

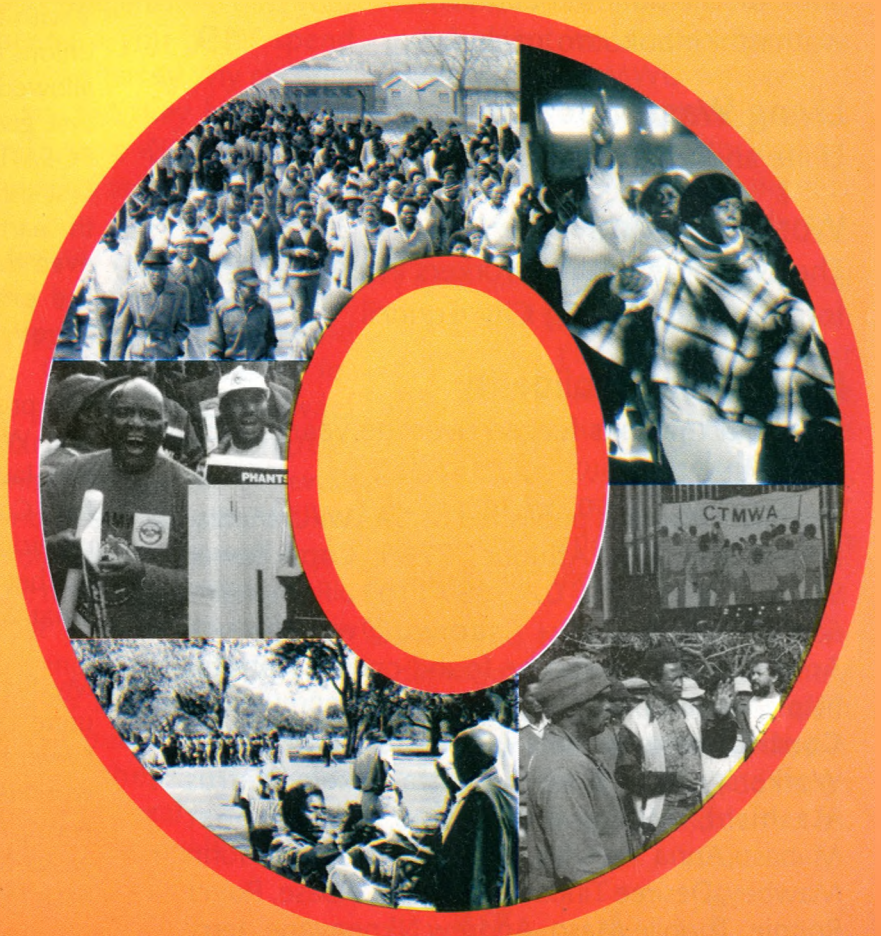
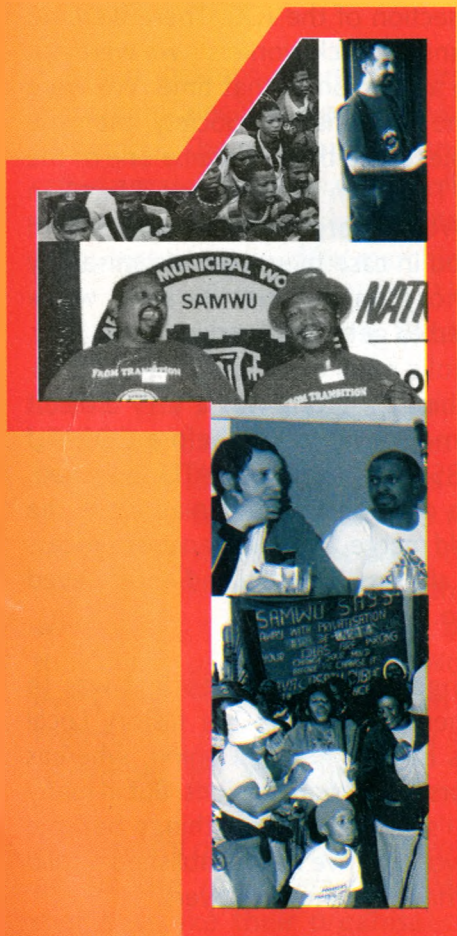
WORKERS NEWS

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NOVEMBER 1997 THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPAL WORKERS UNION

1987-1997



Special tenth anniversary edition

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Comrade Petrus Mashishi, SAMWU's President since our launching Congress in 1987, looks back over the past ten years...

I started with the municipality in 1970 as a plumber with the technical section of the JCC. There were no unions then that organised Black workers - we were not allowed to belong to any union at that time. We were first given help by the Industrial Aid Society, then the FOSATU Workers Project, and then I became one of the first shopstewards in TGWU in 1980. It was difficult in the early days of TGWU - other workers would be afraid even to sit next to you in case they were victimised by the employer. In those days there were no wage negotiations - we used to get a 20c increase.

The process in launching SAMWU was a very difficult one. We started the merger talks even before COSATU was launched in 1985. But when COSATU launched, that Congress took a decision that organisations in the municipal sector should merge. It was not an easy process but because we were all for unity in the end we achieved what we set out to do.

My first main challenge as SAMWU President was to unite Local Government workers. In our history Local Government workers had no national union, whereas workers in other sectors had national unions. But in many ways, after SAMWU's first Congress, things became easier for municipal workers. We had established a solid base from which to challenge the employers.

Many historical events have happened during my term as President. The 1993 strike was the first time that municipal workers had ever waged a national strike.

Message from the president

It brought change in Local Government. Although this strike was a success for the organisation, we suffered losses. Many workers were dismissed and many workers suffered injuries at the hands of the security forces. This strike forced the employers to take us seriously.

Another strike took place in 1995. Here again we had casualties. Workers were shot and beaten by police in places like Pietersburg, Kuruman, Bethlehem. We have workers in Groblersdal who were dismissed during that strike who have not been re-instated to this day. We have tried our best, and will continue to try.

A funny incident during my term was when Cdes Tom Ngoben, Mike Mthemba, Themba Khumalo and I called a march in Pretoria. The police station commander asked us how many workers would be marching, and Cde Tom replied "40 thousand!" When it came to the day of the march, the army lined a long street. The soldiers were heavily armed and barricaded both sides of the street. But when the march started, we were only 150! So the soldiers were far more than the marchers! The police said that they were going to sue SAMWU, but they ended up doing nothing. Now every time we want to march in Pretoria, this station commander still remembers this incident.

As President of SAMWU, I feel great about the members. SAMWU members like their organisation. Wherever you go they are proud about their trade union. Even in areas where service to members is

weak, those members are still proud of their union. The Union came in as a saviour to many workers, taking into account the conditions we used to work under.

I always believe that if you are elected by people they should not be afraid to talk to you. I don't like it when a President is above the workers, and the workers are not permitted to say anything about their President. You have to be open to criticism, and that is the only way you can be built by others.

I enjoy being a trade unionist first and foremost, but it is not an easy job to be a President. You miss your family because you never spend time with your family. My children have grown but they have never spent much time with me, except at night when I arrive home late.

I think SAMWU will grow more and more. We have grown since our launch by over 100 thousand members. One of the reasons for this huge growth is that we always have a target at every Congress. During this period we didn't have a target, and that is why we did not grow so much. We need now to say that by the next Congress we should be at least 150-180 thousand in SAMWU, and make sure that we work hard to target that number. We also need public sector unity to make sure there is proper restructuring of Local Government and also to rid the public sector of corruption.

Although corruption is not a new thing - it has been there for years but we need to come together to

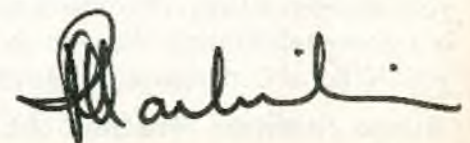
make sure that we instill that discipline within all workers in the public sector, even those that are not our members. We must make sure that all corruption in Local Government is rooted out, especially those workers in traffic departments.

There are corrupt elements in every traffic department in this country. We need to build an image that will gain us respect from those communities that we are supposed to serve.

Most of our members understand that SAMWU is opposed to privatisation. Once the state assets are in the hands of the private sector, government will be dependent on business. As SAMWU we say that we need a strong state to lead us, instead of the private sector leading. This will be one of our biggest challenges in the next few years.

I have an important message to all municipal workers on our tenth anniversary. I would like to say that we need to improve our service delivery and make sure that we are closer to our communities. Communities must understand our problems and we must also understand their problems.

We need to make sure that we democratise our union. Where there are weaknesses, members must make sure that those weaknesses are addressed. If we don't do things correctly, workers should correct us.



PRESIDENT OF SAMWU

UNISON

UNISON sends greetings of solidarity to SAMWU on the historic occasion of your 10th anniversary, combined with your 5th Congress. We are immensely proud of the long tradition of friendship and solidarity which has existed between our two organisations. During that time, we have seen how our sisters and brothers have grown in strength and how much they have contributed to the building of a new South Africa. The challenges which SAMWU and its members are facing are similar to those we face. The global economy means that it is more important than ever that the trade union movement across the world presents a united front in order to fight against the constant threats against our livelihoods. We look forward to joining with SAMWU to defend our public services and the rights of our members. We hope that the next ten years will bring an ever closer friendship between our two organisations, ever stronger and more fruitful. Congratulations and long live the SAMWU/UNISON friendship!

John McFadden, President

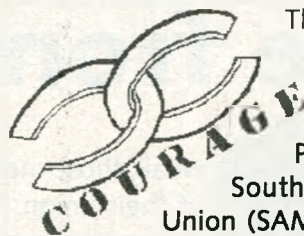
Rodney Bickerstaffe, General Secretary



On the occasion of the 5th National Congress of the South African Municipal

Workers Union and your 10th Anniversary, we would like to congratulate you and send our message of solidarity from Japan. On behalf of one million members of JICHIRO, the All Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Union, I would like to pay our sincere respect to your union for the role you have played in abolishing apartheid and to bring democracy into the Republic of South Africa. We shall continue to support and extend our solidarity with your union in leading your struggle to further democratise your country, protect human rights, improve public services and increase jobs. Meanwhile, we are in the same family under the Public Services International whose 26th World Congress is going to be held in Yokohama in November. The Japanese affiliates of PSI are working hard to prepare for hosting the Congress and to welcome our colleagues from all over the world. We are looking forward to seeing your representatives in Yokohama soon and confirming our strong relationship. We wish you all the success in your National Congress as well as your work in future.

Tsuneo Enomoto, President, JICHIRO (All Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Union)



The Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE-Philippines) warmly salutes the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) on its 10th anniversary celebration and convening of your 5th Congress.

Militancy, patriotism and progressiveness are still relevant for our cause in these challenging times. The imperialist attacks on our salaries, security of tenure and full union democratic rights are widespread around the world due to globalization. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) are being imposed by the International Monetary Fund-World Bank (IMF-WB), and the General Agreement on Tariffs & Trades-World Trade Organization (GATT-WTO), at the expense of the oppressed and exploited peoples. The impact of privatization of state assets, liberalization of trade & investment, and industry deregulation has brought more havoc than real development to the poor people of the world.

Warm and militant greetings from our international comrades

Privatization attacks the economic condition of the public sector workers and paves the way for contractualization and casualization of labor. The flexible labor policy is a direct assault to the real salary/wage of the workers. When people protest these, the state's answers are repression and psy-war! With these situations, public sector workers, along with the workers in the private sector, should link with the sectors of their societies to bring about meaningful structural change in their countries. Furthermore, it should build international solidarity with other workers of the world and strengthen its ranks through sharing of each other condition and analyses. Let us remain vigilant in solidarity, consolidate ourselves for a higher level of unity and the challenges ahead.

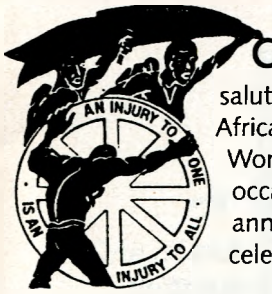
Long Live International Solidarity!

Long Live the Peoples of South Africa and the Philippines!

"Mabuhay Ang Uring Anak-pawis!"

Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees

37-A, Tomas Morato Avenue, Quezon City, PHILIPPINES



COSATU

salutes the South African Municipal Workers Union on the occasion of its tenth anniversary celebrations.

Throughout its proud history, SAMWU has helped develop, and in practice, stuck to the principles, traditions, values and moral standards that have helped the progressive trade union movement of our country grow from strength to strength since its re-emergence in 1973. These proud traditions include internal democracy, open debate, selflessness and a total commitment to the working class struggle. They include a willingness to sacrifice and a leadership style which is based on an understanding that leaders are servants of the membership, rather than kings and queens who must be served by members. COSATU wants to thank SAMWU's leadership - past and present - and its entire membership for keeping these cultures alive, not only within SAMWU, but within the federation as a whole.

SAMWU has become one of the most militant trade unions in the country. Over the past ten years, and under extremely difficult conditions, SAMWU has fought countless battles to improve the wages and working conditions of all municipal workers; participated in the broader

liberation struggle and in deepening transformation. Above all, SAMWU has remained steadfast in its commitment to improve the quality of our people's lives through meeting their basic needs like water and sanitation, among other things. We salute your struggles to strengthen and defend the role of the state in the productive sector of our economy and in struggling for a better life for our people where they live. Your battles to defend the state's role in the provision of peoples' basic needs against the profit-chasing private sector, is a historic role that should not be underestimated.

We trust you shall continue with the revolutionary project you are already engaged in. Your phenomenal membership growth is itself a tribute to the victories you have scored. SAMWU has united municipal workers across the country through mergers.

Within the space of just ten years, you have become the only credible voice of South Africa's municipal workers.

Your congress, which takes place so soon after COSATU's national congress,



should confront squarely the challenges facing the union. As municipal workers, you are at the frontline of delivery. As municipal workers you have a critical role to play in destroying the legacy of apartheid and in transforming the public sector to meet the needs of our people. You know that democracy at the local level can only have concrete meaning for our people if local government is transformed into vehicles of delivery of basic necessities like water, sanitation, refuse removal, clinics, schools and infrastructure.

