

**Federation  
of  
South African  
Trade Unions**



**THE WORKERS STRUGGLE**

**WHERE DOES FOSATU STAND?**

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THE WORKERS STRUGGLE - WHERE DOES FOSATU STAND?

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Three years ago - almost to the day - we met in this very same place to form FOSATU. Today we have set our theme - the Workers Struggle - in a serious attempt to further clarify where we as worker representatives see FOSATU to stand in this great struggle.

That we are discussing this theme today and resolutions that relate to it is a justification of our original decision to form FOSATU and shows how seriously we take the new challenges that face us three years after that decision. Clearly any such discussion raises many very important issues and the purpose of this paper is to try and bring together these issues in ways that will help guide our discussions.

It is the task of this Congress to give a clear policy direction to our actions between now and the next Congress - we believe that the issues raised in this

paper are crucial to a political understanding of our policies and what we hope to achieve by them. We also believe that it is the task of Congress to add and modify the views expressed through open and serious debate.

## 2. FOSATU - AN ASSESSMENT

In the three years that FOSATU has existed there is little doubt that we have achieved a lot in terms of growth and gains made for our members. However, I believe that our greatest achievement is the fact that at this Congress we are determined to re-evaluate our policies. We are determined to respond to new challenges and set new directions if this is necessary. We could have made this Congress a great occasion open to all to parade our successes and hide our failures, however, we have chosen otherwise.

We have chosen to keep it closed and to once again self-critically examine our position. I believe that this shows our determination to take the great militancy of our members and use this to build a just and fair society controlled by workers.

We have no intention of becoming self-satisfied trade

unionists incapable of giving political direction to the workers struggle.

Yet we would only be dreaming of change if we do not strengthen and build our unions into large and effective organisations.

At our Inaugural Congress we stressed certain policies and set ourselves the task of establishing a tight federation of non-racial, national, industrial unions, based on shop floor strength. We set ourselves the task of sharing resources between affiliates and of building up an educational programme. We further stressed our independence in regard to party political organisations and from international trade union organisations.

Now it is not my task to assess every success and failure of FOSATU. There are reports tabled that will allow delegates to draw their own conclusions. However, it is important to make certain assessments in order to go further and identify why we need to clarify our position and set new and clearer directions.

I believe that we have to ask ourselves two crucial

questions:

- have we established an effective organisation based on shop floor strength and national non-racial industrial unions?
- has our organisational activity developed worker leadership that can give guidance and direction to all workers?

In answer to both questions it would be wrong to expect a positive answer after only three years. However, we should be able to assess if we are going in the right direction.

Clearly in regard to the first question we made progress - it could even be said to be considerable progress - with NAAWU, NUTW, and MAWU beginning to be a significant presence in what are major industries. However, there is a long way to go both in these cases and more so in those of the other affiliates.

It is, however, the second question that poses more problems. As the unions grow and are faced with new challenges it becomes crucial that the leadership knows what direction it is going in. What are the

organisational strategies that are necessary as the unions become larger and more effective? What dangers to worker militancy lie in recognition and stability?

As these unions grow then the question is what role do they play in the wider political arena. There has been a great upsurge in political activity over the last few years and many different political groups are looking to the union movement to state its position. We must be sure our organisation and our leadership can confidently state its position and continue to organise in the way that will strengthen and not weaken that position.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the issues we should debate if we are to meet the challenges.

### 3. WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

As a trade union federation we are clearly concerned with workers and their aspirations. If we were to think in terms of our members only, we would have a very limited political role. If, however, we are thinking more widely of the working class then we have to examine very much more carefully what our

political role is. In particular we need to look at this role in the South African context.

If we look at the advanced industrial countries then we see what can be called working class movements. There are a number of different organisations - trade unions, co-operatives, political parties and newspapers - that all see themselves as linked to the working class and furthering its interests. These working class movements are, therefore, powerful social forces in those societies.

In the capitalist economies these working class movements have power and organisation yet politically the working class is still subject to policies and practices that are clearly against their interests as the activities of Thatcher and Reagan show. This is increasingly leading to intense political and organisational activity to give the working class and the union movement a clearer direction so as to gather together the working class movement into a force that will more definitely put workers in control of their own destiny.

