

A LOOK AT THE OPEN TRADE UNIONS:

METAL AND ALLIED WORKERS' UNION (DURBAN).

The Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) was formed on the 28th April 1973, and at present has branches in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. At the time of its formation, it was the first open trade union in Natal. The Durban branch has 15 executive members and employs three officials - a secretary/organiser, organiser and a clerk/typist.

The present membership of the Durban branch is 2327, distributed in the Iron and Steel, as well as the Motor industries. The union is well established in the following firms; Leyland, Defy Industries, Non-Ferrous Metal Works, Glacier Bearings, Lawsons Auto diesel, Rowen, G.U.D. Smith Industries and many others. These firms have regular meetings with the union officials and have permitted the election of shop-stewards, who attend courses conducted by the union and offered by the Institute for Industrial Education.

MAWU has no existing contact with the Industrial Council for the industry. It can participate informally in the Industrial Council only if the Boilermakers' Union (registered) and the Steel and Engineering Federation of South Africa agree to this. As yet this has not occurred though MAWU is attempting to narrow the rift.

The union is related to the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund in that this body provides doctor and funeral benefits for the union members. There is also a relationship between this union and the other local unregistered, open trade unions situated at Central Court and Bolton Hall. This relationship takes the form of discussions, consultation and the formulation of policy, which takes place at the meetings of the Trade Union Advisory and Coordinating Council. T.U.A.C.C. also provides a forum for consultation and discussions with members of the Kwazulu Government.

The MAWU has contacts with various International organisations for example, the British Trade Union Congress and the I.L.O. It has applied for membership to the International Metal Workers' Federation.

The union has received invaluable assistance from the Garment Workers' Industrial Union (registered), in the form of accommodation, stationery, bookkeeping etc. The union officials feel that without this assistance, it would have been impossible to set MAWU on its feet. The Secretariat facilities offered by the Central Administrative Services have also enabled the union to achieve semi-independence in a relatively short time.

Attempts to break the ice with some employers have been in vain. The failure in this sphere is a result of the influence of the Department of Labour, which acts as an unofficial advisor to management. The officials are not disheartened by this because they feel that the open trade unions are here to stay, as all responsible employers will realise. However, attempts to contact emp-

ployers by means of letters have received little response. This negative attitude is most manifest in firms like Caravan International, Lawsons Auto-diesel, Glacier Bearings, Smith Industries and Leyland Motor Corporation, where an uncertain relationship between management and workers exists.

The following are some of the problems faced by MAWU;

- a) Stop-order facilities are withheld by management so that subscription fees have to be collected separately from each individual. This wastes a lot of the officials' time. A system was introduced whereby shop-stewards do this job, but this was found to have complications, for example, the loss of contact with the members.
- b) The union has recruited members from factories where conditions of work were bad, low wages were paid and no channel for communication between the workers and the employer existed. Once membership was consolidated, management frequently improved its attitude to workers with the result that workers began to lose interest in their membership of the union.

METAL AND ALLIED WORKERS' UNION (PIETERMARITZBURG).

The Pietermaritzburg branch of the MAWU was formed on the 9th of June 1973. In the short space of one year it has built up a membership of 1556 workers distributed over 55 factories. The union employs two full time organisers.

The significant aspect of the union membership is that it includes workers in the motor repair industry and also workers from a large rubber plant in Howick. To understand this aspect of the union structure, cognizance must be taken of the fact that MAWU and the other T.U.A.C.C. unions grew largely because of the pressure exerted by the workers for trade unions. At the meeting where MAWU was formed, workers from the rubber plant and motor repair shops called on the Metal workers to include them under their wing. This did create organisational problems but the union has been able to partly overcome these due largely to the well developed and high level of consciousness shown by workers at this particular rubber plant. This is partly a consequence of the fact that there was a union covering these workers in the late fiftys and early sixtys, but which disintegrated as a result of the banning of its leaders.

The MAWU in the initial stages of its formation was given a great deal of support from the secretary of the Engineering Union, Mr. Norman Middleton, but from subsequent developments, it would seem not from his union. MAWU also has a relationship with the registered, Boilermakers' Union of South Africa. Collaboration with this union grew out of the fact that a large number of the MAWU membership comes from Hullett's Aluminium, which is also the focal

point of the Boilermakers' Union in Pietermaritzburg.

