

and build a united trade union movement.

We urge all other unions, at a national, regional and local level, to put our proposals — or let us put our proposals — for unity to mass meetings of the organised workers and let the workers themselves, in a spirit of genuine worker democracy and control, decide on our and any other proposals for the way forward for trade union unity.

And let the coming summit be a place where the issues around, and the method with which, we build our united trade union movement be discussed and prepared. Then, through workers action and ongoing discussion and co-ordination, the path can be solidly laid for a united and triumphant trade union movement.

The OVGWU proposes:

Solidarity Action Committees in every locality as the united fighting base of the trade union movement.

United action against high prices and low wages  
retrenchments and unemployment  
victimisations and state repression  
influx control and the new constitutional  
proposals

(February 1983)

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## **DEMOCRACY IN TRADE UNION WORK**

**An internal circular of the Food and Canning and African Food and Canning Workers' Union, early 1983.**

A trade union is, by its character and origin, a mass democratic organisation. It is precisely here that the word democracy must fully correspond to the character of the organisation. A trade union would not be able to carry out its tasks successfully if it were not a mass organisation and if this organisation were not democratic.

The trade unions are great schools for the working class. They awaken the class consciousness of the workers, they help them to acquire their first experience of organised struggle, in defence of their interests, and they prepare the leading cadres of the working class. A well-organised mass trade union represents a tremendous force with which employers and capitalist governments must reckon.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the enemies of the working class

strive by every means to prevent trade union organisations being set up. In those countries where the workers, after a long and difficult struggle, have successfully set up trade unions, their enemies employ every means to injure and weaken the unions, to change their character and aims, to transform the trade union movement set up to protect the workers' interests into bodies serving employers and reactionary governments. All kinds of politicians worm themselves into trade union organisations, seeking to use them to further their careers.

The surest and most effective way of combating such degeneration of the trade union is to support and develop real trade union democracy. It can even be said that wherever the principles of democracy are observed and applied in the activity of the trade unions, the organisation is solid and in a position to protect the workers' interests.

A trade union is not a temporary but a permanent organisation, called upon to protect the workers' interests, to organise, to unite, to clarify, and to assist the workers in their daily struggle to satisfy their needs. That is why it is important for ordinary members of a trade union to show a continual interest in their organisation, and not only during disputes. Trade union members must be able to call on their organisation for help in the solution of many vital questions which confront them, and it is the duty of the organisation to provide this help.

Mass participation in real trade union activity does not take place by itself, it requires constant and systematic work on the part of the leading trade union bodies. To ensure the participation of the mass of these workers in the activity of trade union organisations requires, at least:

- a. that all the important questions concerning the life and activity of trade union organisation be widely discussed at general meetings of the members, that the advice and proposals of ordinary trade union members be taken into consideration and fully examined, that the executive bodies of the trade union organisation keep their members regularly informed of the work carried out and of the application of the workers' proposals,
- b. that regular reports be given to members by their elected representatives, those in leading positions must not fear criticism and self-criticism, but on the contrary develop it,
- c. that the members systematically participate in the daily work of the trade union organisations. Depending upon the problems which the workers have to solve, commissions, or groups, should be set up on a voluntary basis aimed at achieving the demands of the mass of the workers,
- d. that liaison between the trade union and the mass of trade union members and non-members as well, be systematically organised at the place of work.

It is there on the job, that the close link between the trade union and

the mass of the workers is forged. It is there, through meetings on the job, in conversation from machine to machine, department to department, between workers and the ordinary trade union activist, dues collectors, shop stewards, committee members etc. that the demands of the workers are revealed, that unity is brought about, and that the struggles which the trade union must lead are waged. It is there through the experience which the mass of the workers themselves acquire, when the trade union is their faithful interpreter and unfaltering guide; that trade union recruitment is carried on, that is, the organisation of ever wider masses for increasingly decisive struggles.

e. that systematic work be carried on to promote and educate militants from among the trade union membership. They must be helped to improve their knowledge, experience required in the work be passed on to them and regular meeting of activists must be held on the various aspects of trade union activity,

f. that continuous mass education work be undertaken to raise the cultural political and occupational knowledge of trade unionists, without neglecting even the big or the small tasks. No 'detail' should be neglected if that detail concerns the workers interests. The carrying out of these elementary and long established roles will ensure the membership's constant participation in the trade union's activities. The workers will clearly see that the life of the trade union is closely linked with the life of the mass of the workers, that the organisation works for the masses and that the masses are carrying out the trade union's most important functions. Such methods of work will at the same time ensure a democratic solution to all questions.

## TRADE UNION ELECTIONS

Methods of electing the leading trade union bodies and their officials are a further indication of prime importance of the democratic character of their organisation. No organisation which violates the rules of democracy and its procedure for electing its leading bodies can be democratic.

The constitution of trade unions should stipulate that all leading bodies of the trade union, as well as delegates to trade union conferences and congresses, are elected by secret ballot. In the election of the trade union bodies, members of the trade unions have the right to nominate candidates, to recall and to criticise any of them.

It must be stipulated that all members of a trade union have the right to participate in elections and to be elected to any trade union position, to trade union conferences and congresses, that they have the right to put forward to trade union organisations questions and proposals concerning the improvement of the trade union work, to criticise the activity of the

local and higher trade union bodies and their activists in meetings, in trade union conferences and congresses, to submit questions, requests and complaints to all leading trade union bodies, that they have the right to demand their personal participation each time a decision has to be taken by the trade union organisations on the activity or running of the organisation.

