

RAILWAY WORKERS ON THE TRACK

COSATU is the biggest federation of labour in South Africa, and has united half a million workers across a broad spectrum of political views. It has had an enormous task in creating national industrial unions – having to triumph over past hostilities, differences and rivalry.

The struggle for working class unity can only be enhanced if democratic debate is encouraged. It is important that unions inside federations and other independent unions work hard towards the realisation of operating under a single worker-controlled federation. A divided trade union movement can only serve to benefit the bosses and their political and economic system of oppression and exploitation, and in so doing, delay our struggle for total liberation.

Bearing the above in mind, we print a statement by the then National Interim Committee of Railway Workers (N.I.C.R.W.) and encourage a response from either the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (S.A.R.H.W.U. – a COSATU affiliate), or the African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (A.R.H.W.U. – an independent trade union).



NATIONAL UNION OF RAILWAY WORKERS



Railway workers have long been severely oppressed and exploited. The different staff organisations are dummy institutions and are in the effective control of the state. They are of no assistance to oppressed workers.

Working on May Day and June 16th for example, many of us will not forget in a hurry. We were treated like social outcasts by the communities we live in. Various trade unions intervened, but they exploited the situation and made false promises.

With not a single union representing our demands and grievances, we decided to take matters into our own hands. We established steering committees in various regions throughout the country and have now reached a point whereby we can launch a National Union of Railway Workers on the 29-30th November 1986 in Johannesburg.

The decision to launch this independent union was made neither easily nor thoughtlessly. We had, for example, decided to approach COSATU for moral and financial assistance, since we are supportive of the aim to organise and unite as many workers as possible into one union per industry. A problem arose, however, in that SARHWU had been admitted by the Credentials Committee of COSATU as the authentic repre-

sentative of railway workers. We reject this claim of authenticity, since this union was not formed in consultation with workers, and their constitution was not drafted by workers. Until recently (the situation has since changed), the executive committee of SARHWU consisted of people who had never even worked for the railways, and who knew nothing about our grievances and problems which face us in the work-place.

It is our duty as serious, committed fighters in the liberation struggle to smother and destroy any undemocratic practice that rears its head. We urge the COSATU Central Executive Committee to look into this very grave matter, and recommit ourselves to fight for united, truly democratic, worker-controlled trade unions.

Amandla!