It is you who can give real meaning to the Masakhane campaign. We need to build the capacity of the local government political office bearers and functionaries. We need to ensure that these representatives of our people remain true to their mandates and to the RDP. We need to deepen democracy at a local level and ensure that our people are not just spectators in the transformation process. In the communities where we live and work, we need to build mass organisations and join hands with our allies to make our struggle for a better life a reality. These are some of the challenges your congress has to confront. The stakes are high. You dare not fail.

Happy Birthday SAMWU combatants! Zwelinzima Vavi, Assistant General Secretary, on behalf of the National Office Bearers

Z.U.C.W.U.

Dear Comrades,

On behalf of our National Executive and General Council Members and indeed the entire rank and file members of ZUCWU, I want to congratulate SAMWU's 10th anniversary celebrations. We salute the achievements scored by SAMWU in the last decade and hope the anniversary will serve as platform to take stock of those achievements. Your sacrifice for the struggle of liberation of South Africa cannot be ignored and it is the same sacrifice which must be taken by all workers to achieve political economy of our various countries. Happy Birthday SAMWU! Forward Ever, Backward Never! Yours in workers' struggle

S.M. Chiroba, General Secretary, Zimbabwe Urban Councils Workers' Union (Z.U.C.W.U.)

SACTWU

Dear Comrades,

On behalf of the President, National Office Bearers and members of the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union, we would like to take this opportunity to convey our fraternal greetings and well wishes to you on this memorable day, your 5th National Congress and also the tenth anniversary of your union. We wish you well in your deliberations on the days of your Congress and hope you grow from strength to strength. Viva Umsebenzi Viva! Viva SAMWU Viva! Viva COSATU Viva!

**Jabu Ngcobo, General Secretary
Southern African Clothing and Textile
Workers' Union**





Durban Corporation workers on strike in 1973 - these strikes started the ball rolling for the resurgence of trade unionism in later years

The early years

The roots of the SAMWU of today are complicated by the fact we are a product of mergers as well as recruitment. There is probably no union in COSATU which has such a variety of union roots. Two of these unions, the CTMWA and DIMES were around for many years before SAMWU was formed - the CTMWA from at least 1928, DIMES from 1935. So we also have some very old roots.

But the developments which gave rise to SAMWU are located in the 1970's and 1980's and in the new unions which developed in this period. It was the new spirit of militancy and struggle forged by these unions that changed the labour movement in South Africa, causing older unions to come alive after many years of mainly conservative existence.

The surge in organisation in the early 1980's accompanied the state's attempts to under cut unregistered black unions through its Wiehahn reforms. It was also these reforms and their meaning which provoked heated debate between different union centres. The debates centred largely around whether unions should register and take advantage of the amended law, or remain unregistered and reject what was clearly an attempt by the state to tame unions.

As youth and community struggles increased, debates grew about the relationship between workplace and community struggle and affiliation to the UDF which was formed in 1982. Comrades took positions either for or against adoption of the Freedom Charter as the guiding document of the struggle. There were workers supporting the view that liberation was a struggle in two phases. These workers thought that the national democratic revolution should be given priority, and only after that would a socialist revolution be possible. There were others who believed that the focus should be on building a direct path to socialism. But no one foresaw the negotiated transfer of power that came to pass in the 1990's.

It was from unions and parts of unions with differing histories and positions on these issues that SAMWU was to emerge. What was the background of these founding unions?

→
*One of the
 1980
 BMWU
 strikers is
 herded
 out of Selby
 Compound
 by soldiers for
 deportation
 to Lebowa.*



Looking back at 1973

Municipal workers played a prominent role in the 1973 Durban strikes but did not follow through to consolidate this in trade unions. Efforts to organise in the 1970's focused on building manufacturing industry unions. There were, however, always some municipal workers who were members of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU).

In 1979, TGWU started organising in Johannesburg after being approached by Petrus Mashishi and comrades who were seeking help to retain their rights to be treated as artisans and not "homeland artisans". TGWU was an affiliate of FOSATU and decided in 1980 to register in the belief that this would gain them organisational space.

TGWU only applied for registration once the state had backed down in its attempt to restrict union rights to township residents and exclude migrant workers. It also, with FOSATU, made it a pre-condition that

it be granted non-racial registration. By 1987, TGWU could justify its decision by its successful consolidation of organisation together with a consistent pattern of militancy - not least amongst municipal bus drivers in Natal. By the time of the merger it had gained recognition in several smaller municipalities in Natal

Shattering the silence

In general, municipal workers did not get organised in the 1970's. In 1980 in Johannesburg workers shattered the silence. In late 1979 the JCC tried to move ahead of workers by imposing an in-house sweetheart union - the Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers (UJMW). In response, Joe Mavi, Phillip Dlamini and others set up an independent Black Municipal Workers Union (BMWU.)

The BMWU had hardly begun recruiting when workers at Orlando Power station went on strike over wages and were immediately dismissed. Over the next 7 days the

strike spread to all 11 000 of the hostel based migrant workers employed by JCC. Many workers will still remember the harsh treatment meted out to the strikers. Dismissed workers were bussed back to the "homelands" under police guard. It is a reminder of how difficult it was to organise in these times and how repressive conditions were.

After the strike, BMWU split. Phillip Dlamini went on to set up the South African Black Municipal Workers Union (SABMWU). In 1982 BMWU changed its name to the Municipal and General Workers Union of South Africa (MGWUSA) and then in 1985 to the Municipal Workers Union of South Africa (MWUSA) when it merged with a union of the same name which had been set up in Natal.

MWUSA rejected registration and affiliated to the UDF. Its main membership base was in Johannesburg and surrounding areas, but it also had some members in Natal, the Orange Free State and Northern Cape.

Risings in the East

A third founding member of SAMWU came from municipal workers who were members of the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU). In 1980, SAAWU took East London by storm with a wave of strikes in all industries. SAAWU based its organisational style on the power of workers and that alone. It rejected registration as amounting to declaring allegiance to the state. It insisted on the inseparability of workplace and community struggle and was a key affiliate of the UDF. It was to prove that registration was not an obstacle to recognition. By the time of SAMWU's launch it had expanded and had municipal members in the Western Cape and the old Transvaal.

Finally, there was GWUSA in Port Elizabeth which at a late stage began organising in the Port Elizabeth Municipality. GWUSA was linked to MCWUSA which was an auto workers union formed by workers who split off from the FOSATU automobile union. It were also affiliated to the UDF.

The Core Founder

It was the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA) which dominated the process of launching SAMWU. The CTMWA had an early history of being a very conservative union. However, in 1964 CTMWA was taken over by a progressive grouping lead by John Ernstzen and John Bosch who set about cleaning up corruption and breathing new life into its work.

But the general climate in South Africa remained too repressive to bring about a new spirit of mobilisation for many years. That changed with the 1980's and CTMWA embarked on a thorough process of mobilisation playing a prominent role in both labour and community struggles in the early 80's. On the wage front CTMWA pursued matters to arbitration in 1984 and in 1987 conducted a successful go slow.

The CTMWA was the core founder union of SAMWU



Politically the CTMWA had decided that it should stick with other unions in the Western Cape, the GWU and FCWU in not affiliating to the UDF, or to the Cape Action League (CAL). It decided that its primary task was to pursue the question of trade union unity. It and its Secretary, John Ernstzen, were to play a key role in the creation of COSATU. From 1985 onwards CTMWA expanded through the Western Cape. Although it represented over 11 thousand workers in Cape Town alone, the CTMWA struggled to achieve recognition elsewhere during this period.

Merging or not?

For those involved in the sector meetings from October 1985 through to the launch in 1987, the merge seemed to be a "stop-start" process. In fact, from March 1986 to March 1987 no merge meetings took place at all!

One reason for this was that the second State of Emergency had been declared in July 1986 and there were widespread detentions - amongst them many comrades

from MWUSA and SAAWU. But this was not the only cause of delay. Centrally, all unions were caught up in their own affairs; suspicious and demanding clear information before proceeding.

In February 1987 the COSATU CEC laid down the law. Unions must merge or face disciplinary action and possible expulsion. The wheels began to turn again, and there was a pre-launch workshop in April. The hope was for a July launch but this was not to be. The unions instead participated in the July COSATU Congress as a municipal sector.

Comrades who were around in these times will surely remember the feeling that SAMWU would never be formed! Although COSATU was firmly established and the policy of establishing industrial unions on the cards, workers were all wondering whether the different unions that would make up SAMWU would ever overcome the antagonisms existing between them.

But they did - and municipal workers over the past ten years have gained enormously from that achievement.

Launching SAMWU

There was little doubt that a new union would be launched on the 24 and 25 of October 1987 when 77 delegates and a few observers assembled in the Harold Lewis Hall in Athlone, Cape Town. For one thing the COSATU CEC had made it clear in February of that year, that any union who did not co-operate in creating and launching new industrial unions would face discipline and probable expulsion from the federation. Secondly if it came to a vote, the CTMWA, could determine the outcome - and everybody knew this. Forty seven delegates were from the CTMWA and only 31 from all of the other unions combined. The only real concern was whether there might be a walk out by one or more parties, or that debate might become so heated as to sour the project from the start.

In the lead up to the launch the assessment of credentials had been tense - with MWUSA's claims being substantially reduced. In addition MWUSA had walking out of the merger talks meeting in August 1987 alleging that TGWU was "poaching their members" in certain local authorities. These two unions were in conflict over members and disagreed on organisational and political issues. It was clear from the nature of resolutions submitted, and all previous discussions, that the issue of union registration, stop-orders, political policy and a variety of more detailed issues to do with how the new union should approach its organising tasks would be at the heart of the debates.

Let us look at how debate unfolded and reflect on the outcome of these debates on the initial years of SAMWU's existence.

The Constitution

It came as something of a surprise when MWUSA opened debate on the question of scope. In merger meetings and in COSATU it had been decided that a union for municipal workers would be launched. In fact, all of the unions had participated as a "municipal sector" in the COSATU Congress in July.

More contentious was a surprise proposal that an Assistant General Secretary be elected. This had never been raised previously. Both CTMWA and TGWU considered it premature for a union of about 15 000 members to have an Assistant General Secretary. In the end it was agreed that the position be included but not filled until a future date.

The constitution provided for a centralised system of finances with all subscriptions being sent to Head Office. This was not contested, but became a bone of contention with ex-MWUSA structures in the years ahead.

The only exception to this was a clause which give sole control of the historic funds and assets of CTMWA to a Cape Town Branch. All of the other unions found this unfortunate but accepted that after 40 years of accumulation the CTMWA's members were being protective. The "nationalisation" of the Cape Town Branches reserves was to be contested for many years to come.

The name and logo provoked strong emotions. The solution on the name was easy as CTMWA gave up on its idea of the National Union of Municipal Workers, deciding to support SAAWU's proposal of SAMWU. Discussion on the logo came at the end of the Congress. Here tempers really flared.

What else could have been expected from tired and irritable people with many kilometres of travel by road ahead of them late on a Sunday afternoon? This matter was eventually resolved at SAMWU's first NEC.

Viva SAMWU and its logo!



Non Racism

The resolution which was adopted at the launching congress stressed that there is "only one human race." That the union would fight discrimination and race classification while also striving to organise all workers irrespective of race. The alternative resolution that had been proposed questioned the role of white intellectuals in the union movement and that they should get on and organise white workers into the union rather than being "controllers or instructors of our national democratic struggle". It was however firm that it should be a "priority to organise workers of all races into the union."

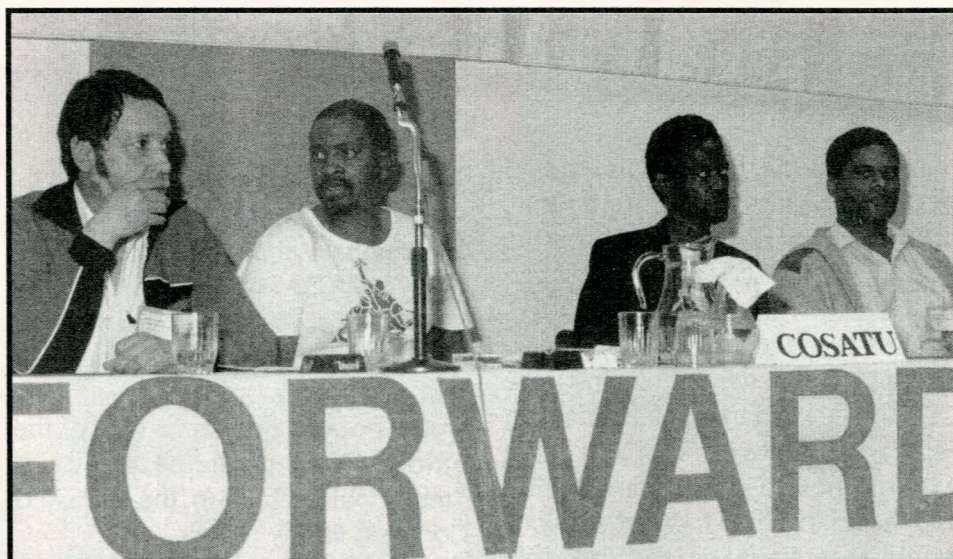
In essence the debate was a continuation of one element of the "workerist" versus "populist" debate. SAAWU was emphasising that the "national revolutionary struggle" consisted of "two inseparable components - national democratic struggle and class exploitation." In response TGWU was to argue about the "struggle for socialist democracy" and question the implied "ethnic organising" proposal.

Have we resolved all of these issues today? It is clear that we remain far short of "non-racial unionism". The working class remains divided. We still need to reflect at length on such questions of race, class and culture, and the form of the struggle.

Registration of the Union

The resolution which proposed that the union register by using CTMWA's registration and changing the name to SAMWU was adopted. SAAWU comrades were to stick to their guns in proclaiming registration equal to "swearing an allegiance to the state".

