

# Editorial

During the past months, a number of new political organisations have been formed. Some aim at specific constituencies (indians, students, the youth). Others, like the United Democratic Front and the National Forum, are co-ordinating bodies comprised of member organisations.

There are differences between many of these organisations - in membership, structure, ideology and aims. Yet the context in which they have emerged is the same - one of explicitly political opposition to apartheid and its implications, based on intended mass mobilisation and organisation.

Naturally enough, the formation of a new set of institutions has not been without conflict, as old political allegiances have been carried into the present. Thus, various black consciousness tendencies seem evident in the National Forum, while the style of the provincial United Democratic Fronts has been influenced by a Congress perspective, often based on support of the Freedom Charter.

New organisations are competing for members, prominence and resources. They feel weak and vulnerable, especially to possible state action against them. It is thus understandable that they are not all equally open to scrutiny, debate and criticism. Yet if the opening up of a new democratic political era is to be real - if political democracy on the left is to have substance - then debate and assessment of what is occurring is necessary.

South Africa lacks a strong or developed democratic tradition. This has sometimes allowed leaders to act without mandate or constituency, accountability or responsibility. This has tended to weaken mass activity and organisation. Too often the absence of debate and criticism, assessment and response, has been justified on the grounds that its presence is too dangerous in a repressive society. Yet if a period of legal and open mass politics is upon us, old ways may not be the most appropriate ones.

This is the context in which WIP has published three contributions dealing with some of the questions relevant to political organisation. There is no collective position or 'line' in these articles, and they represent different tendencies in the emerging debate. Questions of class and race, ethnicity and nation are discussed, and the issue of forms of organisation appropriate to the current situation are also raised.

Debate between contending parties and interests is to be welcomed, and will hopefully continue. This can only serve to deepen political democracy. Importantly, though, it must be noted that in opening its columns to these different positions, WIP is not endorsing everything that appears in the publication. Indeed, given the differences in positions adopted, this would not be possible.

It is early days in the attempts to establish more solid foundations to open political organisation than existed in the past decade. If the experience of the independent labour movement is anything to go by, the process of consolidating organisation and edging towards political unity will be a slow and difficult one. Yet at all times during this, the right of debate and criticism, both from within and without political organisations, needs to be retained if democracy is to be more than a slogan for manipulation.