Early last year the Boilermakers were entering into negotiations for a technical schedule and the MAWU approached the Boilermakers and the firm concerned, requesting the union's participation. The Boilermakers supported MAWU's admission but the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel and Engineering industry refused to allow it to participate, without directly informing it of their decision. It had taken legal opinion on the matter, the gist of which was that the Industrial Council is "a master of its own destiny"; it can include or exclude whoever it desires. It decided to exclude MAWU.

The union's branch executive committee has now decided that it should have direct negotiations with the Boilermakers who would then represent it in the Industrial Council when it sits to discuss the technical schedule later this year. The union hopes to further strengthen its relationship with the Boilermakers and also try and open negotiations with other registered unions, for example, the Iron and Steel and Engineering Industrial union.

MAWU has after a great deal of struggle been able to gain access to management at Hulett's aluminium. Its relationship has developed to a point where it is now negotiating for total recognition. The union officials are sure that they will be successful with this particular factory and thus gain victory for the workers' movement. The union is, at present involved in opening negotiations with the management at Sarmcol the Rubber plant in Howick. Last month its request to meet management was favourably received but unfortunately there have been some changes in the top management and the union has had to make approaches to the new managing director for an interview.

The management at Sarmcol has been conducting a campaign to force the workers to elect a liaison committee. The entire workers' force of African, Indian and Coloured workers have stood firmly rejecting the concept of liaison committees and have asked for the recognition of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union.

The struggle for recognition in a number of other factories has been pursued with all the means available to the union. Some form of liaison does exist with management especially with regard to the solving of complaints.

The officials of the union feel that after one year of existence, great strides have been made in the general education of workers and in gaining partial recognition from management. They feel, however, that the task facing them at the moment is to strengthen the shop-steward system.

NATIONAL UNION OF TEXTILE WORKERS.

The National Union of Textile Workers was formed on the 25th September 1973. In the 8 months of its existence it has recruited more than 5,000 workers. That is, it has already drawn approximately 25% of all textile workers in the area.

There have been two major responses to this growth; a negative one and a positive one. The basis of the negative response is the premise that the Textile Union is ultimately a threatening body. The State has persisted in this approach, banning four people in January. Recently the State seems to have adopted a policy of technical opposition to the activities of the union, for example a pass raid on the union offices. The officials of the union feel that such harassment has the indirect, positive effect of enhancing their awareness of these technicalities. The positive response is that management, in a substantial number of firms, has begun to take a more accepting attitude to the union. Smith and Nephew and S.A. Fabrics in particular have shown an openness to the open trade union which is to be commended. At Smith and Nephew negotiations for an agreement have reached a final stage. One of the benefits negotiated, namely a joint attendance/length of service bonus will be introduced as from the 24th June 1974. The union expects that the agreement will be signed within the next week or two. S.A. Fabrics have given the union free access to the factory at all times and will negotiate an agreement with the union as soon as it has concluded the agreement with Smith and Nephew.

The general feeling of the union officials is that this attitude will increasingly become more prevalent amongst employers. The contacts which the union has established with the management of various other firms, has not been unrewarding on the level of individual worker complaints. The union hopes that, with time and effort this will be extended to include more general discussions on wages and working conditions.

THE FURNITURE AND TIMBER WORKERS' UNION.

This union started in February 1974 and has a present membership of just under 300 in an industry where the potential is about 4 000 members. At the moment the potential is relatively small since Africans in this industry are outnumbered 3:1 by other racial groups. The main response has been from the Timber section where the following factories provide most of the membership; Blaikie and Johnstone, Rhodesian Timbers, Hillman Brothers, and Marshall Timbers. The Furniture workers have been slow to respond, mainly because the majority of these workers joined the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund in 1972 or early 1973, thinking that it was a union. They were subsequently disappointed that no negotiations for improvements were undertaken and they lost some faith in the idea of a union. In the Furniture section Aristocraft, Huski and Greaves and Thomas have shown most response.

The union receives moral and practical help from the Furniture and Allied Workers' Industrial Union (Natal) though financial support is limited to the use of the telephone and minor stationery. The registered union supports its unregistered counterpart and accepts the principle of open membership, but is restricted by the law. Some officials of the registered union however give priority to the protection of the interests of their members.

The union has one organiser who started work in April. His salary is being paid by C.A.S. for the first three months. The Acting-Secretary is a voluntary worker, who also assists the registered union. After an initial general meeting, an acting-executive committee, known as the 'care-taker committee', was established consisting of a delegate and an alternate delegate from each factory where interest in the union has been shown.

