

## THE NATIONAL MANPOWER COMMISSION REPORT: REFORM OR CONTROL?

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Initial response to the report has been fairly muted. Management bodies have been slow to make any pronouncement. Some of the emerging unions have condemned the Report for the new powers it proposes to give to the Registrar of Trade Unions. In order to take part in bargaining at any level, unions will have to comply with "certain minimum requirements". These requirements include: submitting constitution, membership records and accounts (including disclosure of funds recieved from outside) for approval; independence of any political affiliation; and existing only to "serve the interests of its members and their collective relationships with their employers." The last criterion is particularly undefined and far-reaching in scope.

The Council of Unions of South Africa said the proposed changes in registration "would put the power in the hands of civil servants through regulation. This is not acceptable to us." The Metal and Allied Workers' Union, an affiliate of the Federation of South African Trade Unions stated: "If we are to take as read press reports on the NMC submissions the proposals are in line with what we see as a clampdown by the State. This makes it quite clear that we can expect nothing of the National Manpower Commission."

Even before the Commission reported there was dissension amongst its members with a minority group objecting to forced registration. Right-wing trade unionists sitting on the Commission took issue with certain proposals made by the majority. It is proposed that "race" and "representativeness" should no longer play any part in the registrar's decision to approve a union. It is on these grounds that established unions have previously been able to use the

## NMC Report

law to prevent newer unions gaining approval. Garment Worker/Klerewerker described this proposal as "opening the doors to a flood of unrepresentative unions" and undermining orderly collective bargaining. The TUCSA unions are also threatened with the NMC's announcement that it will be investigating further the possibility of outlawing the closed shop.

As the debate continues other areas of the Report will come in for scrutiny. Proposals to improve the workings of industrial councils and to revamp works councils are accompanied by plans to improve the image of the Industrial Court. The Minister of Manpower would no longer have the power to prevent trade unions taking "unfair labour practice" cases to the Court. But the Report also lists practices which it wants declared "unfair" including "secondary product boycotts" by unions or attempts by an emerging union to force an employer to deal only with it and to exclude minority unions representing only skilled workers.

The SALB will be presenting its own detailed analysis of the NMC Report at a later date.

(Johannesburg correspondent, May 1984)