

DOCUMENTS

Mawu and the Industrial Council

This is a press statement released by MAWU following its application for membership of the Industrial Council.

The Metal and Allied Workers Union has decided to apply for membership of the Industrial Council for the Iron Steel and Engineering and Metallurgical Industry.

This decision was taken after eight months of intensive discussion among the union's members, shop stewards committees and executive committees. All the union's branches have now voted in favour and the National Executive Committee decided unanimously on 20.2.83 to apply for membership of the Industrial Council: the letter of application from the union sets out MAWU's principles.

1. That MAWU organises primarily at the shop floor level and that MAWU is committed to the principle that shop floor bargaining is fundamental. Industry wide bargaining may be supplemented but can never take the place of shop floor bargaining on all issues including wages and working conditions.
2. That MAWU is democratically controlled by its members and that the union will be represented primarily by elected worker representatives. These representatives will be mandated at all stages of negotiations by the union's shop steward councils.
3. That MAWU will represent all its members regardless of race.
4. That MAWU will not be party to any agreement or actions by the Council which MAWU's members do not agree with.
5. That MAWU will withdraw from the Council if necessary.
6. *That the union understands that the Council will not attempt to limit or discourage shop floor bargaining. In addition MAWU will insist on facilities for reporting back during negotiations.*

In a booklet circulated to MAWU members following the NEC's deci-

sion, MAWU members are warned of the many potential dangers of becoming a member of the Council. Members are warned that MAWU is in a minority in the Council and cannot hope for big gains. So members should not rely on the Council in any way. MAWU remains committed to shop floor organisation as being the most important — industry-wide organisation is secondary.

Why has MAWU decided to apply?

From the time it was inaugurated in Pietermaritzburg in 1973, the employers — SEIFSA — and the state have repeatedly tried to kill or cripple MAWU. Despite this MAWU has grown into a national union with about 200 organised factories. It is one of the two largest unions in the metal industry and has a mass membership organised factory by factory and concentrated in the main industrial areas of South Africa.

During the wave of strikes in the metal industry in 1981 and 1982, MAWU members made substantial gains until the middle of 1982. A combination of high unemployment, action against migrant workers by the Administration Boards and concentrated action by employers through SEIFSA, allowed employers to strongly resist workers' demands.

MAWU has fully reviewed the events of the past year. All the strikes were over the same issues — wages, pensions, job security and retrenchment. Although the strike wave assumed industry wide proportions the strikes themselves were fragmented. Workers in different factories did not unite in their demands.

MAWU has made various attempts to overcome this problem, as for instance in the campaign on the East Rand against retrenchment: this campaign was conducted through shop steward councils. However it has become clear that MAWU needs a focus around which workers could unite in their demands. Industry wide bargaining is needed for this level of mobilisation of members.

MAWU needs to mobilise its members as a mass union and to unite them across factories. The employers are solidly united behind SEIFSA while the unions are divided along racial, political and occupational lines. Most of the unions have aligned themselves in support of the Industrial Council. So at this time, the Industrial Council will have to be the focus for mobilisation.

With 200 organised factories MAWU has to rely more and more on the shop steward councils. The union cannot any longer rely only on the structure in each factory. To dominate the industry MAWU will need to organise a large fraction at least of the 1,000 major factories in the industry out of a total of about 8,000 factories.

So strategies to work as a mass union are of crucial importance.

Moreover, the Industrial Council is more and more taking over demands made by MAWU to individual employers. These demands have

been hijacked and mishandled by the Council. These demands include:

- minimum R2 per hour
- retrenchment procedures
- layoffs instead of retrenchment
- recognition of shop stewards
- recognition agreements and dispute procedures
- bargaining in industrial sectors

Whether MAWU likes it or not the minimum conditions of employment are negotiated annually in the Industrial Council. Some of the unions now in the Council claim to speak for black workers. It is necessary to establish clearly that only MAWU and the very few other unions in the metal industry with similar policies are the only true representatives of the oppressed workers.

MAWU will review its decision to enter the Industrial Council at regular short intervals and will withdraw if necessary. Besides entering the Council, MAWU is also developing strategies to build its power in the industry. During 1983 the union has resolved to concentrate on organising and consolidating a few sectors of the metal industry in order to reach a dominant position.

MAWU will also continue to build its structures to face employers at all levels:

- in the factory
- joint company shop steward councils
- local shop steward councils
- shop steward councils for different sectors

25th March 1983

Collective Bargaining

An article by Anna Scheepers from Labour Mirror, Vol 2 No 13, June/July 1982, official newspaper of the Trade Union Council of South Africa.

Collective Bargaining can take on different forms. There can be collective bargaining on a factory or shop floor basis, industry-wide negotiations or through the legally provided means of collective bargaining at Conciliation Board meetings and, of course, the best known collective bargaining — that at industrial council level.