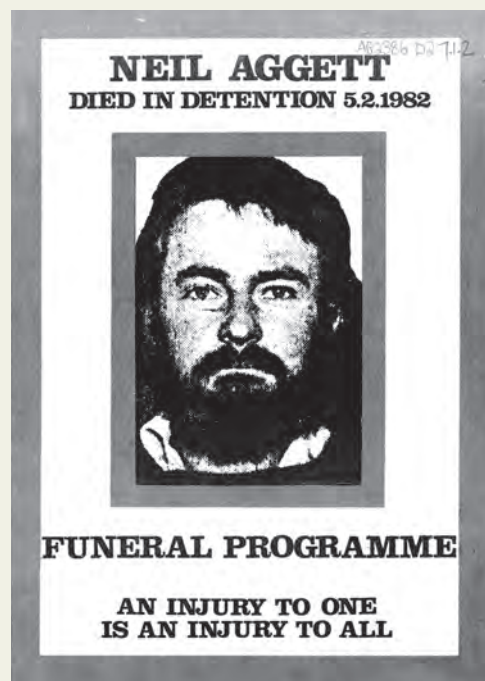
In the 1980s, the trade union movement felt the full force of state repression as trade union organisers and leaders were banned, detained and some even killed.

'Those who were seen to be active both at a political level and a union level were the first targets.'

Vusi Mavuso, a trade union organiser at the time

'The white policeman held my hands behind my back while the other walked on my ankles. It was very painful ... He then put his hand against my forehead and banged the back of my head hard against the wall twice. He said "Sit daar jou striker".'

James Tamboer, a shop steward at General Motors, speaks of his interrogation.



Wits Students' Resource Centre Records, AG2386

The death of Neil Aggett

Neil Aggett was a trade union activist working for the independent Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU). He trained as a doctor but soon moved into trade union work on a full-time basis. He was appointed as the organiser of FCWU's Transvaal branch and helped organise a successful strike against Fatti's and Moni's. In 1981 he was detained by the security police in a swoop against largely white union and student activists. On 5 February 1982, after 70 days in detention, Neil Aggett was found dead, hanging in his cell. He was the 51st person to die in detention.

According to the security police, Aggett committed suicide. However, fellow detainees testified to Aggett being tortured in prison. In a statement released by the Food and Canning Workers Union, the union stated, "As far as we are concerned there are no 'suicides' in detention, only victims."

About 15 000 people attended Neil Aggett's funeral. The FCWU called for a stayaway on that day, to which there was a widespread response from unions.



THE FUNERAL OF ANDRIES RADITSELA ON 14 MAY 1985. Photo by I Bissell, FOSATU Archives, AH 268o/C28

The death of Andries Raditsela

More than 30 000 mourners bade farewell to Andries Raditsela who died of head injuries on May 6 1985 shortly after being released from police detention. Raditsela , aged 29, was an active worker leader. He was a senior shop steward at Dunlop in Benoni and sat on both the Transvaal Branch Executive Committee and the National Committee of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union. He was also active in FOSATU where he served as vice-chairman of the Transvaal region. Raditsela was committed to bringing about wider unity among the working class.

Andries Raditsela was taken into police custody allegedly for stealing a car which the union had hired for his use. However, later the police insisted that Raditsela had been detained under Section 50 of the Internal Security Act. Shortly before he died, the police withdrew the detention order.

Over 100 000 workers in factories around the country downed tools and held memorial services for Andries Raditsela. This demonstration of worker solidarity served to cement trade union unity immediately prior to COSATU's formation.



ARMED POLICE PREVENT WORKERS LEAVING THE JOHANNESBURG MAY DAY MEETING IN 1985. Photo by Paul Weinberg, Africa Media Online, APNz7861

The State of Emergency

In the 1980s, the state was placed under increasing pressure from resistance movements. It responded with even harsher methods of repression. In 1985, a limited State of Emergency was declared in identified 'trouble spots', followed by a national State of Emergency from 1986 onwards. More activists were detained, and the power of the security forces was boosted.