Within six months, in East London, they were to once again to show the



Elected as the first National Office Bearers of SAMWU at the launching Congress in Cape Town, 1987, were: (from left) John Ernstzen: General Secretary; Petrus Mashishi: President; Joseph Spambo: Vice-President; and Sidney Adams: Treasurer.

pro - registration lobby that it was not a prerequisite for recognition. But with both CTMWA and TGWU being firmly committed to registration, and MWUSA no longer hostile, this issue was quickly resolved. In practice it was to make only a marginal difference with employers. In the coming years they denied the union was registered until it had "varied its scope" to each and every town!

The sting in the tail of this particular resolution however was that it set out in precise terms what each union was to do in integrating their members into the new union. For GWUSA, SAAWU and TGWU it was a matter of transferring their municipal members.

MWUSA however, as a municipal union, was required to dissolve and liquidated and transfer any remaining assets to the new union. This issue of whether or not MWUSA had dissolved, and further issues of accountability to the union on the part of ex- MWUSA officials was to be a central area of conflict in the first 2 and ½ years of SAMWU.

Representivity

Resolutions proposed by TGWU and CTMWA aimed at achieving disciplined organisation were also the subject of much debate at the launching congress. One in particular set out to define how and when a local authority would be recognised as a formal structure of the union for purposes of representation viz. that this would only be on the basis of majority membership in a local authority.

The resolution aimed to prevent the crowding of constitutional structures by unrepresentative leaders who were not supported by a properly organised base.

It was aimed at MWUSA - who naturally resisted. It reflected the concerns at that union's tendency to claim to be organised in various municipalities, when in fact they only had a minority of loosely organised members. It was not however not simply an effort to clip the wings of MWUSA.

TGWU in particular was speaking from its own bitter experiences of how unrepresentative leaders who lacked a base in their workplace could retard effective organisation. The resolution was passed. It was to be critical in the first years in building SAMWU on a firm base.

Organising strategy

The resolution which created the strongest antagonism was on the strategy and tactics of organising in JCC.

After the 1980 strike in JCC, the Council together with JMEA and JMCEU had taken further steps to promote its sweetheart union for black workers - the UJMW. A closed shop was instituted for all unions who were members of its in house Industrial Council. In future all new entrants to its employ would have to join one of the union parties to the Industrial Council.

Migrant workers, who had to renew their contract on an annual basis, would be treated as new entrants. UJMW had a simple mechanism for continued growth. TGWU, MWUSA and any other union trying to organise "from the outside" would have to face up to its members being forced to pay subscriptions to another union at the same time.

MWUSA rejected both registration and industrial councils. TGWU on the other hand was registered. It decided that there could be no progress in JCC unless a majority of workers could be organised on a sustainable basis. This meant going into the Industrial Council and obtaining stop-order rights. In response to management's attempts to close off JCC to "outsiders" they challenged JCC to accept them as "insiders".

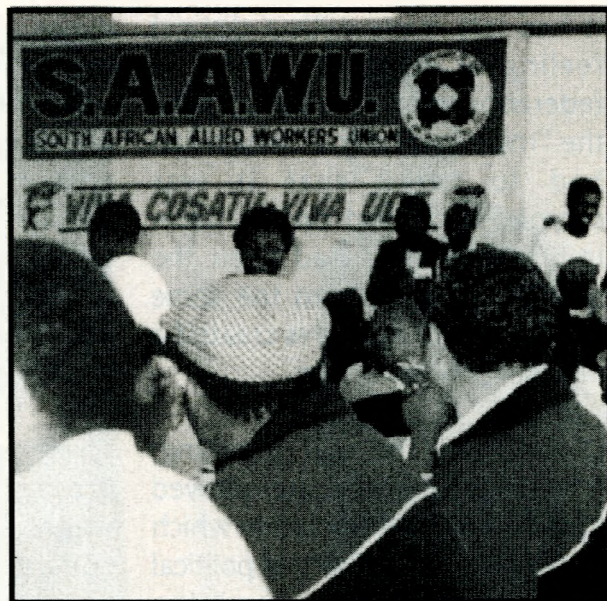
The Council and other unions made every effort to resist, but were caught off guard. TGWU forced its way onto the Industrial Council. It was this approach which TGWU now sought to protect. MWUSA in turn demanded that TGWU withdraw and "stop using its registration".

In the end, with CTMWA mediating, the matter was left unresolved. It was yet another factor in the conflict that would continue to exist for the next 2 and ½ years.

Stop Orders and Subscriptions

In the early 1980's there was a strain of thought which rejected stop-order facilities. It was argued that once a union secured its subscription in this manner it lost contact with its members. In the merger talks some unions, notably MWUSA and SAAWU adopted this position. However in the Congress no one raised the issue. CTMWA, TGWU and GWUSA supported the practice throughout the talks. More controversial was the proposal that subscriptions be based on a percentage.

This was a new issue for trade unions. When it was adopted, with a compromise that those still paying by hand pay a flat rate of R2,00 per month, SAMWU was in advance of most other unions in COSATU. It was an issue which was to take a long time to implement in practice. It has however been critical in sustaining the unions finances and allowing it to "achieve self sufficiency in all respects."



The South African Allied Workers (SAAWU) was one of the founding unions

Political Policy

If the launch had taken place at any earlier date the debates of the key political issues of the day would have been far more heated. Should the union adopt the Freedom Charter as its guiding document? Should it affiliate to the UDF?

The UDF affiliated unions had put up resolutions to this effect. What made the difference was that COSATU had already resolved in July not to affiliate to the UDF, rather it would seek to build a more effective alliance. This issue was therefore agreed on the same basis.

The COSATU debates on the Freedom Charter was between adoption as the guiding document (NUM) versus acknowledging the Freedom Charter as a minimum set of demands but seeking to guide COSATU towards developing a working class programme of action with socialism as its primary task (NUMSA). That debate had been extremely antagonistic.

It had left many with a distinct feeling of division within the federation, none more so than the "municipal sector" which had had to admit that it was completely divided on the issue. In addition there had been the split in CCAWUSA on the same issue. Perhaps all of this created a new spirit of tolerance.

In any event the UDF grouping, after considerable debate, allowed the adoption of a resolution which recognised the diversity of political positions existing amongst the unions' membership and directing that the union once established debate "the Freedom Charter and all other progressive programmes – in order to arrive at a working class understanding of their respective demands."

Events since that time might be thought to have taken us beyond such debates. Yet many of the issues underlying this debate remain with us. The question we need to ask is how thoroughly we have debated political policy since then.

All round agreement

There were of course many other founding resolutions which were endorsed without controversy and have helped to guide SAMWU since then. We demanded the right to strike, and have in most respects achieved this. We resolved to fight discrimination against women.

While partially addressing this within the Union, we have in many respects failed to make

major advances in promoting the employment of women in local government. We noted that municipal workers provided services "considered essential to the well being of urban living areas" and that their remuneration should be based on "the maintenance of social standards" and not profits.

That we would struggle to progressively achieve a living wage. This we have done with considerable success if we remember where we started. Yet we still have employers considering our wages as if they were merely an irritating "cost" rather than a social standard to be set.

"Walls are built brick by brick"

One of the resolutions noted "that we here gathered today represent a very small minority of municipal workers" but that it was "our objective to unite all municipal workers in South Africa."

Today we can certainly be proud of having progressed a very long way towards achieving what we set out to do.

We have organised and recruited, negotiated mergers, and advanced. In every way we have built the wall of which the resolution spoke.

A guide to abbreviations...

South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU)

Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA)

General Workers Union of South Africa (GWUSA)

Durban Integrated Municipal Employees' Society (DIMES)

Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)

Municipal Workers Union of South Africa (MWUSA)

Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)

Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU)

United Democratic Front (UDF)

Johannesburg Municipal Combined Employees Union (JMCEU)

Johannesburg Municipal Employees Association (JMEA)

Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA)

Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers (UJMW)

SAMWU's first General Secretary looks back...

Cde John Ernstzen, General Secretary of SAMWU from 1987 to 1994 talks to our current General Secretary, Roger Ronnie, about the old days...



Ronnie: You were an integral part of the COSATU merger process. Did that experience contribute to the founding of SAMWU?

Ernstzen: In some senses yes. One began to observe that there was a seriousness around uniting workers and ultimately that the interests of workers could best be served if strong organisations were built rather than fragmented components, which permitted the bosses to continue with their divide and rule policies. In that context, being involved in the COSATU launch broadened my horizons because it transformed what many of us had been thinking into a practical reality. But I would hasten to add that some of the mergers were imposed by the National Executive of COSATU, who were at times insensitive to the ideological differences between organisations and their ability and readiness to merge.

Ronnie: You mentioned the different ideological perspectives within the merging unions that would make up SAMWU. Were you always positive that the merger would take place?

Ernstzen: One thing I was very certain of even though it was going to be very traumatic and take a great deal of sacrifice was that some new body would emerge, whether all those groupings became a party to it at the end or not. For example, I was clear in my mind that the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association had outlived its history and that we needed a national perspective.

Ronnie: What main factor brought everyone from the CTMWA fully on board?

Ernstzen: I attribute that to careful planning and broad consultation. Let's make no mistake, many branch and depot meetings were held - often under difficult circumstances - to ensure that everyone was kept informed. Ultimately, it was the whole consultative and information process that brought the whole body on board. One thing that we cannot ignore however, is that our history of closed shops and access to stop order facilities also contributed because there were those who feared losing their benefits.

Ronnie: Was there any defining moment in your memory when you knew that the merger was finally complete?

Ernstzen: When the logo had been adopted, because that was the end product. When everybody finally accepted this picture, I knew we were home.

Ronnie: What were some of the problems in the initial period of SAMWU?

Ernstzen: There were quite a number of problems actually. One was the different approaches by comrades from the different unions to organisation, accountability and discipline. Organisational problems were bound to arise, because it was the first time there was a true national municipal union in South Africa. We had to build branches and regions from the roots up. Also, a few unions had become accustomed to going out on strike quickly, on matters that could have been resolved fairly easily.

This came from their background in those harsh times when black unions were not recognised. There were others of us who argued that the strike weapon was one that should only be ultimately used. There were also ideological difference among us. There were the "Charterists" who pushed very hard for adherence to the Freedom Charter. Then there were "non-Charterists" and a variety of other groupings. A lot of the debates in Congresses and meetings were around political philosophy.

We also faced tremendous resistance to recognition. I remember people like Cde Samuel Pule in Bloemfontein who would stand on a bridge selling SAMWU t-shirts, being harassed by police, yet returning the next day. It was difficult to organise in Bloemfontein. Once Cde Pule and I took a pile of completed union membership forms to Council and were met instead by the security forces, who tore up every one. I saw a lot of suffering in the Transkei, particularly among the women workers. I could go through the country listing problems we encountered!

Ronnie: To build structures, you need money. Yet to get members' subscriptions, you need structures. How did SAMWU overcome this to reach the stage where we are almost completely self sufficient today?

Ernstzen: Fortunately, the old CTMWA did have funds that could be made available to build structures in other parts of the country. Also, workers were extremely willing to sacrifice and also helped raised money through holding union functions. A bit later on the basis of international workers' solidarity, we received donations from international unions.

Ronnie: I joined SAMWU from a union that had been split down the

middle by the Freedom Charter debate, yet I have never seen any sign of a split in SAMWU. How did everyone stay together despite political differences?

Ernstzen: I am not going to be modest, I think I was seen as a unifier because of the role I played in the formation of COSATU. Even though I had my own political outlook, the unity of workers was paramount. I had to walk a very thin line trying to keep everyone together. At most of COSATU's unity talks, the group of seven UDF aligned unions would walk out, leaving the rest of us to sit for hours waiting for them to return. Often that group would refuse to talk to anyone except me, and I would have to convince them to stay with the talks. With SAMWU, it was easier because of the lessons learnt two years earlier. But there were still those people who were hellbent on destruction - even some who would come to meetings with guns in their pockets, ready to start shooting.

Ronnie: What of the struggle of women during your time as General Secretary?

Ernstzen: I take pride in the role I played in the formation of women's committees. I am on record internationally as supporting eradication of gender inequality. During my time in SAMWU, I encouraged women to travel overseas to share experiences with other women workers. I have seen women coming to the forefront of SAMWU over the years, whereas when we started out there was a degree of intimidation, insecurity and because of this women were unwilling to speak up. You would find men even going to the womens' committee meetings just to continue their dominance over women! But now women put male comrades in their place! I abhor sexism, and I encourage

SAMWU women to continue their fight until they are completely emancipated.

Ronnie: What were the highlights of your time with SAMWU?

Ernstzen: I felt a tremendous pride in the organisation we were building. Even though the wages of municipal workers today are far from ideal, I will never forget going into the former Ciskei to negotiate for wages for the first time. Workers were earning R80 per month and we came away with a minimum of R200 per month. I felt ashamed and I thought we would be hung! On the contrary, workers were happy. What it meant for those workers to jump from R80 to R200, we could never really appreciate. That was definitely a highlight to me.

Highlights to me include anything that had a material effect on the lives of workers. Another success story was the converting of many casual workers to permanent employees. Many of those workers had been working in municipalities for many years and yet had never been made permanent. Also, the formation of SAMWU meant that the barriers of race and colour that we had been burdened with all our lives fell away with this new organisation. It is very difficult to pick one highlight.

Ronnie: What were the lowlights of your time with SAMWU?

Ernstzen: There were a number of occasions when I was exhausted. I was constantly recalled from leave. I was away from home for long periods of time, and when I returned I would have to leave almost immediately for another province. I also began to see cliques forming that became regional and this caused me to question whether I still had the stamina to deal with side issues such as these when there were already so many central issues against the employer.