In the Socialist countries similar battles are being

fought. Whilst social, political and economic relations in these countries have been greatly altered and there have been great achievements to the benefit of workers, there is still the need for workers themselves to control their own destiny. So Solidarity was not struggling to restore capitalism in Poland, its struggle was to establish more democratic worker control over their socialist society.

Now my purpose in briefly looking at the working class movement in the advanced industrial countries was twofold:

Firstly, so that we can be clear that worker activities such as strikes and protests do not in themselves mean that a working class movement or working class politics exist. These later are more than that - they are large scale organisations with a clear social and political identity as the working class.

Secondly, I wished to show that the pure size of working class organisation is itself no guarantee that workers will control their own destiny. In fact as the struggle of Solidarity shows, even the fact that a country is said to be socialist does not guarantee that

workers control their own destiny.

In short it could be said that workers must build a powerful and effective movement if they are to succeed in advancing their interests against some very hostile forces, but they must also ensure that this movement is able to take a clear political direction.

The experience of the great working class movements in the advanced industrial countries is a very important guide and lesson to us. However, it cannot provide all our answers. Firstly, in South Africa we cannot talk of a working class movement as we have defined it above. Secondly, whilst there is undoubtedly a large and growing working class its power is only a potential power since as yet it has no definite social identity of itself as working class.

The questions we should, therefore, address ourselves to, are:

- Why has no working class movement emerged?
- What are the prospects for such a movement emerging?
- What role can FOSATU play in such a process?

#### 4. THE WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA'S POLITICAL HISTORY

It is not possible in a paper such as this to deal fully with all the developments in South Africa's history that have led to the non-existence of a workers' movement in South Africa.

South Africa's history has been characterised by great repression and the major political and ideological instrument for this repression has been racism. Yet the major effect of this repression has been to very rapidly establish a large capitalist economy.

Racism and the violence and injustices associated with it is a very stark and clear form of repression. Along side this only about 5 - 10% of the population has ever had the franchise. Clearly, therefore, there is a very identifiable oppressive force and the major political task of the oppressed people has always been to attack that oppressive and racist regime.

So what has developed in South Africa is a very powerful tradition of popular or populist politics. The

role of the great political movements such as the ANC and the Congress Alliance has been to mobilise the masses against the repressive minority regime. In such a situation mass mobilisation is essential so as to challenge the legitimacy of the State both internally and internationally.

Where virtually all the population is voteless and oppressed by a racial minority then a great alliance of all classes is both necessary and a clear political strategy. Furthermore, building such an alliance was a great task.

The ANC had to overcome racial division so as to rise above the divisive racism of the oppressors. They had to deal with opportunistic tribal leadership, to organise thousands upon thousands of people and they had to do all this in the face of harsh repression by the State. In achieving this there is little wonder that the ANC rose to be one of the great liberation movements in Africa.

In this context it is also easier to see and understand why the trade union movement acted in a particular way. The racial divisions in the working class,

linked as they were to other objective factors, made it possible for capital to quite quickly suppress any serious challenge to their supremacy. It was possible to create the conditions that led to a politically tame union movement and thereby forced more militant and progressive unions to bear the brunt of State action, which in turn affected the politics of these unions.

Furthermore, at all times there were occasions when workers resisted by strike action, protest and organisation. Yet this by itself cannot constitute a working class movement. Whilst the unions were often prominent they were always small and weakly organised both nationally and in the factories. They could not provide an organisational base for a working class movement as we have defined it above.

Progressive and militant unions were continually the subject of State harassment, but, never managed to seriously challenge capital nationally or on a sustained basis. As a result the effective political role of progressive unions and of worker activity was to provide a crucial part of any popular struggle and that was to give it its "Worker Voice". No mass popular movement can be effective or be seen to be



effective if it does not have some worker involvement or representation. By the 1950's with the growth of South Africa's industry and the size of the working class the need to include workers became essential and as a result SACTU became an important element of the Congress Alliance.

In these circumstances the progressive trade unions became part of the popular struggle against oppression. They did not and probably could not have provided the base for working class organisation. There is of course no doubt that their activities have been very, very important in creating the conditions that led to the emergence in the last ten to fifteen years of the present progressive trade unions. However, these unions are operating in a different environment.