On 21 March 1985, on the anniversary of Sharpeville, security forces attacked a crowd in the Langa township in Uitenhage, killing 21 people. The police used intimidation tactics to threaten unionists. However, these kind of tactics just made unionists and workers more determined to resist.



FOSATU Archives, AH2680/B102

Worker's story: Chris Dlamini – a worker leader

Chris Dlamini was born in 1944 in Benoni. He grew up under harsh and unforgiving circumstances. For most of his childhood, he lived with his mother in a shack in someone's backyard. Chris thus grew up with a sense of apartheid's injustices. But it was not until he was inspired by visits by Mandela and Sisulu to his township Daveyton, that he began to synthesise his own experiences into a wider political context.

During his school years Chris strengthened his interest in the politics of the time through the intervention of a teacher who spent many hours talking to him about the

struggle. He remembers feeling involved in these wider struggles, "I thought that I'm an activist of Umkhonto We Sizwe when I had no connection but this is what was in my mind..."

At the time of the 1973 strikes, Chris was working at an engineering company and he joined the Engineering and Allied Workers Union. This was the start of his work in trade unions. In 1976 he began working for Kelloggs in Springs. He volunteered to organize the workers and as a senior shop steward, Chris was instrumental in campaigning for equal work for equal pay and for maternity rights for women. His hard work and dedication to workers' control led to his appointment as President of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU) in 1978. The union workers and their victories at Kelloggs made such an impact that many white artisans at the factory also joined SFAWU— a step that made FOSATU the largest non-racial union federation and contributed to the breaking down of apartheid's racial barriers. Through his tremendous victories Chris Dlamini earned his qualification to be the President of FOSATU from 1982 to 1985. He epitomised the qualities of a true worker leader.

MOVE TOWARDS community action

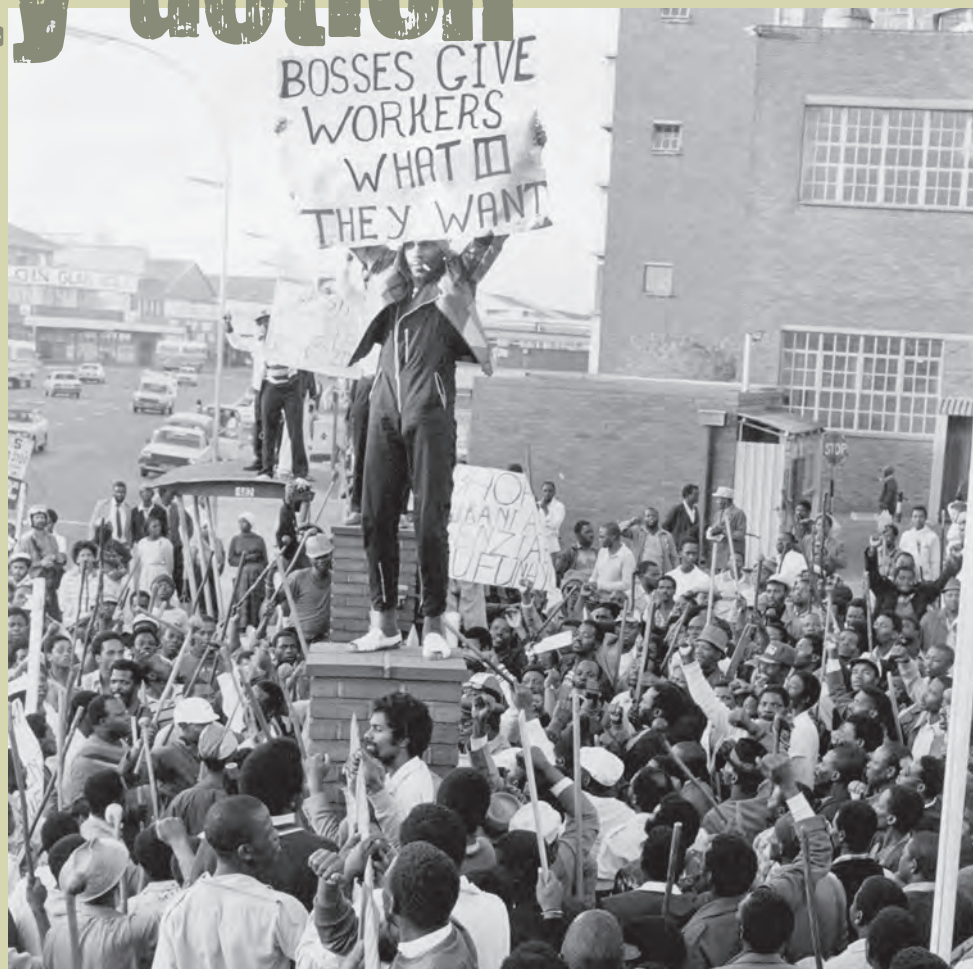
“MAWU is not just a union anymore. It is a movement of workers fighting for liberation.”