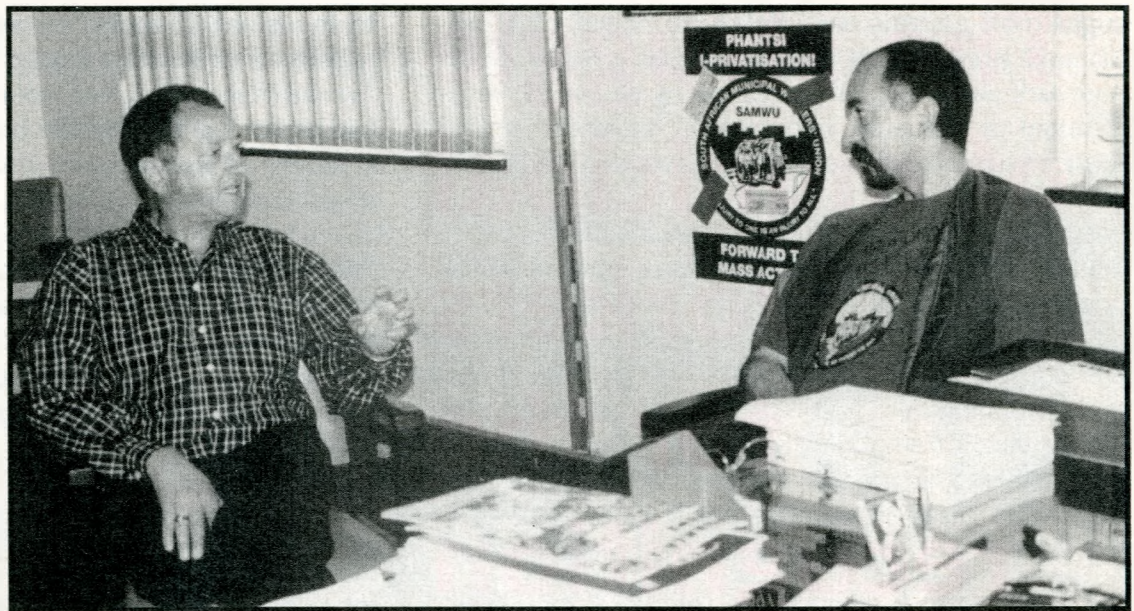
Ronnie: You left the unions at a time when we were in transition to democracy. The decision to leave could not have been an easy one. Was it as a result of the lowlights of your time in SAMWU?

Ernstzen: I was genuinely tired having been in the unions since 1958 - most of that time in the CTMWA before SAMWU was born. I also saw young and competent leaders emerging, and thought it would be a good time to hand over the reins. But I wanted to leave the union honorably so I consulted the NEC, the SAMWU and COSATU office bearers and the merger committee. But had there not been the change to democracy, things may have been different because I wasn't looking for another job at the time - it was government who solicited me.

Ronnie: I would like to think that once a trade unionist, always a trade unionist....

Ernstzen: Yes, being thrust into the role of negotiator for the state was the most traumatic moment in my life. As a former unionist, I often stepped out of line with other negotiators especially when I saw attempts to tamper with mandates. I try to influence labour standards within the public service. For example, I played a role in removing government inequalities in the wages of men and women. I also fought against a State rule that maternity benefits to women workers only cover a certain amount of pregnancies. I try to assist workers.

Ronnie: You were an integral part of the initial merger talks between SAMWU and other public sector



unions POTWA and NEHAWU, but a merger has still not taken place. Did SAMWU use some of the lessons learnt during our own formation in 1987?

Ernstzen: SAMWU certainly did learn from those lessons, and went to great lengths to keep people on board in this merger. I am not sure whether the other unions took it to the same extent. With this merger, there were different factors to consider. With the formation of SAMWU, the only union with any assets was the CTMWA so the money factor wasn't so important in those days. Now SAMWU and the other public sector unions both have finances to consider. Also, remember that the other unions didn't have much experience of merging to learn from.

Ronnie: The post-apartheid period has caught trade unions off balance. What do you think the key challenges are? Do you have any advice for us?

Ernstzen: The challenges now are even greater than before, and they will intensify because of the restructuring of local government and the impact this has on workers. Was

it not for SAMWU, many workers would have already been retrenched. Transfers mean that workers could lose their jobs. We still haven't really transformed...those who come through struggle are not always the most sympathetic as bosses. My advice to SAMWU is to consolidate structures, empower shopstewards, intensify training, and prioritise literacy classes - illiteracy is something that must be done away with to empower workers.

Form cultural clubs and become more comradely. Realise also that pensioners have a role to play in SAMWU whether in a pensioners club, on the picket line or assisting behind the picket line.

Ronnie: A final word?

Ernstzen: My advice to worker leaders and officials is please don't burn out or allow your family life to be disrupted. The family unit is critical and should never be forgotten. If you aren't careful you won't know your own children one day. I am proud to have contributed to the growth and development of SAMWU, and wish the union the best of luck for the next ten years, and the future!

The struggle of municipal workers for the recognition of their union

Today SAMWU enjoys recognition in over 400 municipalities. We also have a new LRA which makes recognition of any sufficiently representative union very easy. Ten years ago, at our formation, we had majority recognition in only one city and seven small municipalities, mainly in Natal.

The employer response to new unions

In 1984 the municipal employers organised rapidly to limit union recognition. The Transvaal Employer Organisation (TMEO) expanded to cover the OFS and Natal and became the Municipal Employers Organisation (MEO). The Cape Local Authorities Employers Organisation (CPLAEO) was established for the Cape Province.

These organisations had one immediate goal. To ensure that all municipalities acted as one - and did not grant local level recognition to unions. The central position adopted by both Employer Organisations was that they would only recognise registered unions which were party

to Industrial Councils. Yet when SAMWU became a registered union they denied it was registered until it "varied its scope". To vary your scope meant that a union had to prove to the registrar that it had paid up members in a defined area before it would be registered for that area.

The major cities in almost all cases established in house Industrial Councils and sweetheart unions to seal themselves off from "outsiders". So even before SAMWU was established the employers had moved to block independent union organisation.

Some small gaps in their armour

Cape Town was one exception in that the CTMWA had been recognised from the 1940's and had a closed shop for coloured workers since 1947. That union had also weathered a storm in 1965 when the Cape Town City Council considered withdrawing recognition because a radical leadership had taken control of the union. In 1985 CTMWA also got recognition at Somerset West before the CPLAEO could block them.

In Natal the employers were also too late to block recognition of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) in a number of smaller municipalities such as New Germany, Westville, Kloof, Richards Bay, Empangeni, Queensburgh, and Kingsburgh.

In two of these cases, at Queensburgh and Empangeni, recognition was removed, before SAMWU had been formed, when striking workers were summarily dismissed. Elsewhere in Natal, and in the rest of the country recognition was withheld. In the case of TGWU the additional argument was that employers would never recognise anything other than a registered municipal union. When TGWU took this on dispute to the Industrial Court for its members at Secunda the case was lost.

The only other recognition which existed arose from a strategic choice which TGWU made to enter the Johannesburg Industrial Council.

Early breakthroughs

This then was the setting into which SAMWU was born. It had well organised majorities in many Western Cape municipalities and in East London and had growing membership in many other municipalities around the country - yet it was blocked at every turn by the employers. What was to be done?

The first breakthrough came in East London where there was a well organised workforce and where the history of the struggles of SAAWU had made registration a matter on which employers had learnt not to insist.

In Diepmeadow strike action by TGWU also forced recognition. The Soweto strike of 1988 also had as one of the demands the recognition of the union - but there were also a series of other demands around wages and other matters which took the strike into a confrontation in which the union was crushed.

In Port Elizabeth at this time all graded workers were forced to be members of a sweetheart union PIMEA through a closed shop. Fezile Mavuso (later to become a National Organiser in SAMWU) took a stand and refused to be a member - he was dismissed. Workers wanted to strike but were restrained while the issue of freedom of association went to court. In the meanwhile workers organised more strongly.

The legal challenge on freedom of association was a victory and in its wake, recognition of the union for non-graded workers was conceded.

What is to be done?

In the mass of municipalities the MEO and CPLAEO continued to resist. There were however differences in the detail. The Cape employers demanded proof of paid up membership in good standing (which meant three months subscription collected by hand). They also demanded approved variation of scope, and membership of the Industrial Council. The MEO differed in not insisting on variation of scope if the union was a party to the Industrial Council.

The question now was whether or not the union should enter Industrial Councils. The NEC of the Union could not make up its mind for some while. Workers were correctly suspicious that the Industrial Councils had been established by the employers and SAAME to undermine shopfloor strength.

Within the progressive labour movements of the early 1980's industrial councils had been regarded by all as a recipe for turning unions into top heavy bureaucracies which lost touch with membership. They were part of the despised system of apartheid. This situation had changed by 1989 but within SAMWU resistance remained strong. The hostile attitude of the employers only tended to increase suspicion.

The Natal Region of SAMWU was pressing, from August 1988, to get a decision to enter the Industrial Councils. The NEC would go no further than to agree that there was no absolute "in-principle" objection to Industrial Councils but required more time to think about the issue.

In Natal further hard bargaining with MEO during 1989 lead to an agreement that if the union joined the Industrial Council they would enter into a "facilities agreement" granting the union access, stop-orders and shopsteward recognition on the basis of signed stop-order forms. It was finally only late in 1989 that the union decided to join the Industrial Councils. It was to be a crucial decision - in the next few years despite ongoing resistance by employers locally, the union was able to gain recognition across smaller municipalities.

What of the cities?

The strategic choice which TGWU had made in 1985 to enter the JCC Industrial Council was very simple. How can one possibly organise a majority in such a large workforce which the employer has sealed off with sweetheart unions enjoying a closed shop? To the heirs of the 1980 strike, who were organised by MWUSA, the answer was to resist anything which was a management inspired structure or approach and to mobilise for confrontation.

For TGWU it was a case of facing up to the long haul of slowly recruiting members through small day by day victories on the shopfloor and accepting that a stable membership would only arise with stop-orders. This issue was to be perhaps the most hotly contested issue in SAMWU's Launch Congress. It was swept under the carpet - which was just as well. In due course some MWUSA members shifted sides and bit by bit membership grew. It did turn out to be a long haul - for it was only after many more struggles, such as the march against hostel violence in 1991, and the merger with UJMW and JMCEU that a majority position was achieved.

The decision to enter Industrial Councils was to have a similar consequence in Kimberley, Bloemfontein, and Port Elizabeth. Though in these cases the union was already having or near to having majority membership.

In Durban it was mobilisation of workers in the electricity department and strike action which lead to recognition.

It was the efforts of DIMES which had in the meanwhile established a sound recognition agreement into which SAMWU could join. The merger, and the shift of TGWU bus drivers to SAMWU further consolidated SAMWU as the major union. In Pietermaritzburg recognition had been attained by TGWU for bus drivers in 1980 and expanded to include the quarry in 1985. On the basis of these agreements SAMWU was able, relatively easily, to secure recognition once it managed to make an organisational advance in the Electricity Department.

What are the lessons?

If there is any lesson it might be that it is often important not to read the employers intention as creating reality. It all depends how you respond in finding ways of out manoeuvring the employer on their own ground. You need to have strategies to ensure that their intentions do not work out as planned.

The arguments for entering the Industrial Council in 1989 were not that they would benefit workers in a straightforward way. The argument was that by getting one foot in the door, the union would force the door open. The union realised that entering the Industrial Councils would not solve all of the workers problems.

That always depended on the unions ability to use the space to mobilise and strengthen its workplace and industrial power. It was recruitment, mobilisation and militant struggles, notable in the national strike of 1993, which continued to build the union. It was however the decision to enter the Industrial Councils which made this possible.



Joseph Spambo of SAMWU organises workers in the early nineties

As we enter a fully National Bargaining Council for the first time we need to look back at these lessons. The Council is only a structure - how we organise around it will determine its success or failure for workers. The second lesson is that we now have a new LRA. That many of the agreements of the early years were minimum agreements signed under very restrictive conditions - we must take forward a process of review of all agreements and we must mobilise and struggle, on the shopfloor and through centralised bargaining to ensure that we further strengthen our rights as a union.

