

Hell for leather

MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD trade unions are involved in an initiative to form a new union federation.

The main force behind the initiative is Freddie Swartz, general secretary of the 5 500-strong Transvaal Leather and Allied Trades Industrial Union. He has written to approximately 176 unaffiliated unions inviting them to attend a meeting in Johannesburg on 21 November to establish whether there is sufficient common ground among them to warrant the establishment of a new umbrella body.

In the letter, Swartz states that unionists from the unaffiliated unions have often expressed the need to get together in a federation, and points out that they have more members than the combined membership of the Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the National Council of Trade Unions (Nactu). The principles on which such a new federation would be based, he adds, could include non-racialism, non-violence, non-involvement in party politics and opposition to sanctions and disinvestment.

Swartz also points out that unaffiliated unions frequently find themselves in conflict with Cosatu unions in the course of their work and that if they want their views to be heard they have to unite.

'There are many disadvantages in not being in a federation', Swartz told WIP in response to queries about the initiative. 'Other groupings claim they speak on behalf on labour. But in terms of numbers and policy

they do not really represent the whole of labour. These groupings are also closely aligned to certain political parties. We are not sure that is a role labour should play.

The response to the letter has been 'heartening', he adds. - *Robyn Rafel*

THE NEW RIGHT

The Uncle Tom freedom fighters

ON THE last Friday of October, Zimbabwe Unity Movement leader Edgar Tekere could be found some 30km out of Johannesburg enjoying that much-loved South African form of entertainment, the braaivleis.

If eyebrows were raised it was not because of the Afrikaner-inspired cuisine (after all, United Democratic Front treason trialists have been known for their addiction to biltong) but because of the company.

Tekere's hosts on this occasion were the Federal Independent Democratic Alliance (Fida), whose affinity to Tekere was explained in their letter of invitation: 'He has first-hand experience of Africanisation and is a strong opponent of Marxism and the one-party system', the letter stated.

Fida, headed by 52-year-old former churchman John Gogotya, was brought into being in mid-1987 - a year into South Africa's longest state of emergency and in circumstances where tens of thousands of UDF supporters had been detained without trial.

Following Fida's launch, Gogotya expressed strong opposition to the UDF - which 'had high on its

agenda plans to necklace black moderates like us' - and to the system of one person, one vote. 'We have seen what this has done to the rest of Africa', he said. 'It has brought oppression and deprivation to the whole continent'.

The man who believed just two years ago that ANC leader Nelson Mandela was 'in jail by his own choice', hailed Tekere as a freedom fighter.

And, within a week of the Tekere braai, Gogotya and his team were closeted in the Union Buildings with president FW de Klerk jockeying for a place at the negotiating table and asserting that - provided one did away with 'simplistic models such as the "Westminster system"' - the principle of one person, one vote could be respected.

Fida claims anything between 300 000 and 600 000 supporters. Its activities are all-but unreported. Gogotya claims this is not because the organisation does little of note, but because the media has systematically boycotted its events.

Fida has been seen in anti-apartheid circles as a state project, as part of the counter-revolutionary strategy pursued since the mid-80s by the Botha regime, which involved smashing democratic organisations and inserting government-sponsored structures into the resultant vacuum.

The suspicion arose not only from the timing of the Fida launch, but also from Gogotya's association with Maboyi Zondo who in turn was linked with a vigilante group which operated with impunity in its war against UDF-aligned groups in the Eastern Transvaal town of Leandra.

While Gogotya has always denied government links, until recently he

refused to disclose alternative sources of sponsorship. Now he states that South African business, often through the Afrikaanse Sakekamer, is a major benefactor. So, he says, are multinational oil companies.

He remains insistent that Fida receives no foreign funds. But it is quite clear that the organisation considers itself part of an international anti-Marxist movement. Propaganda of the International Freedom Foundation adorns the walls of its Johannesburg head office.

And Gogotya is also chairman of the Progressive Alliance, which makes claims on Christianity in its stridently anti-ANC/SACP pitch and has Richard J Harty of the World Commonwealth Foundation manning its Washington office.

Tekere's primary South African host is considerably less contentious than Fida. He is Phil Khumalo, described in the press two years ago as Johannesburg's 'fastest growing black businessman' and head of a venture called Business Challenge.

Khumalo, the first black South African to be granted a Nashua franchise and a former lecturer in small business development at Wits University business school, sent his daughter and designated successor, Pam, to university in Harare.

The motto of Business Challenge, says sales co-ordinator Sydney Maisela, is 'we put people into business'. He adds that party-political alignment is out. 'We deal with anybody, but anybody'.

Business Challenge does this in a number of ways: by collectively investing the modest contributions of its members with the Allied Building Society, in an elaboration of the stokvel principle, and providing