Democracy cannot exist where trade union meetings are not held, where the voice of the membership is not heard, where the workers are cut off from any participation in the life of their organisations, where they are arbitrarily expelled from the trade union if they criticise its activity.

Union members must and can bring about real trade union democracy in the workshops, to impose in the workshops a real organisation of the working class led by it and for it.

This will result in forming a broad policy of unity to fight for their demands and to systematically denounce the anti-democratic policy of the leaders.

### SHOP STEWARDS

- a. In mines, factories or any workplace where there are members employed, shop stewards shall be elected by the members employed in such a place at a meeting convened by the Branch Secretary. The shop stewards shall request all members to produce their membership cards for inspection and shall request all new employees to apply for membership of the union, seven days after commencing work. Upon receipt of the application for membership and the payment of an entrance fee and subscription fee, a membership card shall be issued to the new employee.
- b. He shall pay over to the branch secretary all monies collected not later than 4 days after each collection and shall see that the shop stewards book signed off and an official receipt issued to him for the amount and signed by the Secretary or such a person authorised.
- c. The shop steward shall collect subscriptions from all members in his establishment, and enter same into a shop stewards book, provided for that purpose.
- d. The shop steward shall immediately notify the secretary in the event of any dispute arising in the department or factory.
- e. The shop steward shall furnish the secretary regularly with a list of all members in his establishment showing full names, rates of pay applicable to each member, whether adult or juvenile, and residential address.
- f. A shop steward shall hold office for one year and thereafter until his successor is appointed, but shall be eligible for re-election, and his post shall become vacant on the decision of the branch executive committee or by resolution of two thirds majority of the members in such establishment and if the post becomes vacant the branch secretary shall im-

mediately arrange the election of a shop steward in his place.

A continuous effort must be made in trade unions to ensure that this broad democracy holds sway among the rank and file. Continuous criticism and self criticism should be carried on and encouraged to ensure that the economic, social and political demands put forward by the trade union, from the most general to the most particular, are really the demands of the workers.

The most modern trade union cadres learn under the fire of criticism that demands are not just imagined, that the good trade union leader is one who knows how to guide the workers struggle in the factories because he knows how to learn from them and to be attentive to their needs including the very smallest. The good trade union leader is attentive to their desire for unity and educates himself by starting the manifold initiatives of the workers in the course of their struggles. This is why such trade unions and their activists are real organisations and militants of the working class.

#### TRADE UNION FINANCES

A primary question in determining the degree of democracy of trade union organisations is that of the source of their funds, methods of collecting dues, control of expenditure and the use to which the expenditure is put. The question of finance in trade unions is a political and not a technical question. No trade union can be considered democratic unless it gives a regular accounting of its expenditure to its members.

Practice shows that abuses in the administration of trade union funds are numerous. Elementary democratic rights, such as the voluntary payment of dues, are the financial basis of the trade union. The financial resources should come from the monthly contributions and from the income from cultural or sports events. The payment of dues is voluntary and the collection is made by shop stewards and members who are made responsible for this job by the trade union organisations themselves.

Elected trade union bodies have the right to use the financial resources and the property of the trade unions, and they have the legal responsibility to safeguard them and to control expenditure, a control commission should be elected by secret ballot at the time of elections of trade union leaders by general meetings or conferences of the members of the trade union.

These are truly democratic methods as far as the financial activities are concerned. They guarantee fully the principle of voluntary dues payment as well as the control of the expenditure by the members. The rate of trade union contributions is fixed by the members themselves. Their funds are administered and controlled by them through their elected representatives. The funds are used to support struggles, to maintain the

trade union offices (i.e. rent, telephone and payment for elected union officials as well as for various social work and activities for the members). The permanent officials should have a wage equal to that of a skilled worker in the industry.

Trade union democracy does not rest exclusively on the three principles given above, but these principles are none the less the most important and characteristic, to a large degree, of the true status of a trade union. Regular and systematic participation of the members in the activities of their organisation, their complete freedom to elect and replace the responsible leaders and functionaries, the absolutely voluntary character of dues payments, the control of expenditure by the membership, such are the conditions to be fulfilled in order that trade union democracy be not an empty word.

The observation of the rules given above will ensure the support of the members for all measures taken by the trade union and will guarantee as a consequence their healthy and vigorous development.

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## **FOSATU on Unity**

### **An editorial from Fosatu Worker News, March 1983 (No 19)**

On the 9th and 10th April FOSATU will send a worker delegation consisting of representatives from all the federation's regions and affiliates to a meeting in Cape Town to once again discuss trade union unity. There is no doubt that this meeting of unions will be crucial for workers in South Africa.

Unity is at the very heart of the workers' struggle as it is only if they can achieve unity of organisation and political direction that they can build a society of equality and justice for all.

Workers understand this well and ever since the rebirth of independent non-racial trade unions in the early 1970's there have been moves to build a wider trade union unity. In 1979 FOSATU was formed and CUSA shortly after that. However, outside of these two federations there remained other independent unions and new unions began to emerge.

It was clear that the task of building a wider unity had to continue. Faced by new labour laws an important step towards unity was taken by the independent union movement at the Langa meeting in Cape Town in August 1981. This was followed by further meetings in April and July the