In 1982 Moses Mayekiso, a MAWU organiser, registered the union's shift to political involvement

By the 1980s FOSATU had strengthened its organisational structures and had grown in confidence. However, the federation found that it was forced to look beyond the factory. Drawn into community involvement by a radicalised and politicised workforce, it realised it should no longer abstain from the political terrain.

The formation of the United Democratic Front and the National Forum in 1983 reflected the resurgence of black politics. The focus was on community struggles, and civics strove to address the needs of their constituents.

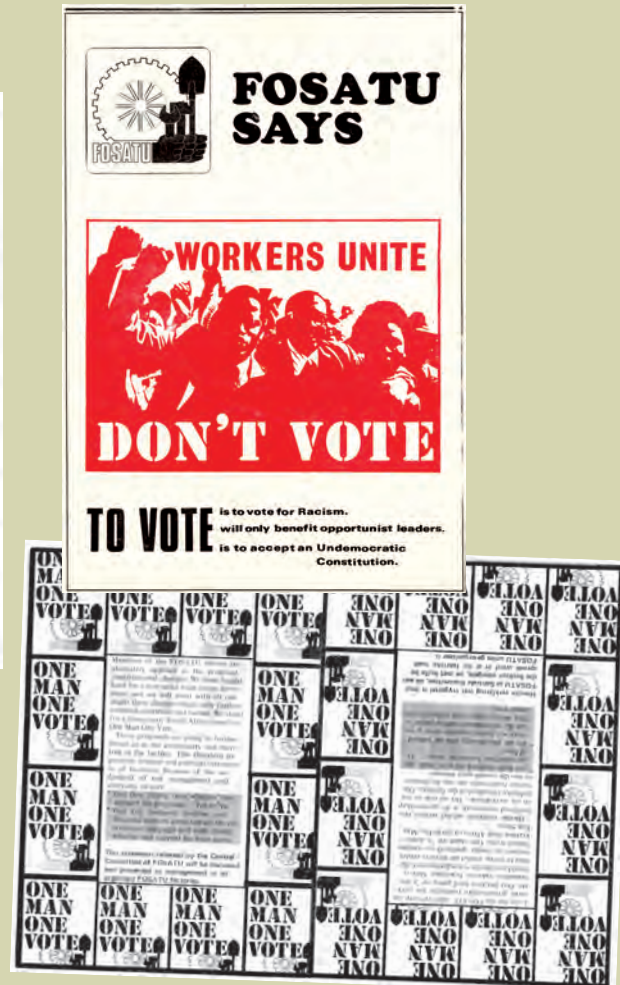
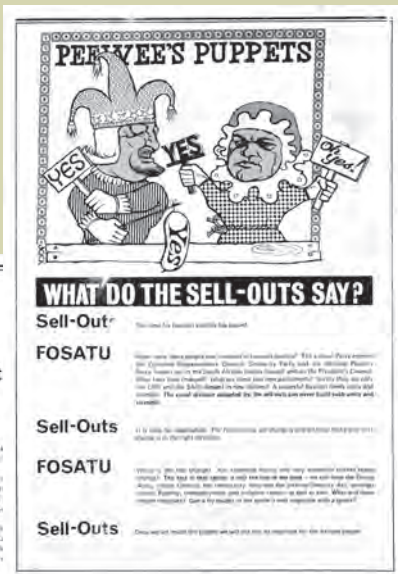
At its 1982 conference, Joe Foster presented a new strategy for FOSATU. FOSATU would engage in community campaigns but on its own terms – they needed to be controlled by the workers, and they needed to have a mandate from FOSATU.



