

The Response of African Unions to State Labour Policy

- Jun '77** **Appointment of the Wiehahn Commission**
- May '79** **Publication of Wiehahn Report Part I**
- May 19** **FOSATU attacks both the Report and White Paper on the basis of the intention to divide the working class along racial and craft lines, arguing that in certain respects the Report and White Paper represent a withdrawal of existing rights enjoyed by African workers. (see page 12)**
- May 21** **Industrial Conciliation Bill tabled in Parliament.**
- May 23** **FOSATU rejects the proposed legislation as unacceptable in terms of internationally accepted labour practices. The Federation attacks the extension of state control over all aspects of trade union activity as well as the government's intentions to halt the operation of unregistered unions in future and to deprive the majority of African workers of their rights to join trade unions.
The Consultative Committee attacks state policy on migrant workers. It also predicts that the state will encroach on union territory through safeguards to exclude politics from labour. The Cape unions (WPGWU and the Food and Canning unions) make known their refusal to register under the terms laid down by the Bill.**
- Jun 12** **In simultaneously released statements, the Consultative Committee and FOSATU condemn the IC Amendment Bill currently being debated in Parliament for the exclusion of migrant workers.**
- Jul '79** **FOSATU initiates moves to bring together independent trade unions with a view of formulating a joint policy towards recent legislation.**
- Sept 25** **The Minister of Manpower Utilisation announces that by power of exemption, trade union rights would be extended to all South Africans including migrants from former South**

African territories.

- Sept 27** Cape unions announce that they would abide by their decision not to seek registration in the light of the ministerial exemption.
No clear picture of the Consultative Committee's position emerges, with reports that its affiliates are divided on the question.
- Oct 1** FOSATU states that despite the fact that the exemptions constituted an important change in the situation, substantial problems still remain to be weighed against the exemption. Here the racial segregation of unions is referred to as a major stumbling block. The Federation declines to take up a position on the changes until other unions have been consulted with a view to adopting a common stand. During the course of October, a meeting between FOSATU, the WPGWU and the Food & Canning unions is organised.
- Nov 2** On the eve of the joint meeting, WPGWU release to the press its independently formulated response to the question of registration. (see SALB Vol. 5 No. 4)
- Nov 3** FOSATU unions report back to the Central Committee on the views of affiliates. The situation is further considered and FOSATU formulates a statement intended for use as a basis for discussions with the Cape unions to be held later in the day.
- Nov 4** WPCWU and FOSATU release a joint statement (see p17) to the press emphasising that their struggle is not over registration *per se*, but for the maintenance of certain basic principles. At the same time, FOSATU releases its memorandum prepared the previous day. (see p14) This outlined the policy of the organisation with regard to registration in the light of its objectives.
- Nov 5** FOSATU states that it intends to test the new law by applying for registration on its own terms.