Workers and their struggle became very much part of the wider popular struggle. An important effect of this development was that capital could hide behind the curtains of apartheid and racism. The political energies of the oppressed masses and of international critics were focussed on the apartheid regime and its abhorrent racism. The government and Afrikaanderdom

became the focus of attack. In fact the position was such that learned liberal academics saw in capital the great hope for change despite the fact that capital and its lackeys were undoubtedly the major beneficiaries of apartheid.

Capital did its very best to keep in the political background and as a result this helped prevent the creation of capital's logical political opposite which is a working class political movement. However, of crucial significance was that capital was growing rapidly and changing its very nature into a more monopolistic, technologically advanced and concentrated form. Its links internationally were also growing as was its importance for international capital.

We find, therefore, that behind the scenes of the great battle between the apartheid regime and its popular opponents that the capitalist economy has flourished and capital emerges now as a powerful and different force. It:

- is highly concentrated in truly gigantic corporations;
- has access to international information on how to deal with working class challenges;

- has access to the State's security information;
- is able to rapidly share and assess information;
- is able to use the objective circumstances in its favour such as unemployment and influx control to weaken worker organisations;
- is now an important part of international capital and cannot, therefore, be lightly discarded by international capital;
- is able to hide behind politics and as a result can hide its sophisticated attacks on labour because no-one is paying any attention.

Yet as the upsurge of popular political activity emerged again in the 1970's some of its new forms such as Black Consciousness also place little emphasis on capital. So there is a growing gap between popular politics and the power of capital and as a result the potential power of workers. It is in this context we should look at the likelihood of a working class politics emerging.

## 5. THE NEED FOR A WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

The growing size of the economy and the dramatic changes taking place in capital have created important new conditions in the economy. We also have to take into account the speed and manner in which the economy has developed. In discussing the working class movements in the advanced industrial economies, we have to bear in mind that in most cases they took about 100 years or more to fully develop. Industry started first by building larger and larger factories and bringing people together in these factories.

The new capitalists had to struggle politically with the older ruling classes over labour, land, taxation policy, tariff protection, political rights and political power.

Then mechanisation became more important and there was a definite change in production processes. As this happened the skilled workers who had usually given leadership to the craft unions found themselves in a very difficult position. As a result leadership problems in the organisation of trade unions and the

political environment, developed in a complex and relatively slow way.

In South Africa this has been condensed into 60-70 years and from the outset large scale capitalist enterprises dominated. The birth of capitalism here was brutal and quick. The industrial proletariat was ripped from its land in the space of a few decades. At present capitalist production massively dominates all other production. There are no great land lords on their agricultural estates and there is no significant peasantry or collective agriculture. Virtually everyone depends for all or part of their income on industry or capitalist agriculture.

The working class have experienced a birth of fire in South Africa and they constitute the major objective political force opposed to the State and capital. There is no significant petty bourgeoisie or landed class with an economic base in our society.

In the economy capital and labour are the major forces yet politically the struggle is being fought elsewhere.

The existence of this industrial proletariat and the rapid transformation of capital are very powerful reasons why a working class movement could rapidly develop in South Africa. There are a number of factors that will assist in the organisation of workers:

- the great concentration of capital has also meant a greater concentration of workers. These workers generally have a higher level of basic education and skills than before and their links with the past are all but broken so that more and more a worker identity is emerging;
- this is reinforced by the sophisticated strategies that are designed to "de-racialise" industry and some other areas of society. The effect of this is to divide off certain privileged members of Black society leaving workers at the bottom of the privilege pile;
- the concentration of workers in industry has also concentrated them in the great urban townships;
- the particular structure of the South African economy with its high degree of State involvement, price controls and heavy dependence on international markets has made it a

very sensitive economy. As a consequence attempts to "buy off" the major part of the working class will fail. It is more likely that as some readjustments of privilege are attempted that it will have to be workers that suffer through inflation and lack of basic commodities;

- the above factors and South Africa's international economic importance are likely to force capital into the political open and as a consequence develop a worker response;

- although capital can at present hide behind apartheid it is also the case that if workers organise widely enough they can get great support from the international labour movement. Also international public opinion has to be very carefully watched by capital because both international and South African capital are dependent on their links with the rest of the world.