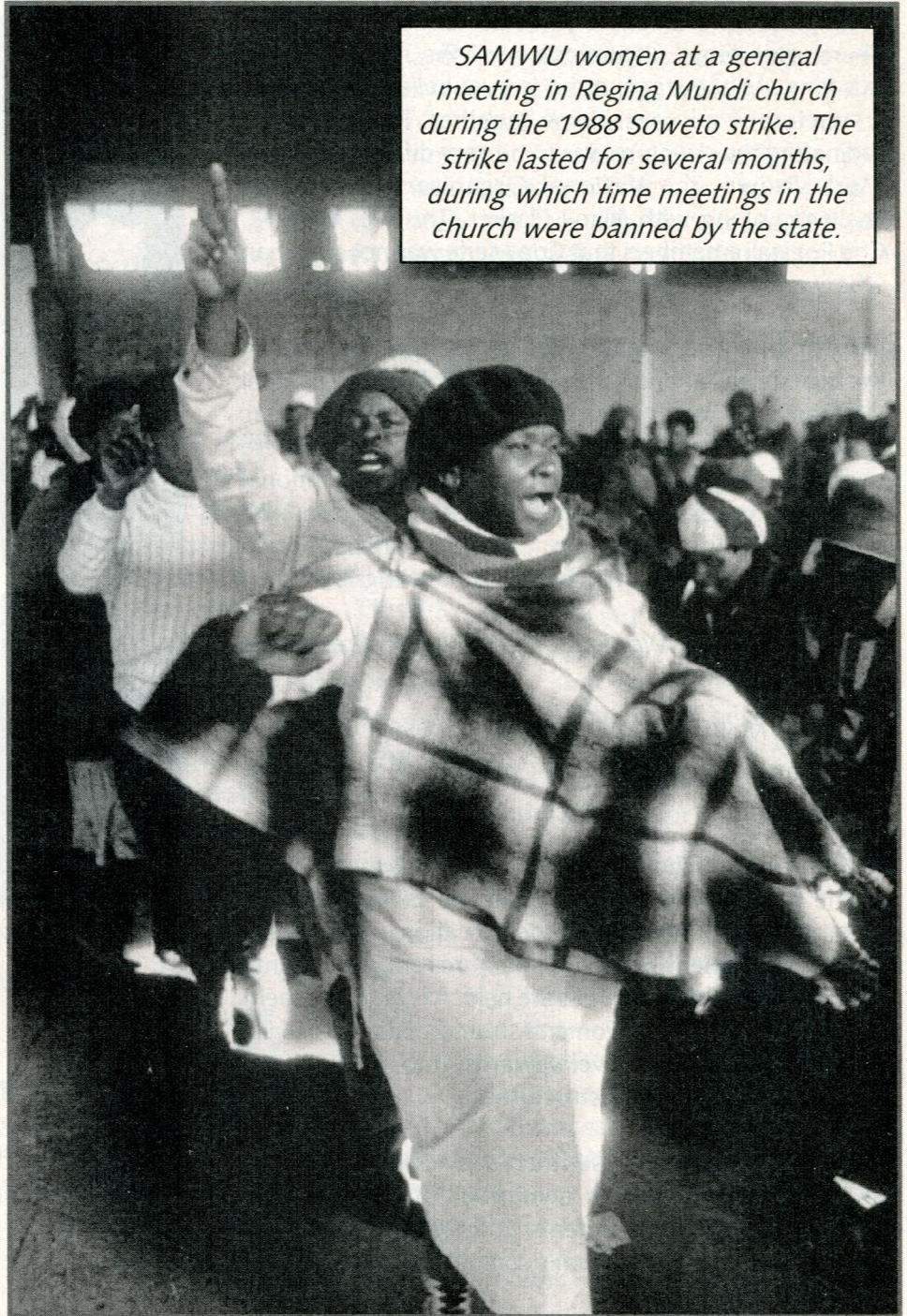
Cde David Morapedi recalls the struggle for recognition in Pietersburg...

The Indian Centre in Pietersburg has a historic background. It was the mecca of mass protest and union activism. Police harassment was a daily problem. That is where I first came to know about the unions. I became a member of SAMWU in 1989. During that period we were just a few workers who were signed up members. There was a workers committee, but this was a toothless dog designed by management. But because they feared victimisation, workers stayed in the committee and didn't join us in large numbers. That is why we began using some of the workers committee members in our organising strategy and planning. It soon became evident to management that they could not keep up with workers' demands, and before long the committee had collapsed and the workers joined SAMWU. Our victory was marred by white workers intimidating the comrades. The intimidators told SAMWU comrades that the union would bring poverty and strikes. But we managed to overcome these problems. In Pietersburg, we were recognised in 1991, and other regions such as Phalaborwa and Potgietersrus soon followed with their own recognition agreements.

Women are coming around the corner

SAMWU women have fought hard to make their voices heard over the past ten years. It is only recently that women have begun to win victories. SAMWU is now ahead of other COSATU affiliates with a quota system that makes constitutional provision for one third representation by women, with full voting rights on all branch and regional executive committees and full representation by the National Women's Committee Office Bearers at a Central Executive Committee level.

But have these constitutional amendments been adhered to in practice? Interviews by *Workers News* found that most organisers in SAMWU are male, and this, together with a lack of emphasis on building women's structures from Branch and Regional Office Bearers has meant that women have not been organised effectively. Many workers are not even aware that they can elect women shopstewards. Regions need to identify constituencies where women shopstewards can be elected if they are to comply with the provisions of the constitution. This is not happening and is a cause of great



SAMWU women at a general meeting in Regina Mundi church during the 1988 Soweto strike. The strike lasted for several months, during which time meetings in the church were banned by the state.

concern to women comrades interviewed by *Workers News*.

Let's go back to the roots of the women's movement in SAMWU. Discussions and debates around forming a women's structure first took place at SAMWU's second National Congress in 1989, but a firm decision to was only taken at the third Congress in 1991. Regina Chibase, long time fighter for the rights of

women and a female leader from the days of the first women's structure in SAMWU, told *Workers News* that it took a long time for male comrades to get used to the idea that women needed a structure of their own to air their specific problems. "We had to convince male comrades 100% that we are part of SAMWU and that to overcome problems we would need their help and support," said Cde Regina.

Setting up the women's structure was not child's play! There were tense discussions in all the regions during this time. At one stage, nobody ever believed that such a structure would ever come together. The job of co-ordinating the structure was to be very difficult, but Cde Merle Brown, the National Organiser took up the challenge along with Maryl Plasket. This was in 1992. Cde Regina remembers that Cde Merle was not a woman who was easily intimidated!

Later on that year, women's structures were launched in the regions and at branch level. In 1993, the first National Women's Co-ordinating Committee (NWCC) was launched. "That was a victory, even though we were observers and could not participate fully in constitutional structures, for example having no voting rights in NEC meetings," says Cde Regina. "But our participation in meetings was giving us a chance to be recognised."

The first National Women's Co-ordinating Committee Office Bearers were:

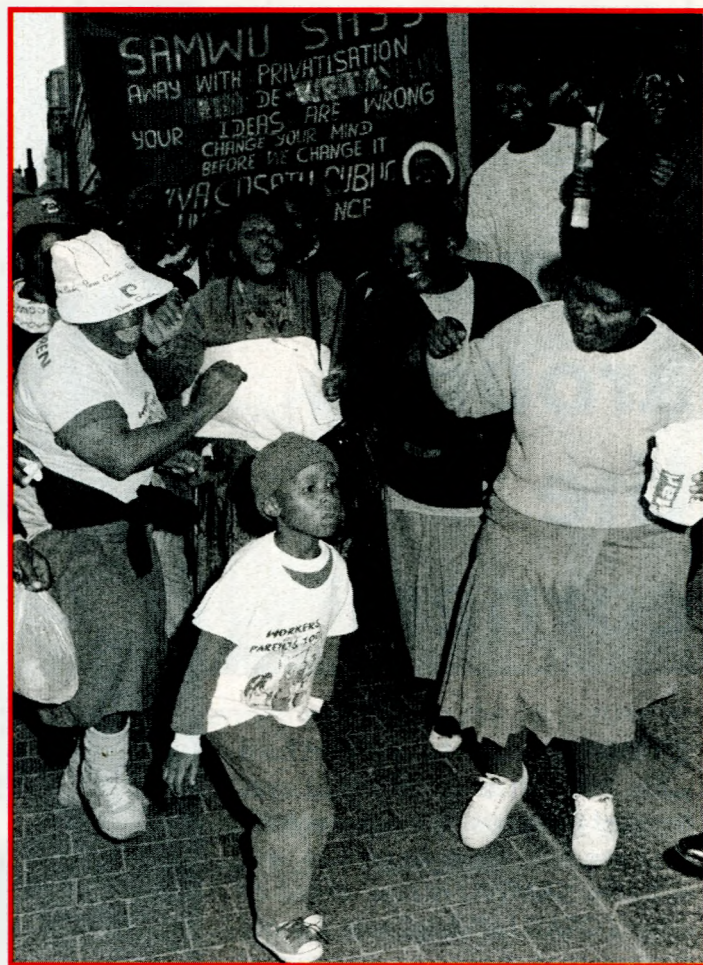
Kekeletso Mokatsane	(Chairperson, OFS)
Nthabisang Chibase	(Vice Chairperson, S. Transvaal)
Fikile Ndamase	(Secretary, Natal)

With the introduction of the new SAMWU constitution, all the former women's structures are being rebuilt in accordance with new branch demarcations. This means that at the moment, women's structures are interim until branch shopsteward elections are held. All comrades seem to agree that when the women's structures are eventually launched from branch level upwards, they will be much stronger than the earlier structures.

This is not to say that these structures achieved nothing. *Workers News* spoke to a number of women who outlined the accomplishments and failures of the old regional and national women's committees over the past five years.

Parental Rights

The NWCC managed to draw up Parental Rights documents which are now in the process of being negotiated through every Local Authority in South Africa. In 1994, this was adopted as a campaign which is still underway. Unfortunately, this campaign has not been prioritised by comrades - some comrades seem to think that parental rights are a women's issue only, forgetting that without women they themselves could not be parents. Northern Province has scored a victory by having successfully negotiated this agreement through their regional bargaining council.



A SAMWU Parental Rights march in Johannesburg, 1993

Sexual harassment

A code of conduct on sexual harassment was passed through SAMWU's NEC in 1996. COSATU also adopted a code of conduct on sexual harassment last year. This has gone a long way towards improving the situation for female comrades who were victims of sexual harassment by bosses and fellow comrades in the past. However, sexual harassment has by no means stopped. It is extremely prevalent during Congresses and National Meetings. Also, the code of conduct on sexual harassment has not been taken to employers for official adoption. Many workers on the ground have not been educated about what they can do if they are sexually harassed. Organisers need to make this part of their shopsteward training.

Sexual harassment can ruin someone's life - it is dangerous, intimidating and a violation of human rights. It undermines union solidarity! Let's put a stop to it.

Affirmative Action

In Local Authorities, few women are employed. Jobs seem to be strictly divided by gender. For example, cleansing workers are mainly men, while office administrators are predominantly women. We need to work hard and negotiate for affirmative action in our local authorities.

This applies to both SAMWU members and union officials. With regard to union officials, it is pleasing to see more women being employed by SAMWU in national and regional positions. "But this is still a drop in the ocean," Cde Regina told *Workers News*. Cde Grace Caesar, National Education Administrator added that "even in education, a field where women work in abundance, we only have two female regional education officers out of nine. In fact, most female officials are employed as administrators while political or strategic posts are kept for men."

The position of National Collective Bargaining Officer is currently vacant - only one of the National Officers is a woman. We would like to see the next CEC take a decision that this position be filled by a woman. "Affirmative action should apply on all levels, not only when it suits our male officials to have female administrators," one administrator told *Workers News*.

Education

Cde Grace Caesar reports that the 1996 Policy Conference agreed that specific education programmes should be drawn up to cover a wide range of issues affecting women. A lot of work has been done and this programme will kick off in early 1998 and will be followed by the planned National Women's Conference during the first half of 1998. This would include registering women on courses normally dominated by men, such as collective bargaining. It will also include workshops to train men in becoming gender sensitive.

It has also been observed that within SAMWU, active women are drawn from our white collar membership.

For example, these women are librarians, heads of departments, and some are studying at the high level of Master degree. Does this mean that women workers are only noticed in SAMWU if they are educated? It is interesting to note that male blue collar workers such as road diggers and cleansing workers rise to the top of SAMWU politically, but blue collar woman workers such as cleaners traditionally feel very intimidated in union meetings.

Cde Desiree Tlhoale, Co-ordinator of the Interim NWCC, summed up the problems facing women in SAMWU.

"SAMWU has in all its endeavours as a national union tried to adopt policies that are supportive of women but has failed in implementation. One of the reasons why women's structures in SAMWU have not met with overwhelming success has been that these structures are left on their own without any financial backing or support from the National Union."

It is alarming that the little finances raised by women or allocated to women on a regional level are often unilaterally used for other projects.

"It is common practice in all regions that finances of the Regional Women's Committees (RWCs) are used to subsidise other regional issues. Comrades, this must come to a screeching halt!" said Cde Desiree.

One of the reasons why women in SAMWU have traditionally not been dynamically uplifted could be because Local Government only has 15% women workers. Some Local Authorities don't have women workers at all! But most women interviewed felt that male Cdes should not use this as an opportunity to ignore women. Women are 15% but this is increasing and female comrades feel that they have valid inputs to make on all the issues!

In this light, Cde Regina was pleased to note the election of female ROB's in Gauteng, Northern Province and Free State. But Cde Desiree highlighted the danger of becoming satisfied with the election of a few women.

"To all members of SAMWU - the establishment of women's structures will not come from a set of ideas that we can memorise. It will happen by analysing society so we use that knowledge to change things. It comes from women's ability to size things up at a glance, and the flair for feeling a situation while sorting out the main threads and developing an overall strategy. This is important in our day to day work and in a revolutionary period, those qualities become decisive."
- Regina Chibase, Interim Women's Co-ordinating Committee.

"We need many more female leaders like these three ROB's in order to transform this union!" she said.

Male attitudes

Cde Aletta Sekele, a Gauteng shopsteward, says that many males in leadership positions have problematic attitudes towards women, which means that workers will never change if that is the example given to them by their leaders. "In Johannesburg, women face ethnic and cultural problems - we have men mostly from the North, including the rural areas, where a woman is like a doormat where they wipe their feet. Even my chairperson says that a woman belongs to the kitchen and no woman should tell him what to do. So men still have that attitude within themselves. Being a woman is very difficult! In the urban structures it is much easier, and women don't have such problems with urban men. It will take us a long time to break down these attitudes, but I feel that SAMWU has made a small breakthrough in Gauteng with a female vice chairperson. We will take it from there and we hope that in the future we will have a female chairperson."

While this is true, we must recognise those male comrades who have actually helped the women's structures over the past ten years. Cde Regina would like to thank those progressive males for all they have done to assist in building women's structures in SAMWU. You know who you are!

But says Cde Desiree "The constitution is ours, we all adopted it, let's put it into practice and stop window dressing SAMWU!"

**Sithi kubo wathintha
abafazi; wathinthe
inbokotho uzakufu!**

Dorothy Deku - Fighter for women's rights

by Sanjay Tuckooriah

Comrade Dorothy Deku started work at Scottburgh Municipality in KwaZulu Natal in 1985. Dorothy joined a trade union, DIMES, for the first time in 1987. In 1991 she was elected a shop steward in DIMES. The first struggle for Dorothy was to make sure that women are treated as equals.

Dorothy admits that at first she was shy and afraid to air her views. But not any more, she says that she is now outspoken. She attributes her change in personality to empowerment courses that she attended through the Union and Workers' College.