THE BAKERS' WORKERS STRIKE, JULY 1985. FOUR DIFFERENT UNIONS WERE INVOLVED IN THE DURBAN/TONGAAT BAKERIES' STRIKE, SFAWU FROM FOSATU, THE CUSA UNION, FOOD AND BEVERAGES WORKERS UNION, THE BLACK ALLIED WORKERS UNION AND THE NATAL BAKING INDUSTRY'S EMPLOYEES UNION. FOSATU BELIEVED THAT IT WAS CRUCIAL THAT THE UNIONS PRESENTED A UNITED FRONT AGAINST EMPLOYERS. HOWEVER, THE OTHER THREE UNIONS SIGNED SEPARATE AGREEMENTS WITH THE EMPLOYERS. THIS CLEARLY LED TO A DIVISION OF THE WORKERS. SUCH ACTION ALSO STRENGTHENED FOSATU'S BELIEF THAT THERE WAS A STRONG NEED FOR UNITY. FOSATU Archives, AH2680/G50



FOSATU DISTRIBUTED OVER 80 000 PAMPHLETS COUNTRYWIDE EXPLAINING ITS POSITION. IT TOOK THE CAMPAIGN RIGHT INTO PEOPLE'S HOMES, WORKING TIRELESSLY TO BRING ACROSS ITS MESSAGE. FOSATU Archives, Pamphlets



The Tricameral Parliament

FOSATU rejected PW Botha's new constitutional proposals for a Tricameral Parliament. FOSATU launched its own 'No Vote' campaign with the UDF.

'We campaigned house-to-house. We covered 40 000 households in that campaign. Every afternoon from 5 o'clock after work we started campaigning until about 9 o'clock at night, Monday to Thursday, Saturday afternoons, Sunday afternoons.'

Les Kettledas of the Eastern Cape recalls the energy and hard work of the 'No Vote' campaign

The 1984 stayaway

In November 1984, the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) called for a two-day stayaway. COSAS was demanding major reforms to the Bantu education system, as well as the election of democratic student representative councils and the removal of the army and police from the townships. FOSATU supported the call.

The 1984 stayaway represented a shift in FOSATU's strategies as it participated for the first time in a region-wide alliance with community organisations.

At least 800 000 workers stayed home on both days, and the Vaal and the East Rand witnessed an 80 per cent observance. In unionised plants 90 per cent of workers stayed away. Township and hostel workers participated.

It was the most significant general strike that demonstrated the power of workers and youth unity, and inaugurated the insurrection that followed.

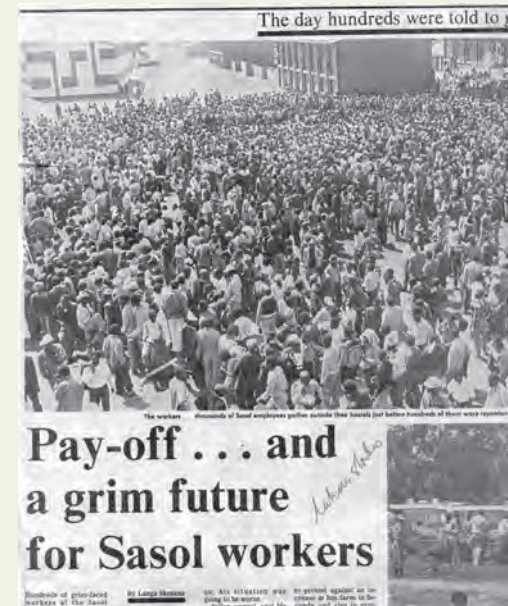
SASOL

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union asked that SASOL be exempt from the stayaway and FOSATU agreed. However, SASOL workers were keen to participate. As a result of their involvement, SASOL dismissed 6 000 workers. Workers decided not to leave their accommodation and the army and police intervened by charging the workers' hostel block in armoured vehicles. The workers gave in. SASOL hired buses to take the workers back to their homelands. Many were forced onto the buses at gunpoint.