These then are some of the important factors that are favourable to the development of a working class movement in South Africa. However, this does not mean that this will automatically happen. To understand

this, we need to look at the present political environment more carefully to see both the present political tendencies and to establish why some active leadership role should be played by the unions and FOSATU in particular.

Workers need their own organisation to counter the growing power of capital and to further protect their own interests in the wider society. However, it is only workers who can build this organisation and in doing this they have to be clear on what they are doing.

As the numbers and importance of workers grows then all political movements have to try and win the loyalty of workers because they are such an important part of society. However, in relation to the particular requirements of worker organisation, mass parties and popular political organisations have definite limitations which have to be clearly understood by us.

We should distinguish between the international position and internal political activity. Internationally, it is clear that the ANC is the major force with sufficient presence and stature to be a serious challenge to the South African State and to secure the

international condemnation of the present regime. To carry out this struggle is a difficult task because South Africa has many friends who are anxious to ensure that they can continue to benefit from her wealth. The fact that the ANC is also widely accepted internally also strengthens its credibility internationally.

However, this international presence of the ANC which is essential to a popular challenge to the present regime places certain strategic limitations on the ANC, namely:

- to reinforce its international position it has to claim credit for all forms of internal resistance, no matter what the political nature of such resistance. There is, therefore, a tendency to encourage undirected opportunistic political activity;
- it has to locate itself between the major international interests. To the major Western powers it has to appear as anti-racism but not as anti-capitalist. For the socialist East it has to be at least neutral in the super power struggle and certainly it could not

appear to offer a serious socialist alternative to that of those countries as the response to Solidarity illustrates. These factors must seriously affect its relationship to workers;

- accordingly, the ANC retains its tradition of the 1950's and 1960's when because there was no serious alternative political path it rose to be a great populist liberation movement. To retain its very important international position it has to retain its political position as a popular mass movement. This clearly has implications for its important military activities.

Internally we also have to carefully examine what is happening politically. As a result of the State's complete inability to effect reform and the collapse of their Bantustan policy, they are again resorting to open repression. Since 1976 in particular this has given new life to popular resistance and once again the drive for unity against a repressive State has reaffirmed the political tradition of populism in South Africa. Various political and economic interests gather together in the popular front in the tradition of the ANC and the Congress Alliance.

In the present context all political activity, provided it is anti-State, is of equal status. In the overall resistance to this regime, this is not necessarily incorrect. In fact without such unity and widespread resistance it would not be possible by means of popular mass movements to seriously challenge the legitimacy of the present regime.

However, the really essential question is how worker organisation relates to this wider political struggle. I have argued above that the objective political and economic conditions facing workers is now markedly different to that of twenty years ago.

Yet there does not seem to be clarity on this within the present union movement. There are good reasons for this lack of clarity.

As a result of repression most worker leadership is relatively inexperienced and this is made worse by the fact that their unions are weak and unstable organisationally. The union struggles fought against capital have mostly been against isolated companies so that the wider struggles against capital at an

industry or national level have not been experienced. This also means that workers and their leadership have not experienced the strength of large scale worker organisation nor the amount of effort required to build and democratise such large scale organisation. Again State repression and the wider political activity reinforce previous experiences where the major function of workers was to reinforce and contribute to a popular struggle.

Politically, therefore, most unions and their leadership lack confidence as a worker leadership, they see their role as part of wider struggle but are unclear on what is required for the worker struggle. Generally, the question of building an effective worker organisation is not dealt with and political energy is spent in establishing unity across a wide front.

However, such a position is clearly a great strategic error that will weaken if not destroy worker organisation both now and in the future. All the great and successful popular movements have had as their aim the overthrow of oppressive - most often colonial - regimes. But these movements cannot and have not in themselves been able to deal with the particular and

fundamental problem of workers. Their task is to remove regimes that are regarded as illegitimate and unacceptable by the majority.

It is, therefore, essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will end have no option but no turn against their worker supporters.

Broad and complicated matters have been covered and it is difficult to summarise them even further. However, I shall attempt to do so in order for us to try and examine the role that FOSATU can play in this struggle.

1. That worker resistance such as strike action helps build worker organisation but by itself it does not mean that there is a working class movement.
2. There has not been and is not a working class movement in South Africa.

