

METAL UNIONS MERGE

On 22-24 May 1987, a new metal and automotive workers union with a membership of 130 000 was launched. The new union is called NUMSA - the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, and represents approximately 30% of workers in the relevant industry.

The merger took place between the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU), the Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union (MACWUSA), the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union (MICWU), the United Mining Metal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (UMMAWOSA), and some members of the Transport and General Workers Union and the General

and Allied Workers Union (TGWU and GAWU). The South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) failed to respond to requests and invitations by the feasibility committee to be part of arrangements for the launch, and to submit their relevant audited membership figures. They were thus excluded from the merger.

political policy

An important debate as regards the political policy of the new union was the question of the adoption of the Freedom Charter. The question of the Freedom Charter dominated the congress and the debate raged for hours. Three resolutions put forward by

delegates are set out below.

procedural problems

The order in which the resolutions were tabled put the GAWU resolution first, the NAAWU resolution second, and MAWU's resolution last. The motivators for the GAWU resolution wanted their resolution to be voted on immediately. Other participants objected: they felt that all the resolutions should be motivated and then voted upon. It would also mean that if the GAWU resolution were adopted, the other resolutions would fall away without being discussed.

After a heated debate, the proposers of the GAWU resolution felt that their resolution was incorporated in the NAAWU one, and that they would drop their resolution in favour of the NAAWU resolution. They then demanded that the NAAWU resolution be put to the vote. Participants once again objected for the same reasons.

Another heated debate raged around the issue, and a proposal was then put forward that both the NAAWU and MAWU resolutions be adopted. This proposal was overwhelmingly accepted.

Below is a summary of the arguments around the issue.

for

It was put forward that the Freedom Charter was a document of great historical importance, and that it was imperative for the organised working class to form an alliance with youth and community organisations. Working class attitude to the Freedom Charter had to be taken from the attitude of these allies to the Freedom Charter.

It was also put forward that one should be careful not to alienate these allies by adopting a different political programme.

"Friendly warnings" were issued to anyone who did not take into account the consequences of possibly alienating one's allies.

TOWARD 1 UNION 1 INDUSTRY

NUMSA



against

Some delegates felt that the Freedom Charter should not be adopted without it being fully discussed on the factory floor, and a mandate obtained from workers there.

Another viewpoint put forward was that delegates had to look at the tasks ahead of them as socialists. While one saw the necessity to form alliances with community-based organisations, this had to be seen in the context of the international and historical experience of the working class. As socialists, it is important to build politically independent working class organisation. Only when the working class takes the lead and organises independently, can true democracy for all the people in S.A. be guaranteed.

In accordance with COSATU's principle of the independence and leadership role of the working class, it is important that when the organised working class enters into an alliance, it does so on its own political programme. The working class is not forced to adapt themselves to the programmes of their allies. Dismay was expressed at the 'friendly warnings' that were

issued in this regard.

analysis

From the above, we can clearly see there was not a simplistic acceptance of the Freedom Charter as has been portrayed in the commercial press. Some socialists in NUMSA see the adoption of both the NAAWU and MAWU resolutions as having laid the basis for the development of a socialist political programme which will go beyond the limited demands of the Freedom Charter.

There are others who see the Freedom Charter as a symbol, but it must be remembered that the Freedom Charter is regarded by its supporters as a political programme. It commits its followers

to a National Democratic struggle. This in itself is not in the long-term interests of the working class. In order to establish the leadership of the working class, make correct alliances and build true socialism and democracy, the working class has to have its own clear political programme.

The Freedom Charter as it stands, can be accommodated by capitalism. Attempts at making the Freedom Charter acceptable, as the NAAWU resolution does by distinguishing between the National Democratic struggle against apartheid and the socialist struggle against capitalism, is both misleading and incorrect. A dangerous trend is also the attempt to stifle debate around the clauses of the Freedom Charter.

A further problem besetting the unity of workers in unions, is that all workers do not support the Freedom Charter. Some workers support the Azanian Manifesto, while others have problems with both documents. The debates around the Freedom Charter are far from over. The urgent task for all of us to build unions like NUMSA, and to fight for working class control based on a clear socialist political programme.

GAWU RESOLUTION

This congress resolves to adopt the Freedom Charter.

MAWU RESOLUTION

Noting that:

- we are committed to building socialism
- we are committed to the leadership of the organised working class in the struggle
- the political policy resolution of COSATU calls for full discussion of all levels of the needs of the workers in the struggle
- worker leaders are increasingly playing a leading role in the community. The lack of initiatives and the confusion that exist within the community itself as political issues arise from the lack of a working class programme
- the Freedom Charter is also a good foundation stone on which to build our working class programme

Therefore resolves that:

- the organised working class can only take the lead in the struggle if it has a clear programme and aims, which clearly indicate what it wants for the working class and what it needs by their demands
- the organised working class can only make correct alliances and build these alliances if it has a clear programme and aims
- the working class and its allies can only build true socialism and democracy if it has clear aims and a clear programme of how to build them
- it should be a priority of the new union and other organisations of the working class to build a clear political programme
- the new union will discuss the aims and programme of the working class at all levels: factory meetings, shop steward meetings, RWAs, CCs, and the National Congress
- the new union will participate fully in all COSATU discussions on the political programme of the workers
- the organised workers should work with their allies, especially the organised youth, in order to build a programme which can bring together as many groups in society as possible

NAAWU RESOLUTION

Noting:

- that the vast majority of the working masses of our country recognise the Freedom Charter as containing the minimum demands for a free and democratic South Africa
- that the Freedom Charter enjoys mass support amongst organised metropolitan workers
- that the Freedom Charter has majority support amongst the national and most reliable, areas of the working class - the workers, the unemployed, the youth and the students

Believing:

- that only the working class masses, under the leadership of organised industrial workers, can truly liberate our country from the chains of capitalist exploitation and apartheid oppression
- that organised workers and their allies have a common interest in the creation of a worker-controlled, socialist society where there will be no exploitation, oppression or discrimination of any form
- that the national democratic struggle against capitalist oppression and the socialist struggle against capitalist exploitation are complementary parts of the uninterrupted struggle of organised workers for control over the industry and government of a liberated South Africa
- that only under the leadership and control of organised workers over the mass democratic struggle of today, and the government of tomorrow, will the demands of the Freedom Charter be fully and completely met in the best interests of the working masses of our country

We therefore resolve:

- to adopt the Freedom Charter as containing the minimum political demands that reflect the immediate needs of the metal workers' union of a free and democratic, non-Apartheid South Africa
- to develop amongst metalworkers in particular, and the organised working class and its allies in general, a correct understanding that the demands of the Freedom Charter, and all other demands of organised workers, can only be met on the basis of the working class masses through the practical leadership of the industrial working class in the struggle for the liberation of a socialist society where workers control of government and industry will be enforced in the practice of a liberated South Africa
- to struggle to uphold and advance the leadership of the working class in all spheres of society

The Freedom Charter

We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

- The people shall govern!
- All national groups shall have equal rights!
- The people shall share in the country's wealth!
- The land shall be shared among those who work it!
- All shall be equal before the law!
- All shall enjoy equal human rights!
- There shall be work and security!
- The doors of learning and culture shall be opened!
- There shall be housing, security and comfort!
- There shall be peace and friendship!