The union members fall under two agreements; the Furniture Agreement for Natal and the Building Agreement for Durban. At the fortnightly care-taker committee meetings, instruction on basic trade union principals is given and discussion of the agreements takes place.

The union's acting-secretary and organiser, and the organiser of the registered union have been visiting management in the Furniture industry to gauge response to the union and to build up good relationships. Their response has been wary and cautious. The union is planning a meeting of all employers in the Furniture section and hopes to approach the Industrial Council on the basis of recognition from the employers, so that some status on the Council can be attained, even if initially only as observers.

As yet the union has not made any contact with the Furniture Workers' International body, though this is being arranged.

The organiser visits distant factories on his way to the office in the morning and nearby factories at lunch hour so the union does not experience serious transport problems. The organiser's activities for the Furniture and Timber Union have been hampered by his having to handle complaints and moneys for two other unions which are just starting, the Chemical Union and the Transport and General Union. Apart from this hindrance which shall shortly be overcome, the organiser has been visited by the Special Branch at his home. Their attempts to intimidate him have been unsuccessful.

THE UNION OF CLOTHING AND ALLIED WORKERS.

This union was formed on the 30th August 1973 and at present has a membership of 974, distributed over 55 factories in and around Durban. The total number of African workers in the entire industry in Natal is approximately 1,100.

The Africans in the industry are covered by an Industrial Council

Agreement which provides a sick benefit to all its members after three months employment. In May all workers in the industry received a 25% increase in wages.

The union has an executive of 12 members. Shop-stewards have been established in most factories, the number shop-stewards in each depending on the number of workers.

This union has established a good working relationship with the registered Garment Workers' Union. In the initial stages of its formation it received financial and other forms of assistance. The union also has a close contact with the Industrial Council. The union officials believe that the union will receive stop-order facilities in all factories in the near future, because of their close collaboration with the registered union and the sympathetic attitude of management in the Garment industry. The Union of Clothing and Allied Workers have experienced a more sympathetic response from management than that received by other open unions. This attitude was also manifested in 1972 when management granted stop-order facilities for the Benefit Fund. Thus this union has overcome one of the most difficult obstacles to its establishment. The union is affiliated to the International Federation of Garment Textile and Leather Workers' Union.

While this union has had to contend with the interference of the Special Branch and the Department of Labour, the problems which it has to face are to a large extent dissimilar to those faced by the other open trade unions.

CHEMICAL WORKERS' INDUSTRIAL UNION.

This union has been accepting members since the end of 1973 most of which are at A.N.C.I. (African Explosives). As yet no organisation has been undertaken. The Chemical workers who come to join are advised to push for a high percentage membership in their factory (at least 50%) as the union will not start any attempt at negotiating with management until this level has been reached. This policy of workers organising themselves has been necessary because the union has had no organiser. However, it has proven to be highly successful and the workers are extremely enthusiastic about it.

The Furniture and Timber Workers' Union staff have been handling the moneys and minor problems. The union has about 600 members. An organising secretary, a former worker, is shortly to assume full-time operations. The workers in this industry seem very keen on being unionised so that one can expect this union to grow rapidly.

GENERAL FACTORY WORKERS' BENEFIT FUND.

The General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund was formally established on the 9th September 1972. The workers elected their executive committee consisting of 20 members most of whom are from the Clothing and Furniture industries. The executive committee holds its meetings every three months except in cases of emergency when special meetings are held. The Fund employs 11 people, at both the Durban and Pietermaritzburg offices, one of whom is on voluntary basis.

The membership of the Fund stands at approximately 18,000 excluding members of the unions who are covered in funeral benefits. In all, there are approximately 22,000 members. These members come from more than 150 different industries.

During the first year of operation, the Fund used the Garment Workers' Union offices free of charge, and only in the second year was it charged rent. Since its formation it has been dependent on an accountant who is paid by the Garment Union.

On the 31st of January 1974 Mr. David Davis, an administrative officer of the Fund, was banned and prohibited from working in any trade union movement. Individual members of the Fund have been visited periodically by members of the Security Police who have attempted to intimidate workers and officials. Apparently some went to the extent of promising large sums of money to spy and disrupt the Fund. On the 20th May 1974, the C.I.D. (Commercial Branch) visited the Fund's offices, both in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. They produced search warrants alleging that the Fund was an unregistered Friendly Society. All the Fund's records were confiscated and have not yet been returned. The officials of the Fund are considering finding a possible alternative form of registration in case the application for registration in terms of the Friendly Societies Act is completely rejected. The possible alternative is to have the Fund underwritten by an insurance company.