3. The dominant political tradition in South Africa is that of the popular struggle against an oppressive, racist minority regime.
4. That this tradition is reasserting itself in the present upsurge of political activity.
5. However, the nature of economic development in South Africa has brutally and rapidly created a large industrial proletariat.
6. That the size and development of this working class is only matched by its mirror image which is the dramatic growth and transformation of industrial capital.
7. That before it is too late workers must strive to form their own powerful and effective organisation within the wider popular struggle.

#### 6. FOSATU'S OBJECTIVE

From what has been said we believe that FOSATU must set itself the task of giving leadership and direction to the building of a working class movement. Our efforts so far have equipped us to do this. Our organisation is nationally based, located in the major

industries and the militancy of our members has generally developed a politically aware and self-critical leadership.

FOSATU as a trade union federation will clearly not constitute the working class movement nor would this place FOSATU in opposition to the wider political struggle or its major liberation movement.

FOSATU's task will be to build the effective organisational base for workers to play a major political role as workers. Our task will be to create an identity, confidence and political presence for worker organisation. The conditions are favourable for this task and its necessity is absolute.

We need have no fear of critics - our task will contribute to the wider liberation struggle and will also ensure that the worker majority is able to protect and further its interests. Ours is a fundamental political task and those who ask of workers their political support without allowing them the right to build their own organisation must answer for their real motives.

As was said above, capital has transformed itself and

has a greater capacity to tolerate worker organisation because it is now more powerful and better able to deal with a worker challenge. Also because of its absolutely central position it will have the full support of the State in its actions and in the bitter struggles that are to come.

This requires a very much greater effort to establish worker organisation and requires thorough organisational work and ceaseless mobilisation of our members. The growth and transformation of capital has created the very preconditions for large scale worker organisation.

## 7. OUR CONCRETE TASKS AND CHALLENGES

If we set the above as our general direction then we must deal with concrete tasks and challenges.

### Organisation:

What is crucial in organisation is the quality of that organisation - the quality that gives it its overall political direction and capability. As is clear from



the experience of the advanced industrial countries that we looked at earlier, organisational size alone is not enough, yet without size there can be no effective counter to capital.

Broadly one can distinguish three factors that affect the quality of worker organisation - the structure of organisational strength and decision making; the location of organisational strength and the political qualities of its leadership structures.

#### Structure:

The structure of an organisation should be such that it correctly locates worker strength and makes best use of that strength.

FOSATU's experience in this has been very important. Our organisation is built up from the factory floor. As a result, the base of the organisation is located where workers have most power and authority and that is where production takes place. This also has the effect of democratizing our structures since worker representatives always participate from a position of strength and authority in the organisation. By

stressing factory bargaining we involve our Shop Stewards in central activities and through this they gain experience as worker leadership. It should be said that they do battle every day.

These factory-based structures are the key to transforming pure quantity of members into a flexible and effective quality. Capital's hostility to factory organisation forces members and Shop Stewards to struggle continuously or else to have their organisation crushed.

At the union level FOSATU has attempted to build broad industrial unions on a national basis. We, in effect, have a position of one affiliate per industry. We have chosen industrial unions because of the organisational advantages we gain in our struggle against capital. However, FOSATU's role is to link these industrial unions into a tight federation that is based on common policy and a sharing of resources. Our aim is to keep a unity of purpose among affiliates at all levels of their organisation.

Our task in the three years to come must be to consolidate and develop factory organisation, a

national presence for our unions and to reassert unity of purpose among affiliates.

The structures we are developing are an essential basis for effective and democratic organisation and are the basis for greater worker participation in and control over production.

#### Location:

The question of location is closely related to structure. Without correct structures then the location of one's organisational strength is not as important.

We must accept that it will take many years to organise all workers and at present that should not be our aim. Our present aim must be to locate our organisation strategically. We need to look at the location of our organisational strength in relation to the industry, geographic area and the points at which we can most effectively carry out collective bargaining.

Our major affiliates should be located in the major

industries. Within those industries we must become a substantial presence by carefully building our organisation in major factories, companies and areas.

Geographically we must clearly aim to be a national presence both as FOSATU and as the affiliates. Our organisation should be able to dominate major industrial areas. By doing this we create the major means whereby worker organisation can play a significant if not dominant role in the communities that surround these industrial areas.