Being a female shop steward was not easy. At first her male counterparts did not take her seriously. But after empowering herself, she made sure that her points were taken seriously and considered. Fortunately for Dorothy, her management does not prejudice her because she is a woman. Neither do they patronise her, she is treated as an equal. That is the way she believes all women should be treated.

The rift between the ANC comrades and IFP has personally affected Cde Dorothy. She says that because she is a shop steward, IFP members tried to intimidate her. Dorothy steadfastly defended SAMWU. She explained to the intimidators that she was only interested in fighting for workers rights, and that no matter which political party you support you are still a worker.

Dorothy has held many positions within the Union. She was the vice Chairperson of the RWCC from 1994 to 1997. Currently she is the Chairperson of the Branch and Local Women's structures. Besides this she is also a member of the Scottburgh ANC Women's League in Scottburgh.



With all this involvement, Dorothy still has time for her family. She has two children and one grandson. When asked if her Union commitment has affected her family life, Dorothy merely smiles. She explained to her children that workers have been oppressed and are still being exploited. Therefore we all have to stand together and fight for worker rights, to make life a little easier for ourselves.

There is one thing clear about Cde Dorothy, she holds the women's struggle close to her heart. She strongly believes that women must take the lead and go to the forefront of the workers struggle and not be in the shadows of the male comrades.

Dorothy's vision for the future. A WOMEN PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA. Her goal in life is to secure herself a better position at work and to continue to fight for workers rights.

The Living Wage struggle:

unite and fight for your life!

The start

August 2nd, 1993 was an historic day in the living wage struggle of municipal workers. It was the day that the first ever national strike of municipal workers, in support of wage demands, started. But our living wage struggle did not start there. More importantly, it did not end there.

Our fight for a living wage started at the launching congress of SAMWU. At the time that SAMWU launched, there were thousands of workers who were earning between R30 and R60 per week. The congress delegates resolved that the Union should set standards for the progressive achievement of a Living Wage through a combination of negotiation, mobilisation and organisation. The implementation of this resolution was to take longer than delegates to the Congress had in mind!

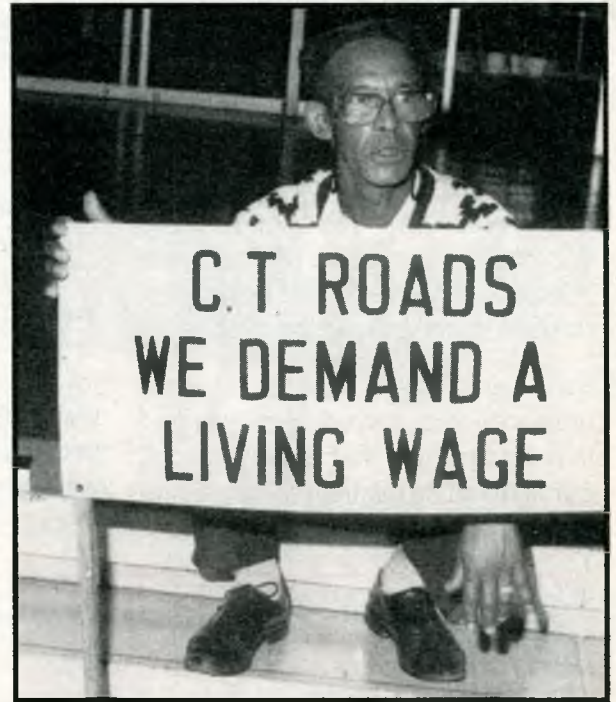
Fighting for recognition

The first two years of the Union's existence was taken up fighting for and securing recognition. Comrades, can read elsewhere in this magazine of our struggle for recognition. It was only after we took the strategic choice to join the existing Industrial Councils that the Union was able to consolidate its presence in the sector. Up until that time, the living wage struggles of our members, were largely uncoordinated. Wage negotiations were conducted at local level and were not guided by any clear wage policy.

The right to strike

Right from the outset, our living wage campaign was not only focused on wages. An important part of the

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campaign centred on winning the right to strike for all workers. It was argued that the right to strike would strengthen the collective power of workers and the broader working class struggle. The launching congress resolved to launch a nationally co-ordinated campaign for the right to strike. This demand was to become a central feature of our struggle for a living wage in the years following the launching congress.

But it was not only as a demand that the right to strike featured in our wage campaigns. The Labour Relations Act, at the time, denied all local authority workers the right to strike and instead provided for the settling of disputes through compulsory arbitration. SAMWU members, in their thousands, used their collective strength, in the form of strike action, to force home their demands for a

living wage. Many of these strikes were taken at great sacrifice by our members. Many workers were wounded in battles with the apartheid security forces, many spent time in jail and indeed some even lost their lives in this struggle.

Centralised Bargaining

Another key demand to emerge during the course of our fight for a living wage related to our demand for centralised bargaining. It became clear, at a very early stage of the living wage campaign that in order to secure a living wage for all municipal workers, negotiations had to be conducted at a central level. Wages in local government rank amongst the most diverse in the formal sector. Wage differentials between large (mostly urban) and small (mostly rural) towns. This happens even in adjacent urban

cities and often distorts the wage comparisons between the municipal sector and other sectors. In addition, thousands of workers today still do not enjoy retirement and medical benefits. In the early nineties, we started campaigning seriously for the establishment of a national bargaining council for the municipal sector. This was part of a broader campaign within COSATU. Part of the SAMWU strategy involved lobbying amongst our Alliance partners. The advent of democratic local government structures in 1995 and the subsequent formation of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) also assisted the process.

But here again, workers were ultimately forced to talk with their feet in order to ensure that employers took our demand for centralised bargaining seriously. This campaign reached a

peak during the latter part of 1995 and in early 1996. However, another year was to pass before the unions and municipal employers were to conclude a historic agreement to set up a national bargaining council for the whole municipal sector.

1990 - A watershed year in our struggle for a living wage

In the first six months of 1990, Union membership shot up from just over 27, 000 to over 45, 000. It was also the year of the most concerted effort by workers to advance their demands for a living wage. Although these struggled were generally uncoordinated, they illustrated a willingness on the part of workers to engage the bosses by using strike

action. A strike diary compiled by the Union at the end of 1990 showed that there were over 50 work stoppages and strikes during the year. Over 50,000 workers took part in these actions, the bulk of which related to demands for improved wages. Two of the most significant strikes occurred in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. Both strikes saw the police intervene. In the case of the Port Elizabeth strike, stun grenades were at one stage used to disperse a group of striking workers. But workers emerged victorious at the end of the day!

These two strikes and the others during 1990 brought home to the union the need for a more coordinated and centralised approach to the living wage campaign. The lessons learnt during the year were to serve the Union well in the struggles which awaited municipal workers.

Cape Town

On Wednesday 13 June 1990, approximately 10,000 SAMWU staged a sit-in at the Cape Town Civic Centre. This was to be the start of a strike which was to end on 25 June. The strike became known as the "mobile strike". After the City Council obtained a court order preventing strikers from entering the Civic Centre, workers gathered at a church in central Cape Town. Police intervention forced workers to relocate to a sports stadium near the Union Head Office in Athlone. The strike eventually moved to the Good Hope Centre.

Another feature of the strike was the high level of police intervention. Rather than intimidating workers, the actions of the police during the course of the strike only served to heighten the militancy and anger of the workers.

The strike forced the City Council to re-open negotiations and further adjustments were made to the minimum wages.

Port Elizabeth

Over three thousand workers embarked on a fifteen day strike in support of a wage demand of R300 across the board plus 20%. The minimum wage paid by the municipality, at the time, was R362 per month. Although the municipality threatened workers with dismissal, workers remained united until victory was eventually achieved.

Although the municipality withdrew subsidised transport during the course of the strike, workers gathered everyday of the strike at the Harrower Road depot.

Another feature of the strike was a public exchange between the Town Clerk of Port Elizabeth, P K Botha, and Comrade Fezile Mavuso on behalf of the workers. This occurred during the second week of the strike. Botha said to Comrade Fezile - " Tell your people sitting in at Harrower Road they will not be paid a single cent on pay day and they will lose all their housing and other benefits". Workers were not intimidated by this and responded - " We won't come back to work until you offer us something"

At the end of the day workers won a new minimum wage of R550, effective from 1 July 1990 and a further increase on the minimum to R600 per month from 1 January 1991. Adjustments across the board ranged between 15% - 33%.

1991 - A year of consolidation

1991 saw the Union move decisively in the direction of a more co-ordinated approach to collective bargaining. It was during April of that year that a National Collective Bargaining Officer was employed. This was a period of consolidation within the Union. But it was also a year in which the apartheid government intensified its attacks against the poor. Many workers and their families were victims of evictions, service cuts and retrenchments. It became quite clear that a big fight between the Union and the authorities was brewing.

The SAMWU National Congress, during 1991, recognised that local government restructuring was the single most important political and economic issue confronting SAMWU. The Congress resolved SAMWU should participate in a meaningful way in the process to ensure that the position of the organised working class informs any decisions taken. This included establishing links with our political allies. It was at this point that our living wage campaign took on a broader political and economic focus.

1992 - The first nationally co-ordinated action

Many municipal workers were still earning as little as R167 per month. The average minimum wage in the sector was just over R400 per month. In addition, as mentioned above, the apartheid government was continuing with the unilateral restructuring of its structures and activities at all levels. Service cuts and evictions continued unabated. These activities were clearly aimed at destabilising the ongoing political negotiations process.

An NEC meeting held during May of 1992 developed a national programme of action in support of the Union's wage demands and as part of the fight against unilateral restructuring. The programme included lunch time demonstrations, marches to the various provincial administrations and marches to local municipal offices. Our demands were very clear:

- ◆ a stop to all unilateral restructuring
- ◆ no retrenchments
- ◆ all evictions and service cuts to stop
- ◆ basic services for all
- ◆ a living wage for all municipal workers.

COSATU and the other Alliance partners were briefed on the campaign and a special pamphlet, aimed at communities, was produced and widely circulated. The Union was quite clear that the attainment of a living wage and the provision of basic services to all, were two sides of the same coin.

The slogan around which members rallied was - Build unity between municipal workers and the community!

During the months of June and July, thousands of people took to the streets in support of the Union's demands. In one of the best examples of the Alliance at work, over 30,000 members and supporters of the ANC, SANCO, SACP and COSATU marched to the East London Municipality on 16 July to deliver a broad set of demands, which incorporated the core demands of SAMWU.

Although the Union's programme of

action placed the struggle of municipal workers in the national spotlight, employers continued to display a hardline attitude to the wage demands of municipal workers. Offers made by the majority of municipalities did nothing to improve the living conditions of their employees. In fact negotiations for workers in what was then known as the Cape Province deadlocked and was referred arbitration in the Industrial Court.

This dispute only came before the Industrial Court late in 1993 but, ironically enough, was not resolved there. It was resolved when workers again took to the streets in August of 1993 as part of the first ever national strike by municipal workers.

1993 - History in the making

Although the struggles of the Union had seen an improvement in wages, average minimum wages in the sector were still lower than the historically bad paying mining industry ! Many workers were still earning less than R400 per month.

In 1993 the Union submitted the following wage demands:

- ◆ A minimum entry wage in the sector of R650 per month.
- ◆ No worker to receive an increase of less than 30%
- ◆ 16 June and 21 March as paid holidays
- ◆ A minimum of 26 working days annual leave.

Almost without exception, employers responded by offering increases ranging between 0% - 5%. 1993 was the year that F W De Klerk imposed a unilateral 5% wage adjustment on the public sector. It was quite clear that municipal employers

had simply jumped on the 5% bandwagon. The stage for first ever national strike of municipal employers was set.

COSATU meanwhile set up a Public Sector Co-ordinating Committee to plan a broad programme of action for the public sector. The first half of 1993 saw many work stoppages, pickets, marches and demonstrations involving workers in the public sector. It was during May that SAMWU also took a decision to ballot its members. The Union made it quite clear that it would not accept the imposition of a 5% wage adjustment. In addition the Union would not accept a situation where municipal employers hid behind the no-strike restrictions placed on workers. A restriction which in the view of the Union prevented the free expression of workers' rights.

Collective bargaining in the sector had become a farce. Many wage disputes remained unresolved. Coupled with the retrenchment of staff and the ongoing cut backs in services, the time had arrived when the Union could not simply stand aside as observers to the destruction of workers, their families and the community. The time had arrived for workers to take action themselves.

So on 2 August 1993, over 60,000 in 276 local authorities across the country downed tools in support of wage demands. The strike lasted a week and ended in victory for workers. The call by De Klerk for the pegging of wages in the public sector was effectively defeated, even in the smaller, rural areas. The second important gain was the recognition by employers that there must be a national minimum wage for municipal workers. Although not meeting the R650 minimum demand, a national minimum entry wage of R550 was gained. For some workers this

constituted an increase of **over 200%**. Most areas settled for an average 10% adjustment with substantially higher increases for lower paid workers.

Another crucial gain made during the strike was that it forced the three industrial council divisions in the old Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal to set up a joint forum for negotiations with the Union.

Our demand for centralised bargaining was starting to become a reality.

But the gains were not made without sacrifices. All our members in Pietersburg and Springs were arrested and subsequently dismissed. Workers were dismissed at seven local authorities in the then Cape Province. In addition there were many more arrests and dismissals in places like Welkom and Odendaalsrus. With one or two exceptions, the Union was able to secure the return to work of most of the dismissed workers. Some workers however became the victims of individual local authorities, hiding behind the "no right to strike" provisions of the Labour Relations Act.

During the course of the strike, many PSI affiliates, from all corners of the globe, sent through messages of support and directly communicated with the employers calling on them to enter into good faith negotiations with the Union. The threat of international solidarity action also contributed in bringing employers to their senses. Our struggle had become internationalised!

1994 - The dawn of a democratic South Africa

Municipal workers took their turn in the queues of South Africans waiting

to vote for the first time on 27 April 1994. The Union took a conscious decision to settle wages as quickly as possible. But this was not before workers, in different parts of country, were once again forced to use their muscle to hasten wage settlements.