'... a lot of people were really affected by their dismissal – the way the dismissal was issued and effected. People were really, in my view, treated like – nothing. I don't think that people even treat animals like that.'

Brian Moholo, a shop steward at Sasol

CWIU launched a massive campaign to try to get the SASOL workers reinstated. It was a long hard struggle, but finally SASOL agreed to the reinstatement of 70% of the workforce, and it recognised the CWIU.



A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE DETAILING THE HARSH FATE OF THE SASOL WORKERS AS A RESULT OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE 1984 STAYAWAY

MOVES TOWARDS unity

'An injury to one is an injury to all!'

From its inception, FOSATU had committed itself to broader unity in the labour movement. Since 1981, the emerging unions had been involved in unity talks, but it would take a further four years before this ideal was achieved.

'To emerging unions, unity was often like motherhood; they agreed it was a good idea, but feared it would cost them their independence.'

Steven Friedman

What were the barriers to unity?

- A level of suspicion and hostility towards the role played by white officials in FOSATU. The Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), which adopted a Black Consciousness philosophy, was particularly hostile.
- FOSATU was not willing to bring into a proposed new federation unions that would not adopt its democratic and administrative style, with its focus on shop floor organisation.
- A number of personality clashes within unions had led to tensions.

The Neil Aggett work stoppage

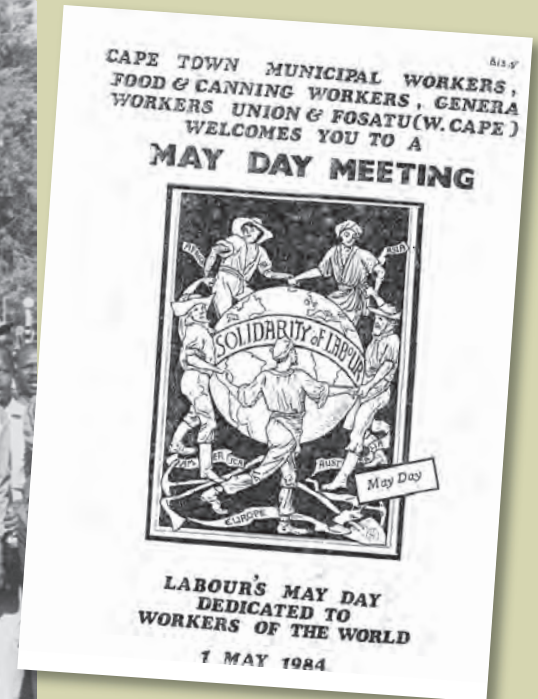
The death of Neil Aggett proved to be a turning point in the quest for unity. Two days after Aggett's death, the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU) announced that their members would embark on a 30-minute work stoppage on 11 February to mourn Neil's death. The FOSATU unions and other independent unions all backed this call and joint work stoppages and demonstrations took place countrywide.

FOSATU's commitment to worker unity, and its ability to efficiently mobilise its unions to participate in this event, helped reshape perceptions of the federation. The general and more political unions viewed FOSATU with less suspicion, and the event sent a clear message of the need for worker unity.