Successful collective bargaining requires that the organisation is capable of mobilising its members behind demands. Thus far our unions have only really been able to mobilise at the plant level. However, the experience of NAAWU which is exceptional in FOSATU has shown what can be gained by mobilising across companies. We have flexible structures and we must use them if we are to serve our members. We must be able to mobilise across factories and in local areas across industries. We must see industry bargaining or regional bargaining not as something to be feared but as the logical extension of our present structures and practices.

### Worker Leadership:

Here we must be immediately clear that we are not talking about leadership in the sense that it is usually discussed - which is in terms of individuals and "great men". This view of leadership is not what is important for a worker organisation. What we are interested in is the elected representatives of workers and the officials they appoint to work within the organisation.

We are interested in how the leadership is elected or appointed; who it is answerable to and how this accountability is achieved; how experienced leadership is and how it gains this experience and how they develop means of training and educating leadership so that it remains self-critical and politically active.

The challenges facing worker leadership are undoubtedly different to other leadership groups. For worker leadership in a capitalist society, your everyday struggle is related to your job and therefore your wage and therefore your very ability to survive. The most appropriate comparison is with that of the

guerrilla fighter who has to develop the strength to resist daily, the knowledge of his terrain that will give him every tactical advantage and the support of those for whom he is struggling. Probably most important because both the worker leader and the guerrilla are fighting a powerful enemy, is the development of a sense of when to advance and when to retreat.

These skills are not easily learnt and not easily replaced. So worker leadership cannot be wasted by opportunistic and overly adventurous actions.

We are also concerned with worker leadership in a wider arena than only that of the union struggle. Giving leadership to the working class requires an organisational base. Without this base, then the poverty and the lack of education, information and time that workers are struggling against will be the very factors which will force workers to surrender leadership of the community to other stratas in society.

Our aim is to use the strength of factory-based organisation to allow workers to play an effective role

in the community. Worker leadership will have:

- gained invaluable political experience from their factory struggles;
- organisation and resources behind them;
- organisational structures and location that will give them localised strength;
- the ability to speak with a clear and democratically established worker mandate.

The points made here should be our guide for action and we have a long way to go in building a larger leadership structure that has the political qualities of clarity, determination, discipline and the ability to be self-critical.

#### Working Class Identity:

The task of organisation outlined above and more important, the quality of that organisation will absorb most of our energies in the next three years, and is, therefore, our major priority. Yet to give leadership in the building of a working class movement we must start to build a greater identity for worker organisation.

In a very important way the building of effective trade unions does create a worker identity. However, there is the danger that the unions become pre-occupied with their members and ignore workers generally. By establishing a clear political direction we can avoid this.

One answer that is often proposed is to be involved in community activities. That FOSATU should be involved in community activities is correct since our members form the major part of those communities. However, as we have argued above we must do so from an organisational base if we are truly to be an effective worker presence.

Without this base, it is more likely that we will destroy a clear worker identity since workers will be entirely swamped by the powerful tradition of popular politics that we examined earlier.

It is also the case that there has emerged into our political debate an empty and misleading political category called 'the community'. All communities are composed of different interest groups and for a worker

organisation to ally itself with every community group or action would be suicide for worker organisation. Under the surface of unity community politics is partisan and divided. FOSATU cannot possibly ally itself to all the political groups that are contesting this arena. Neither can it ally itself with particular groups. Both paths will destroy the unity of its own worker organisation.

This simple political fact is the reason for one of our founding resolutions. It has nothing to do with not wanting to be involved in politics. Our whole existence is political and we welcome that. Our concern is with the very essence of politics and that is the relation between the major classes in South Africa being capital and labour.

We need to state this more clearly and understand it ourselves more clearly. There is also no doubt that we must take our own newspaper very much more seriously as it can be a major instrument in building a worker identity.

At the level of organisation we have a sound base on which to work. Probably our main problem has been

that we did not clearly state why we had chosen certain structures and what could be achieved by them.

As our political clarity and confidence grows, so we must state our position more clearly in our meeting, among our members and through our own newspaper.

#### 8. UNITY IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Our first step must be to address ourselves to unity in the labour movement. If we are to create a working class movement then trade union unity has to be dealt with very early on in our struggle. Because we take working class politics seriously we must take trade union unity seriously.