The RDP, with its focus on meeting basic needs (including a living wage for all) assumed centre stage in planning for our next round of negotiations.

1995 - Another dose of the same

It was all systems go for the first democratic local government elections scheduled for November. But it was not only the forthcoming elections which captured the hearts and souls of SAMWU members. The new democratic dispensation brought the promise of a better life for all. This was reflected in the wage demands tabled by the Union in that year. The demand was to raise the minimum entry level in the sector to R1000 per month.

But nothing much had changed in our sector. Municipal employers continued as if we were still in the old South Africa. They reached agreement with the other major union in our sector (at the time called SAAME). This completely undermined our own negotiations and merely served to entrench the position of privilege which certain layers of local government workers enjoyed as a result of apartheid. Workers did not take this lying down. Workers in the Western Cape were the first to down tools. This was followed by workers in the Northern Cape.

On 15 August, it was the turn of workers in the Free State. Workers returned to work on 18 August after employers in that province made a substantially improved offer.



Cde Alpheus Monaga, of Pietersburg City Council, pictured in his wheelchair just before the police shooting broke out in 1995

Certain local authorities in the Eastern Cape also came out during this period.

During September, the strike spread to Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West and Northern Province. But this was not before these workers marched to the Union Buildings on 23 August in the largest ever SAMWU march.

This strike was eventually settled when the Minister of Labour appointed a mediator to bring the parties to the negotiating table. Once again, the strike extracted improved offers from the employers and forced further

increases in areas where agreements had already been reached with other unions.

This strike, as on previous occasions, was characterised by high level of security force involvement. Many workers were injured in clashes with the police and two workers were killed in Pietersburg and Pretoria. In addition, all Pietersburg and Groblersdal workers were dismissed.

SAMWU's Legal Officer, Cde John Brown, recalls studying the police video of the Pietersburg strike to prepare for the case to reinstate the

workers. "On the police video I saw the police opening fire without provocation at very close range with what appeared to be pump action shotguns gathered outside the municipal premises."

Cde Brown remembers that "the workers fled and the only person remaining was Cde Alpheus Monaga in his wheelchair whose upper body was bent right down to the ground to avoid the bullets-he didn't even have time to turn his wheelchair around!"

Many dismissals also took place in the Free State. Groblersdal workers are still out of work.



Municipal workers struggling for a Living Wage have often met with police violence. Here we see a policeman firing a stun grenade at striking municipal workers in 1995.



A new Labour Relations Act - new strategies

The advent of a new LRA in recent times has forced the union to review its approach to wage negotiations. For an initial period, the old restriction on the right to strike for all municipal workers remained in force.

The Essential Service Committee has now decided that only certain municipal services are essential. All other workers now enjoy a protected right to strike. The use of industrial action in support of wage demands has to be used more strategically. For while the new LRA makes it much easier for workers to strike, total disregard by for the provisions of the LRA will not win the Union much support.

The past two years were also the first time that the wage negotiations were held with democratically elected councillors. With one or two

exceptions, settlements over the last few years have generally reflected a willingness on the part of employers to take affirmative steps to increase the wages of workers. The minimum entry wage in the sector is now in the region of R1200 per month. Still of concern to the Union is the fact that the wage gap between urban and rural workers has not been closed.

In addition, many municipal workers do not enjoy retirement and health care benefits. Many more do not enjoy formal housing and many more are still the sole breadwinners in extended families. Indeed, the majority of people in this country live in poverty.

Our fight for a living wage must be located within a broader fight against exploitation and poverty. It must be part of a broader fight

against an economic system which allows bosses to live in luxury and workers to be subjected to the worst forms of poverty.

The gains made to date in securing a living wage for all municipal workers are a tribute to the thousands of municipal workers who bravely fought against everything that the old apartheid state could throw at them. Dismissals, assaults, arrests, deaths became a feature of the living wage struggle. But the struggle is far from over. It is hoped that workers of today will build on the past struggles of workers and that ultimately a living wage will become a reality for all workers.

Let us join hands with all workers in South Africa and in the rest of world in our struggle for a living wage!



SAMWU veterans look back...

Andrew Nkoenyane interviewed Petrus Mashishi, Aletta Sekele, Christopher Mabaso and Molapisi Mathibe, about their experiences as municipal workers in Johannesburg during the struggle years, and their memories of the launch of SAMWU...

Comrades, please tell us about your backgrounds...

Mabaso: I started working for the Johannesburg City Council (JCC) in the canteen as a cleaner in 1973. In 1984 I became a chef. From 1984 until now I have been a supervisor. Yebo, I've been at the same place all these years. The first union I joined was Municipal Workers Union of South Africa (MWUSA). Then I was recruited into the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and from there I became part of SAMWU.

Mathibe: I started as a meter reader in Diepmeadow. Later I was recruited into TGWU. A few months after joining TGWU all Diepmeadow meter readers were dismissed because of privatisation, but TGWU managed to get us reinstated into other

departments. This was in 1986. I then moved to be a clerk in the Treasury Department, and I was part of the launching Congress. At that time we had about 1400 members in TGWU.

Mashishi: I started in 1970 as a plumber with the JCC. I was one of the first shopstewards of TGWU, which started up in 1980. From then on I went to help launch SAMWU in 1987. To this day, I am still a plumber.

Aletta: I started with JCC as a nursing sister. In those days, there were no unions, only liaison committees. When trade unions became recognised after the Wiehahn Commission, I helped launch the Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers (UJMW) which registered in 1980. Unfortunately, we had a closed shop agreement where workers were

forced to join the UJMW which was a sweetheart union. This caused a lot of hatred, but that changed in 1993 when we merged with SAMWU.

Did Worker's Committees help to build a strong trade union movement?

Mashishi: In 1973 workers in Natal started to fight for liaison committees to be disbanded and for the introduction of workers committees. Most workers always looked upon liaison committees as management structures - the leaders were close to management and no general meetings were allowed. In 1977 the first worker's committees started in the different JCC departments. It worked well, no outsiders were allowed to come in and we could have sit-ins and strikes.

These committees spread throughout the country, and we organised workshops for workers with inputs by activists like Eddie Webster and Phil Bonner. This was before the time of TGWU. When we transferred into TGWU, we already had structures, thanks to the workers committees.

What captures the mood of the launching congress?

Mathibe: What was in our minds at that Congress was to come out of that gathering with one union to represent all municipal workers in the country. We went in with different approaches but the preparation talks helped everything to go smoothly. It wasn't an easy Congress, and it was a different experience for all of us as the unions merging all used to operate differently in the past.

How did SAMWU get its name and logo?

Mashishi: The name "SAMWU" came out of nine names put forward by workers until the Congress agreed upon one. At the congress we had nine logos, but there was no agreement on this. So the launching Congress referred the issue of the logo to the NEC. During this time, there appeared in a newspaper a photo of a go slow by municipal workers, which lasted several days. That press cutting was then adapted into a logo. So you can say our tradition is steeped in workers' struggle.

Mathibe: And there is Cde Mphahlele who was instrumental in us having the sea around the logo - he is a shopsteward, still around and he is the oldest member of SAMWU in the Mpumalanga region.

Mashishi: Yes he's about 70 years old and still working as a truck driver in Secunda.

Comrades, please tell us about your experiences as workers in the former Johannesburg City Council...

Aletta: In 1971, Blacks were not allowed to belong to a union. Instead we had liaison committees. Then in 1980, the UJMW registered, and I became a member. We operated differently from SAMWU, because with us we were more or less like some of the sweet heart unions. Officials serviced the union, not shopstewards. Workers only came in when union policy had being drawn up - we were not much involved. In 1993 when we merged with SAMWU, I realised that I was a shopsteward, because now I was exposed to the workers at the workplace, and solving problems, and many other things that I had not done before as a UJMW shopsteward.

Mashishi: Cde Aletta and I used to have fights!

Aletta: There was hatred because of the closed shop agreements.

Mabaso: I had many different experiences being involved with three unions in my time at the JCC. In 1980, I was a member of MWUSA during the time of the strike, where workers were dismissed and many of them deported. When joined TGWU it was a strong union, particularly at the Diepmeadow cleansing department and Avalon technical where Cde Mashishi was working.

Aletta: I was there, but as part of a registered union. I remember that the City Council came with buses to take the dismissed workers back to where they came from. There was a bus for Transkei, and every other area. But that is why you see many workers from the North living in Johannesburg today. Instead of going a long way back to Transkei or Ciskei, they went

to the north. Only very few were successfully reinstated. I was very bitter, because some of those workers had already been in the Council for 23 years. When they were dismissed, they lost out on the gratuity they would have got after 25 years of service. Our people really suffered.

Mashishi: All of us were part of the strike, and actually it was a blessing in disguise for us because TGWU managed to defend many of the dismissed workers, who then in turn flocked to join TGWU.

Mabaso: In that time it was not easy to organise workers in the Johannesburg City Council. Sometimes I would find Cde Mashishi going around at night to the hostels of the council to recruit the members. If you had union membership forms, you could only give them to people you trusted, because once management could see that you were organising workers you became a victim of dismissal. Once Cde Mashishi went to a council hostel to recruit workers. But he was arrested by security at the gate before getting inside!

Mashishi: In Johannesburg, the situation was worse than in any local authority. They had a unit of the CCB within the JCC. They had a special section within the unit to deal with trade unionists.

Aletta: The manager of Transport was the leader of this CCB unit.

Mashishi: People high up in the army, like generals, were deployed to the council in Human Resource positions to deal with trade unionists after the 1980 strike.

Mabaso: Another experience I had in the 1980's at the JCC was that at my workplace I was not allowed to use the telephone.

If I received a phone call, management would take a knife and cut the wire of that phone. There were also shopsteward spies in the JCC who would come to meetings with tape recorders. We would be discussing issues, and the following day we would be surprised to find that management knew everything. Even at SAMWU's first congress, a speech was delivered by President Mashishi on the weekend. But by Monday, management knew that Mashishi had delivered a speech in Cape Town.

Aletta: Even in the sweetheart union we were victimised, especially if you were outspoken. I am a nursing sister, but I was never given a post. They could never give me the reason, and even today my salary among the nurses is the lowest.

In those days, it was dangerous for unionists to meet openly. How did you overcome this?

Mabaso: Most meetings were held at private houses.

Mathibe: We had meetings in houses, where we were educated as to the aims of TGWU, and how to recruit. Our Diepmeadow recognition agreement was only negotiated by three workers and an official. Our knowledge of how to negotiate this came from the sessions we spent in houses. There was no formal shopstewards training in those days.

Mashishi: There was Ma Sophie and another old man who would let us use their houses. Ma Sophie would even cook for us on the weekends. In fact, we held most of the meetings in the early days of SAMWU at Ma Sophie's place.

Did members suffer other hardships in order to attend SAMWU's early meetings?

Mathibe: Yes, for our National Executive Committee meetings we would travel by car to Cape Town from Johannesburg. We only had one driver - myself. Mashishi could not drive then. There were many accidents involving comrades. The death of Comrade Elias Molema changed union policy - we agreed that even with the extra costs involved we would fly comrades to meetings. We used to sleep at a Lutheran Church in Cape Town.

Mashishi: The whole NEC would sleep in one dormitory. Mathibe would wake up at 3am to call people to shower - there were only two showers for all of us!



Mathibe: When we stayed at the Catholic Church we had to be in bed by 10pm and we could not make any noise after that time.

What are your memories of building SAMWU?

Mathibe: This union was built through struggles. I was recruited by female labourers at Diepmeadow cleansing department. The way the union worked was that labourers would be organised by officials and then they would organise others. But you would not just be introduced to the union without being screened first. People would have to know your background first to know that they could trust you. SAMWU got to where it is today by building structures of the union. We never went for big and fancy structures, and if we could go back to basics our union would be even stronger today. In the Transvaal there was the Johannesburg Area Council.

It was our task as part of this council to recruit and build the region which was then called Transvaal. We had to move around from Johannesburg to Brits to Nelspruit to Pietersburg to organise and set up structures. Our first NEC was based on shopstewards committees. The first region to form was Natal with Cde John Mawbey as the Regional Secretary. We didn't establish regions without having a strong base on the ground. Through these struggles we got educated in the ways of trade unions. My first experience of meeting Mashishi was that he was difficult, but as time went by I learnt that this was a person who you could talk to. Mashishi was always wearing a leather cap at that time!

When I became a treasury clerk I was one of the first clerical workers, but other clericals would say they have no need to join a union.

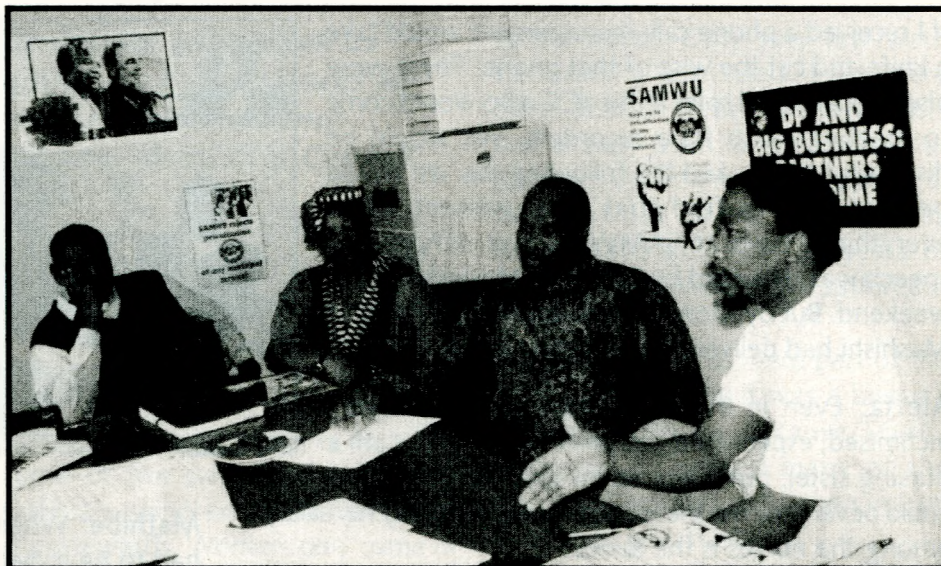
I think this is because they were afraid of being victimised by management. I learnt that rallying around workers, especially the cleansing workers, instilled fear in management. Then they were afraid to touch you.