MAY DAY



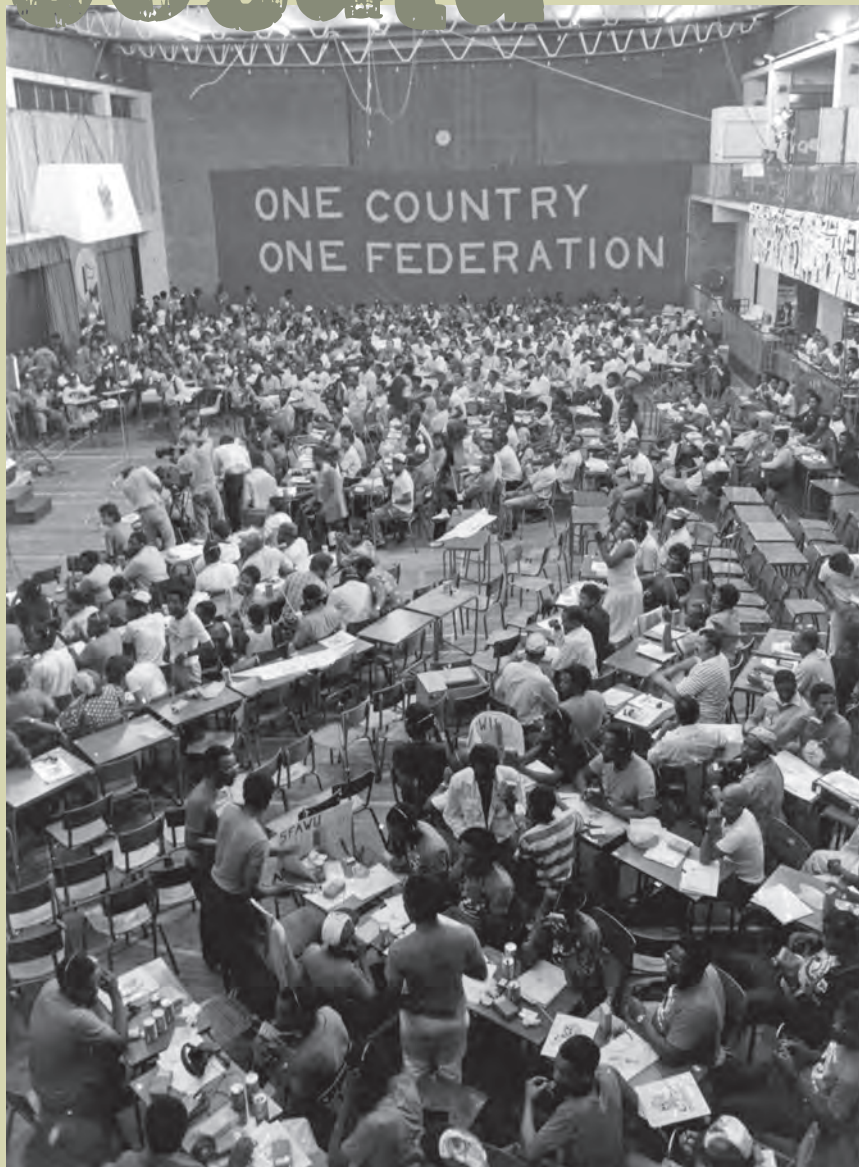
MAY DAY RALLY IN PIETERMARITZBURG, 1985. FOSATU Archives, AH 2680/C4



In 1984 FOSATU worked closely with other unions to organise May Day rallies. There was a concerted drive among independent unions to get May Day recognised as a national holiday.

Shop stewards throughout the country discussed and held joint May Day rallies, resulting in large gatherings. In Cape Town more than 3 000 workers crammed into one hall to call for May Day to be recognised as a national holiday. In Natal thousands of workers wore May Day stickers and handed out pamphlets educating workers on this international holiday. Some employers responded to these vociferous calls and many companies negotiated these holidays in private recognition agreements with the unions.

THE LAUNCH OF COSATU



The Congress of South African Unions (COSATU) was launched at the University of Natal in November 1985. It brought together 760 delegates from 33 unions representing over 460 000 workers. Cyril Ramaphosa, the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), opened the congress. He reiterated the power and strength of this new federation.