At present there is a very great momentum to unity in the labour movement and we have to carefully consider and analyse what is happening.

The first point to understand is that all the unions involved in the talks are relatively weak in relation to their potential - some appallingly so. Many are too easily fooled by their own propaganda and the great

interest shown by everyone into believing that they are now a strong force. Furthermore, with a few exceptions (mostly in FOSATU), these unions are not yet a national or an industrial presence. Their strengths lie in isolated factories and very few have any real geographic concentration. As a result, both the leadership of these unions and their membership have no clear conception of the organised power of capital nor for that matter of its weakness. There is no real experience of the difficulties of large scale worker organisation nor of the difficulties in building democratic worker structures. The bulk of the present leadership has no clear conception of the needs of worker struggle or of a worker dominated society. There is all too often a contradiction between the political position and organisational practice. Radical political positions are adopted but the organisational practice makes little headway into the power of capital nor is it effectively democratic. A number of factors result from this - often capital is attacked in the 'abstract' by making it all powerful and accordingly seeing an attack on the State as the only answer, or political energies are spent in widespread

campaigns. Actual worker organisation and advance is left weak and based on sporadic upsurges rather than on organisational strength.

As a consequence of these factors it is not possible for people to draw any distinction between worker struggle and popular struggle let alone understand the relation between the two in South Africa. The unity talks are therefore conceived of as being within the wider popular struggle and as another area where anti-State unity can be achieved. A formal unity rather than a working unity against capital is therefore seen as the prime object.

There are broadly speaking three forms of unity to the union movement at present and we should look at each fairly carefully:

"Ad hoc unity": this is what has occurred at present where unity is issue-located and there are attempts to take a common stand. At present this unity is significant in that it creates unity out of apparent disunity. However, its significance will rapidly decline. Such ad hoc unity can only achieve anything on specific issues and it is inevitably forced to take

more and more concerted and concrete actions unless it merely wants to be the source of endless press statements. Such further actions require a more permanent organisational link.

"United front unity": here the organisations remain autonomous but they set up a permanent platform of contact. Some people seem to see the solidarity committees as such a platform. However, although this provides a more definite organisational link considerable new problems are posed. Again the movement is towards more and more significant gestures of protest and the problem now posed is how are decisions to be taken and on what mandate. Does each organisation have an equal vote or is voting by size? If decisions are on a consensus basis - then on what mandate? Should each organisation get a formal mandate on each issue and if they don't, how representative of rank and file membership is each decision? Is there not a greater than usual danger of decisions being taken by a few officials who have easy access to the meetings?

A permanent organisational link requires a process for making decisions that is democratic and equitable.

Furthermore, if solidarity actions are to be successful they require organisational co-ordination - this in turn requires the power to sanction. How can this be done if participants are entirely autonomous?

A further step in this type of unity can be a "loose federation" such as TUCSA, where the unions are now all in the same federal organisation and the symbolism of unity is far greater. However, such a federal body - not being based on any clear principles - is unlikely to generate working unity as it would contend with numerous problems of jurisdiction between unions and it is unlikely that organisational rationalisation could take place without firm policies and particular structures.

In fact "United front unity", with or without a loose federation, can destroy the hope of greater unity by creating unresolved differences and no acceptable way of resolving these.

"Disciplined unity": this requires common political purpose, binding policy on affiliates and close working links based on specific organisational structures.

important and complicated - they are the basis for an understanding of the true nature of the workers struggle in South Africa and the political role our organisation must play in that struggle.

We believe that in FOSATU we have a firm base on which to build organisationally. Our task in the three years to come is to firmly commit ourselves to a working class political position. With this greater political understanding we must:

- consolidate our organisational structures;
- give guidance and leadership in the building of a larger working class movement in South Africa;
- seek out comrades and allies who will join us in this struggle;
- and in this way make our fundamental contribution to the liberation of the oppressed people of South Africa.

In doing this we must all be clear that we shall never be so petty as to insist on our organisation's name as the only one in the trade union movement which can carry out this task. It is what the organisation does

that is important - not what it is called. Yet equally, we shall never be so politically foolish as to abandon the worker struggle.