

## GWU: Yes to Registration



In November last year the National Controlling Committee decided to call a special conference to discuss the question of registration. It had become clear to the National Controlling Committee that we were facing increasing difficulties as an unregistered union. It was also clear that since we took our original decision in 1979 to

remain unregistered many of the laws covering trade unions have changed.

The staff and the workers all realised the importance of this decision. When we took the decision in 1979 we fought for our view in the trade union movement. Our decision to remain unregistered caused great problems with the bosses and the government. But because we believed in our decision, we fought for it and we grew from strength to strength.

Why now were we considering changing our decision? Was it because we had grown tired of fighting? Or was it because circumstances had changed in such a way that would enable us to fight better with a changed policy?

After the November meeting of the Controlling Committee the issue was discussed carefully in every factory of the union. Each factory elected a delegate to the Special Conference on 23 and 24 March. At this conference it was unanimously decided that the union should apply for registration.

The delegates present all felt that there was little difference between a registered and unregistered union anymore. The two differences that remained are however important. These are over the question of stop-orders and industrial council. For a registered union to get stop-orders it merely has to reach agreement with the bosses. But for an unregistered union to get stop-orders it has to have the permission of the Minister of Manpower. This is causing delays and difficulties in getting our stop-orders.

The other difference concerns industrial councils. Only registered unions can sit on industrial councils whereas unregistered unions are not allowed to. This does not mean that registered unions are forced to sit on industrial councils. The delegates wanted to know what the union would be if we registered: would we be controlled? If we registered, we would have to send the government certain reports each year. We will have to send them our audited accounts, the names of our office bearers, our constitution and our total membership. But we have to do all this as an unregistered union as well, so that our obligations will not increase as a registered union.

After considering the question carefully, the delegates decided that control will not increase if we register. In fact, decisions over matters like stop-orders and industrial councils will be in our hands only. We will not have to ask the government permission for stop-orders and we will be able to decide for ourselves whether to sit on industrial councils or not. The delegates decided then that if we applied for registration, we would be under less government control than if we remain unregistered.

Many delegates pointed out that, registered or unregistered, the union would only succeed if it was democratically controlled by the workers and if the factories were all strongly organised. Thus you could get strong registered unions and weak unregistered unions, or weak registered unions and strong unregistered unions.

Some delegates asked if we would not be collaborating with the government if we registered? A delegate from Port Elizabeth pointed out that in his city some people said that the registered unions were stooges that collaborated with the government, whereas the unregistered unions were militant democratic unions. But this delegate pointed out that the workers knew that this was not necessarily true. In fact in the motor industry, the registered union - NAAWU - was the militant democratic union that was taking the workers struggle forward, where as the unregistered union had very little support.

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