**“A giant has risen
and will confront
all that stand in
its way.”**

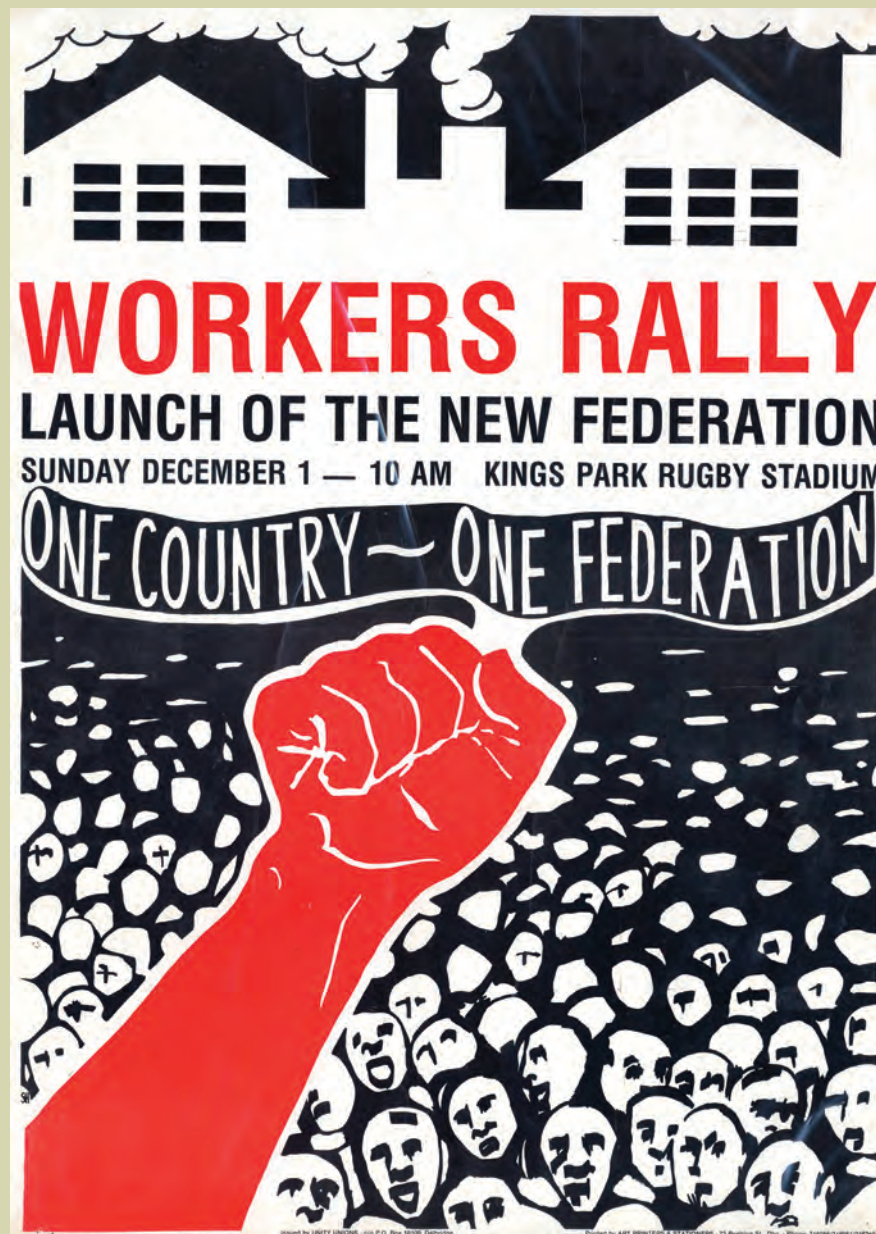
There was no question that COSATU embraced the principles of FOSATU.

UNION MEMBERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY GATHER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NATAL, DURBAN FOR THE INAUGURAL CONGRESS OF COSATU, DECEMBER 1985.