The way we operated at that time was that we had a strict way of drawing up a programme to recruit members in different areas with the view of forming an area council. In those days, we used public transport to move around. We would plan which compounds to recruit in after work. In Springs, we would target various departments in the municipality. If there were no shopstewards, we would meet the worker's committees. Sometimes we would only get to Springs at 7pm and finish at 11pm. We would then have to catch the last train to Johannesburg.

Unbeknown to us, there were ex-MWUSA officials who were organising workers and keeping their subscriptions instead of passing them on to SAMWU. We sorted this out, but it still took a long time to organise the Vaal. Once when we were going to organise the Kempton Park workers at their hostel, an ex-MWUSA official told the hostel dwellers that people from Inkatha were on the way to make trouble. So when we arrived the workers locked the gates behind us, and they shouted to everyone to arm themselves. It was only after a lot of talking that the comrades could see we were coming from SAMWU and not Inkatha.

Mashishi: Yes, that guy would have been prepared to have us killed by those hostel dwellers! We must also mention Comrade Phagadi. He was the only member of SAMWU in the Western Transvaal at that time, and without his help we could not have organised that region. Also, we had another comrade who would force people to join SAMWU. This comrade would tell me that if people don't see the way, they must be forced to see the way! At other times, workers would keep us at meetings until late, promising us transport home. But when meetings closed, the workers would disappear! Many times, we would have to pay the taxi fare for a full load back to Johannesburg from Springs. And in those days, we were building the union and we could not claim that money back.

Mathibe: There are other comrades who were not in SAMWU when it launched but who played a big role in building the union.



I'm thinking of Cde Johannes Gutwane from Bedfordview and the late Cde Walaza who brought back the comrades of MWUSA to join SAMWU.

Have there been mergers since the launch of SAMWU that have changed the union?

Mashishi: We have continued to merge with other unions after the launch of SAMWU. This has built the union and increased membership, but it has not been easy. When we were trying to merge with the UJMW, the General Secretary of that union - Mr Ngwenya - did not want the merger to take place. In fact he walked out of the meeting. That is when we decided that we needed a different strategy in order for the merger to take place. So we took Cde Aletta and another female comrade and together we succeeded in isolating that General Secretary from the UJMW members. Eventually most members wanted to merge, and Ngwenya retired just before the merger took place in 1993.

Aletta: Our merger in 1993 instilled such fear within our employers. Immediately after merging I became chairperson of health and housing. When we joined with SAMWU we learnt a lot of discipline as shopstewards.

Mashishi: The merger with the Democratic Integrated Municipal Employee's Society (DIMES) was also difficult. Differences in organising style, staff benefits and other practices made this merger a very difficult one. At one stage, merger talks broke down completely. The merger eventually took place in July 1994. There have been other mergers with workers in the Port Elizabeth area, Worcester and Vredenburg/Saldanha which went more smoothly.

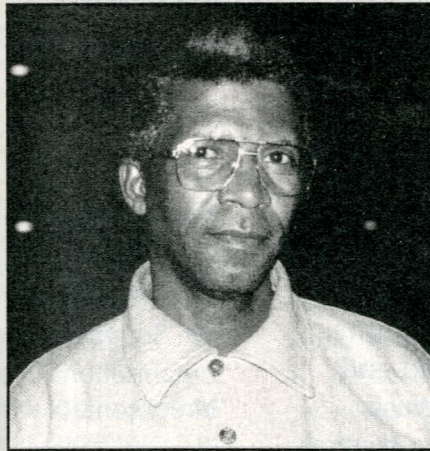
Mathibe: There was one easy merger, which was the Union of Pretoria Municipal Workers. Those comrades just came through to SAMWU and agreed to join, without any conditions attached. This was in 1988.

Please tell comrades how you planned our first national strike?

Mathibe: This was in 1993, over wages. It took a few NEC meetings to get to an agreement that we would go on strike. We had people in SAMWU at that time, for example in Kinross, who were earning R80 per month, and other people who were declared casuals for the rest of their working life. We were aware that these types of problems would not be resolved by leaving every local authority to negotiate for itself.

With pressure from Johannesburg and Cape Town workers, employers would easily bow down. So we took a decision at the NEC to say we have reached a point where we need to show management the strength of SAMWU. We had to be very prepared for this. We didn't have Cde John Brown (the Legal Officer) at that time, so we had to get some lawyers on standby in case of legal problems.

Mashishi: The biggest problems with this strike was the dismissals, the arrests and injuries suffered by many hundreds of workers. Apart from these events, that strike was a success and brought many changes in Local Government. We all need to work hard for further change in Local Government.



Comrade Tsirotsi Ndesi, a driver and now acting supervisor, has worked for East London municipality since 1982. He looks back on his time in SAAWU....

"I was a member of the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) which was one of the unions that formed SAMWU. In the days before the Wiehahn Commission, the regime did not allow trade union activity. Even after the Wiehahn Commission, life was very dangerous for trade unionists. The leadership of SAAWU was harassed, detained, tortured and even killed. As an active SAAWU trade unionist, I myself was detained from June 18th, 1986 until June 11th, 1987, for allegedly influencing East London municipal workers to join the UDF.

SAAWU was organising in many sectors including food, textile and metal. SAAWU also helped to initiate negotiations with other unions to form a trade union federation, which later became COSATU.

As a trade unionist, I have kept these World Federation of Trade Union principles which were written in 1945, in my mind:

1. Working people shall be free to organise themselves into trade unions and engage in all normal trade union activity.
2. Working people shall be free to establish co-operatives and industrial organisations.
3. Freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion and political association shall be guaranteed to working people.
4. Every form of political, economic and social discrimination shall be eliminated. Equal pay for equal work.

SAMWU has organised closed shop municipalities until those unions fell away, or become the minority. The founding principles of non racialism, non sexism and worker control has served us well. We have a good President who has been with us for so long because he is honest, approachable and knows how to commit himself.

(Cde Ndesi is a shopsteward, branch chairperson, treasurer of the BEC of the SACP, and the ANC deputy chairperson in East London).

Building International

No review of the history of SAMWU will be complete without looking at the role that international support played in building SAMWU. But SAMWU has not only being the recipient of international trade union aid and solidarity. Right from its launching congress, debates were intense and emotional about what the international policy of the union should be. It was these debates and the policy positions which arose from them which shaped our relationship to trade unions in other countries.

International Policy

It is no secret that the international trade union movement was used by imperialist forces in their fight against socialism and communism. This eventually led to split in the international labour movement.

Naturally, unions in South Africa, many with strong links to the anti-capitalist bloc, were suspicious of becoming part of a movement which was being used as an instrument in the war against their allies.

Our own launching congress felt that it would be unwise for a new union, still struggling to achieve internal unity, to affiliate to any international trade union organisation. Congress delegates felt that affiliation would draw the union into "the controversies of international politics and introduces the dangers of division and collapse that arises out of the practices of these organisations."

So our first policy position was one which:

- ★ Did not support international affiliation.
- ★ Sought to develop links with progressive worker organisations in all countries and especially establish direct contact with workers in developing countries.

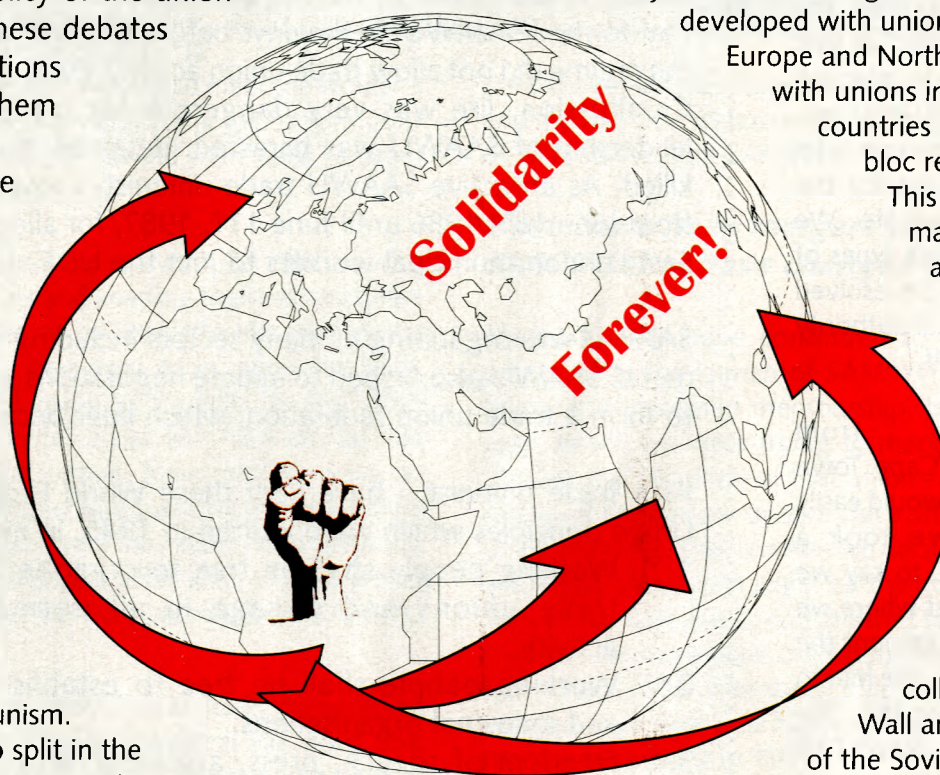
By our second congress, links had been developed with unions in Western Europe and North America. Links with unions in the developing countries and in the socialist bloc remained weak.

This congress maintained the non-aligned position but also agreed that SAMWU should strengthen links with trade unions in the socialist bloc and in Africa.

In the run up to our next Congress, the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the breaking up of the Soviet Union caused a review of our attitude to the

international trade union movement. It was at this congress, held in 1991, that SAMWU resolved to seek affiliation with the Public Services International(PSI). The PSI is the international body to which the large majority of public sector unions are affiliated. But this decision to affiliate was qualified. The actual resolution read - " We insist on our right to develop and maintain relations with public sector unions throughout the world irrespective of whether they are PSI affiliates".

It was also agreed that SAMWU would campaign within the PSI for greater resources to be set aside to promote interaction between unions in developing countries.



Worker Solidarity

This decision was not vigorously pursued by the Union. This was largely because our participation in PSI activities, since our affiliation, has been a bit inconsistent.

The debate on international affiliation was not restricted to SAMWU. Intense and heated debates have raged in COSATU on the same issue. The matter of international affiliation was finally resolved at the recent COSATU Congress.

Building international links

The struggle against apartheid generated international solidarity on a scale never yet seen or experienced.

There is no doubt that this solidarity, in material and moral form, contributed greatly to the demise of apartheid. SAMWU was not excluded from this show of international solidarity.

Visits to and from South Africa, ongoing written communications and material and moral support characterised our international links.

Some of the unions with which we developed links during the formative years SAMWU include:

The AFSCME and SEIU - Both from the United States
NKE of Norway

SKTF and SKAF - Both from Sweden

UNISON - the biggest public sector union in Britain, with over 1 million members (formerly NALGO)

Abvakabo of Holland

KTV of Finland

Jichiro of Japan

Our international work however remained uncoordinated and was not integrated into our day to day work. It was in 1996, that we finally decided to set up an International Sub-Committee. This decision was necessary if we were to give proper effect to our policies on international work. The changing world situation also required a major re-look of how we related to workers in other countries. So behind the slogans "Our Vision - Socialism, The Road - Democracy" and "Workers of the World Unite !" we are starting on the next stage of our international work.



The effects of globalisation are felt equally in the developed and the developing countries.

Workers, in all parts of the world, are being pitted against each other in the name of competitiveness.

This race to the bottom will only have one winner -

the bosses! Workers in the north and the south,

in the developed and developing

countries must unite if we are to defend ourselves against the onslaught launched by the multi-nationals companies. Already increased levels of unemployment, homelessness, poverty, crime etc have come to characterise this period in world history. Yet the profits of the bosses continue to reach record levels.

We are entering a new era in international work. One which is not so much based on receiving foreign support as it is on the need to building a united working class as a necessary part of working towards an alternative to the new world order.

Forward to the next ten years of international solidarity!

The workers of Aliwal North pay tribute to their union

**Ten years ago they had declared Municipal Workers as SAMWU
I speak about Cde Mashishi, Cde Roger
I talk about Cde Melitafa, Cde Mqaka and many more**

**I salute Cde organisers, cde Secretaries and I congratulate Cde
Administrators for their sacrifices**

**Melitafa stood bold about workers rights
He had crossed the field and entered Municipalities and talk about
"Amalungelo Ethu"
Stand for your rights, stand**

**Anger, frustration, protest and meetings, there goes Cdes and address
concern of Abasebenzi: Viva basebenzi, Viva!**

**Unorganised in their numbers "Bantu Administration Board" was
the question. "Rule and divide" was the policy
Through to the songs and slogans, workers gather together and said
"Singaba sebenzi. Basebenzi Masimanyane"**

**During the time of emergency and eviction
SAMWU emerge and heard the cry of fellow countrymen
Bold organisers fighting detention without trial entering plants unnoticed
Behind the walls of Bantu Administration Board the giant union is growing
bigger, the voices were shouting "Viva SAMWU viva"**

**Workers crying for pension,
Provident fund came to rescue
Women fighting for representation
"Women's Committees" established
Union became voice of workers
Long live Workers Union, Long Live!**

1987



1997

Happy Birthday SAMWU