

Trade Unions?

All over South Africa management is starting to think about Trade Unions for African workers. Workers now ask themselves-is the Trade Union the best kind of workers organization? This is a very difficult question which needs careful thought.

There are two types of organizations that unite a lot of workers. The first is a trade union which unites all the workers in one industry. This means that all construction workers, in Cape town, Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth and other centres in the country for example, would be part of the same Trade union. All other industries would be organized in this way.

Another way in which workers can unite is to form a general Union. In a general union, workers from many different industries unite because they realise that their interests are the same. This is obviously much bigger than an Industrial Trade Union and can be more powerful.

This also means that workers in different industries can help each other and there is less chance of some workers being better organized than others and forgetting their fellow workers. Almost all African workers are unskilled -they don't have to have training in order to be employed at a factory. This means that in a dispute management can dismiss the workers at a factory and

employ different workers (even those that have been previously employed in a different industry.). This is probably the most important reason why all workers should get together in a General Union rather than forming a lot of different Trade Unions. All workers face the same problems. It seems silly to break the unity of the workers by forming different organizations for different workers.

EDITORIAL

Organisation Beyond the Factory Committee

Workers will realise from reading this issue of Abasebenzi that it is important to organise beyond the factory committee. The case of Nautilus workers is important. The demands of Nautilus workers were not met even after a strike and much unrest. One of the reasons why Nautilus workers were unsuccessful was because they acted alone. The 286 workers at Nautilus were all united in their struggle against management. They were all united in the wage demands which they presented. And yet they were defeated. Their demands were not met and they lost their jobs. How can the workers prevent this sort of action by management? They can reveal their true strength by uniting. It is easy for management to defeat 286 workers. It is not easy for it to defeat 2 000 workers and it is virtually impossible for it to defeat all the workers in Cape Town.

Organisation and unity of the workers in factory committees is only the first step. Factory committees are only the first sign of the growing awareness of the workers that they gain strength through unity.

We have seen what happened at Nautilus. The unity of the workers in one factory was not enough. But it is not enough merely to say that workers must unite. How are workers to unite? What forms should organisation of workers take?

Certain principles of organisation should be clear. The organisation of workers in factory committees and on General Councils of Workers must exist solely for the workers to represent them. This means that all representatives must be elected by the workers whom they represent. These representatives must keep in contact with the workers and inform them continually on all matters. If the workers are dissatisfied at any point with their representative, then that representative must be replaced by another who is a more accurate representative of the workers. This should happen at all levels. The most important representatives of the workers must also be responsible to the workers on the factory floor. Workers and representatives must be involved at all levels of organisation.