Photo by I Bissell, Congress of South African Trade Unions Records, AH2373/28.1

“COSATU is first and foremost a trade union federation... Its roots are on the factory floor. Its starting point is its organisational strength at the point of production... Our political and economic strength lies in building powerful, militant, democratic organisation in the workplace. This strength will guarantee that workers’ aspirations will not be suppressed. Such organisation is also the basis for the real democratisation of production.”

Jay Naidoo, the General Secretary of COSATU



NUMSA Records, AH2555/F1

MAKING CONNECTIONS

THE FUTURE

For 25 years COSATU has been the largest and most effective trade union federation on the African continent. COSATU remains an important, arguably *the* critical, voice on a range of social issues, such as HIV/AIDS, corruption in the state, job creation, social welfare, the energy crisis, xenophobia and many others. COSATU remains a pillar of democratic South Africa. Its future seems assured: but is it?

One of the trends noticeable amongst trade unions over the last 10 years is the decreasing militancy and strikes amongst private sector industrial workers. In addition, the number of organised workers in these sectors have barely grown. The sections of the trade union movement that have seen both growth and increasingly militancy are the public sector unions. This is analogous to industrial strikes of the FOSATU era where the cost of increased wages was passed onto the consumer. In public sector strikes undertaken against a government that is nominally in alliance with the trade union federation, the effects of public sector strikes are passed onto citizens, either in the form of reduced services or increased taxes. This too has an ideological component. A strike against a multinational corporation's South African branch has in workers' minds a clear class enemy. A strike against a government public service that provides services to workers and their families and whose employer is supposedly in alliance with the working class has no such clear enemy. It is possibly in this context that

prolonged public sector strikes have repeatedly slid into anarchy and mindless violence. For example, during the hospital strikes of the late 1990s, a number of workers, confused about which side they were on, were murdered for not striking.

IS THIS TREND GOING TO BE MAINTAINED IN SOUTH AFRICA? WILL INDUSTRIAL STRIKES BECOME INCREASINGLY RARE AND PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKES INCREASINGLY COMMON?

IS THERE ANY TACTIC THAT CAN BE EMBRACED TO RETURN INDUSTRIAL WORKERS TO THE MILITANCY OF THE PAST?

DOES THE PRESENCE OF TRADE UNION-INSPIRED INVESTMENT COMPANIES, SOME OF WHICH INEVITABLY INVEST IN COMPANIES OR INDUSTRIES ALREADY ORGANISED BY A MEMBER OF THE FEDERATION, REPRESENT A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS?

DO THE LARGE SALARIES AND SHARE OPTIONS OF FORMER LEADERS, NOW PROMINENT IN THE INVESTMENT COMPANIES, REPRESENT A SOURCE OF RESENTMENT FOR THE RANK AND FILE OF THE UNIONS?

CAN FORMER LEADERS, NOW OFFICERS OF THE INVESTMENT COMPANIES, REMAIN FREE OF THE CORRUPTION FREQUENTLY ASSOCIATED WITH VENTURE CAPITAL?

FOSATU – A UNION LIKE NO OTHER

In its six short years of existence, FOSATU played a fundamental role in shaping the traditions and principles of trade unionism in South Africa. It heralded a new form of unionism in which the power lay firmly in the hands of the workers. In its struggle for democratic unionism, FOSATU focused centrally on the shop floor, and on the shop steward. Today, the shop steward is an unquestioned participant in the negotiation process between workers and bosses.

On a practical level, FOSATU raised the living standards of thousands of workers above levels of abject poverty. It enshrined the principles of negotiated wages and service conditions. It can also be argued that the principles of worker democracy laid the foundations for the dynamic democracy that South Africa now enjoys.

Working in a time of extreme political upheaval, FOSATU examined the role of politics in trade unionism, and adopted a policy that allowed the federation to embrace a political role while at the same time asserting its independence and maintaining the worker at the forefront of the struggle.

Today, the political landscape has shifted considerably, as has the nature of trade unionism. Any analysis of the future of trade unionism should engage with the history of FOSATU and the direction and principles that it adopted. It holds valuable lessons for the independence and integrity of trade unions.



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