

# WE MUST UNITE TO WIN OUR DEMANDS!

<p><b>Bosses are on the attack!</b> They do not like the workers' organisations which have been growing. And recession has meant bad business and less profits.</p> 	<p>This means that the workers and Unions are having serious problems. Thousands of workers have been retrenched....</p> 	<p>Workers are divided by Pass laws. The P.C. proposals + Bills will mean more divisions..</p> 	
<p>Workers involved in Unions or in struggles against low wages etc., are being victimised.</p> 	<p>Unionists are being treppressed more harshly by the state</p> 	<p>The bosses and the state are uniting against democratic unions....</p> 	<p>Only a united trade union movement can fight the attack on workers' rights!</p> 

## 'Better understanding between unions' - talks

A summit meeting between independent trade unions held in Cape Town recently, could pave the way towards a united trade union movement.

This has been the fourth conference to discuss unity in the last two years. The talks which were held in Port Elizabeth in July last year, ended in a deadlock. "There was no basis for unity at this stage", said trade unionists after the meeting.

One block of unions argued that they could not participate in a federation with unions that were either registered or sat on industrial councils. A united trade union movement seemed a step or two out of reach.

### Conference

The Cape Town conference held on 9th and 10th April was initiated by the General Workers Union. Fourteen unions around the country were contacted to re-open the unity talks. All fourteen unions attended the recent conference.

Over the past few months before this conference, some unions continued with the efforts to bring about unity. In Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, the Food and Canning Workers Union, acting on a resolution from its annual conference, called meetings between community organisa-

tions and unions. The aim was to inform the community of the efforts at unity.

In all centres, the position was clear. The community organisations endorsed efforts at unity and called for a united labour movement of all independent democratic trade unions.

The Fosatu position was put forward in its newsletter recently. In spite of the deadlock, "all has not been in vain. Since the talks (Port Elizabeth meeting) there has been a great deal of rank and file-discussion on the question of unity in many unions. And a better understanding has grown between the unions".

Before the conference, the Orange Vaal General Workers Union (OVGWU) circulated proposals for building the unity of the trade union movement. "A year and a half has passed since our trade unions first began an organised drive for unity."

"Today, with another summit approaching and the working class needing unity in action more urgently than ever, our trade unions are dangerously divided. The coming summit is an opportunity to put right this wrong".

OVGWU stated its position on the controversial issues of registration and industrial councils. "We do not make our position on these questions a precondition for unity with other trade unions". They called for unity around common problems and needs of workers despite differences which might exist.

The position of OVGWU is that solidarity committees be formed to lay the basis for a federation in the future. And, that unity be built from the bottom upwards around common problems facing workers.

### Problems

The major problems facing the labour movement at this point are:

- low wages and rising prices
- retrenchments and unemployment
- victimisation of workers
- attacks by the government and
- action against the constitutional proposals and influx control which are attempts to divide the working class.

Many unions agree that these are the most urgent problems facing workers.

At the conference there were two positions. One was that solidarity committees be formed as a way of uniting workers and laying a basis for a federation at this point.

"We need an organisational structure which will allow us to take effective common action at all levels - local, regional and national." This is the Fosatu position which appeared in its newsletter.

A feasibility committee was formed to look into the formation of such a federation. All the unions are at present not serving on the feasibility committee, but would go back to their organisations to discuss the question.

The unions which attended the conference are all representatives of the independent, democratic trade unions in the country.

Co-ordinating Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA); South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU); Fed-

eration of South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU); Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU); Food and Canning Workers Union (F & CWU) and the African Food & Canning Workers Union; Orange Vaal General Workers Union (OVGWU); Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA); General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU); Municipal and General Workers Union (MGWU); Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA); Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union of South Africa (MACUSA); General Workers Union of South Africa (GUSA); Engineering and Allied Workers Union (EAWU); and General Workers Union (GWU).

## Detentions make us more determined - workers

ABOUT 200 workers at the Eastern Cape Agricultural Co-op Creamery in Queenstown went on strike on March 9 and demanded

that management recognise their union as representative of the workers and improve working conditions.

Most of the workers belong to the African Food and Canning Workers' Union (Queenstown Branch), but even those who do

not belong to the union have gone on strike. At the moment, some departments at the factory have been brought to a complete halt, while others are kept going by scab labourers.

The workers have called on several organisations for support, including the National Council of Women, Zenzele, YWCA and the Rugby Union.

The workers joined the union in July last year. In November they

## 'We are ready to go in' - FCWU

OUR union welcomes the first concrete steps towards the formation of a new federation, and will be taking part in the committee set up to plan the structure of a federation.

We have been striving for the unification of trade unions since 1981, and believe that the formation of a new federation is now long overdue.

It is our belief that:

1. A national federation of trade unions is best able to support us if employers who are organised nationally, refuse to recognise unions or refuse to negotiate with the workers.
2. Only a national federation can stand up to the government, when laws affecting the entire working class, such as the Orderly Settlement of Black Person's Bill or the new constitution, are introduced.
3. Only if trade unions are committed to one another in a federation can we hope to solve disagreements between unions.

There are disagreements as to which unions organise in which factories. This means that we can often not help unorganised workers who need a union.

It is not likely that all the trade unions will ever be able to agree to form a federation at any one time. This is so because of their different policies and because unions are at different levels of development.

Some unions are only organised in one area, and some are organised nationally. Others have already formed federations.

We believe that a start must be made with those unions that are ready to form a federation.

The door will always be open to unions which are not ready now to join later.

sent a letter to management asking for recognition of their union. The bosses said they would reply to the East London branch secretary of the union by January. They did not do this. In February the workers again sent a reminder, but this was also ignored.

On March 9, the workers decided they could wait no longer and decided to strike. Management said they

wanted to meet with a liaison committee but the workers said this would be puppet representation.

On March 12, the chairperson of the workers' committee, Thandi Madikana was detained and charged with intimidation. The case was postponed.

The workers said the detention had made them more determined to strike until their demands were met.