

KARL VON HOLDT attended the FEDSAL annual conference – and discovered the fastest growing federation in SA.

The mood at the Federation of SA Labour Unions (FEDSAL) annual conference was confident. FEDSAL is the only labour federation which has managed not only to maintain its membership figures through the current recession, but actually to grow through the affiliation of new unions (see table). FEDSAL's 17 affiliates now boast 270 000 members, compared to 230 000 in 14 affiliates a year ago.

"FEDSAL has shown exceptional growth over the past year, and we have expanded into new areas, with tremendous potential for further growth," said FEDSAL president Johann du Plessis in his presidential report. "FEDSAL is now indisputably in the number two spot, and therefore has every reason to try harder."

FEDSAL sees itself as a moderate trade union centre, rather than a white-collar federation. NMC chair Frans Barker emphasised this point in his address to the conference. FEDSAL he said, is very important as a moderating force in the centre. On the shopfloor too, FEDSAL could work to limit intimidation and polarisation. "FEDSAL seems to have built a degree of trust with organisations to the left of the political spectrum. You should be careful not to lose relations with the centre and the right," he said.

But although FEDSAL has both blue-collar and white-collar affiliates, its growth has been in the area of white-collar workers, and this seems likely to continue. FEDSAL is emerging as the federation of white-collar workers. As it does so, the organisation's racial complexion is likely to become an increasing problem for it. There will

'in the number two spot'



FEDSAL

be a growing number of black white-collar workers as SA democratises, and they will become increasingly assertive, both in the workplace and in the staff associations they belong to.

At present FEDSAL has about 30% black members – but the leadership is dominated by whites. There was only 1 black delegate out of



Delegates at the FEDSAL conference: looking ahead with confidence?

Photo: William Matlala

a total of 43 at the conference.

Will black white-collar workers feel at home in these organisations? FEDSAL will have to face such questions with more urgency if it is to become a growing and dynamic force.

An example of the tensions it will face is the anxiety its members express over affirmative action. A number of questions were posed to Barker and guest-speaker Leon Louw on this issue (see also interview with Johann du Plessis and Dannhauser van der Merwe, p56). This will obviously be a key issue in a post-apartheid SA, and black members and white members will have opposing interests.

Will FEDSAL affiliates be able to find a creative way of facilitating affirmative action; or will they be driven by their white members into opposing affirmative action? Given the federation's weakness as a centre – with only one full-time official and an administrator – these questions will probably be addressed by the affiliates rather than by the federation as a whole.

At any rate, FEDSAL probably has little to fear from COSATU's ability to move into white-collar areas at this stage. Although COSATU has expressed the intention to start organising white-collar workers, its affiliates are steeped in the organising traditions and culture of blue-collar workers.

An example of this is the failure of the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union to organise white-collar workers outside the bantustans.

The white-collar sector is of increasing strategic importance for the labour movement. While manufacturing unemployment fell by 46 000 to 1 380 000 last year, the financial sector increased by 5 000 to 186 000 and services by 26 000 to 1 326 000 (CSS in BUSINESS DAY, 18/2/93). The financial sector has doubled in size over the past 11 years (WEEKLY MAIL, 7/5/93). FEDSAL is well placed to benefit from this growth – and COSATU may be watching hungrily. Future developments should be interesting. ☆

Annual conference – FEDSAL style

A FEDSAL conference is unlike a COSATU or NACTU congress. There were no political debates over policy or strategy, relations with political organisations or campaigns to be waged. There were three guest speakers – Frans Barker from the National Manpower Commission, Leon Louw from the Free Market Foundation and Toolsyraj Benydin of the World Confederation of Labour (WCL).

FEDSAL president Johann du Plessis told *LABOUR BULLETIN* that relations with WCL are “informal and cordial”. It is FEDSAL policy to develop its international contacts: “Our opponents - the employers - do so continually and we need to catch up.” It is possible that FEDSAL could apply for affiliation to WCL in future, says Du Plessis, “but first we have to discuss it.”

The president reported to the conference that FEDSAL had successfully lobbied against the Jacobs Committee proposal that pension fund contributions be taxed. He also proposed that a common salary ceiling be adopted for the UIF, Worker’s Compensation and Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Currently employees earning above R32 000 per annum are not protected by the BCOE Act, those earning above R45 000 cannot participate in the Workman’s Compensation Fund, and those earning above R58 000 are excluded from UIF. The conference agreed that these ceilings should be equalised or abolished, and that this issue should go to the NMC. ♦

FEDSAL affiliates

Membership

| | <u>01/12/91</u> | <u>01/12/92</u> |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| ABSA Workers' Union (ABSAWU) | 8 500 | 8 500 |
| Artisan Staff Association (ASA) | 16 500 | 15 500 |
| Eskom Employees' Association (EEA) | 7 000 | 6 000 |
| Financial Institutions Workers' Union (FIWU) | 12 000 | 13 000 |
| Industrial Salaried Staff Association (ISSAV) | 4 000 | 4 000 |
| Motor Industry Staff Association (MISA) | 20 000 | 20 000 |
| Nedcor Staff Society (NEDSTAFF) | 6 000 | 6 000 |
| SALSTAFF (SALSTAFF) | 17 000 | 16 000 |
| SA Association of Municipal Employees (SAAME) | 48 000 | 50 000 |
| SA Footplate Staff Association (SAFSA) | 8 500 | 8 500 |
| SA Hairdressers Employees' Industrial Union (SAHEIU) | 8 000 | 7 500 |
| SA Society of Bank Officials (SASBO) Underground Officials' Association of SA (UOA) | 38 000 | 42 000 |
| Total | 214 000 | 218 000 |
| | | |
| New affiliates (12 May 1993) | | |
| Hospital Personnel Association of SA | | 40 714 |
| Post and TELKOM Association | | 12 673 |
| SA Broadcasting Staff Association | | 1 612 |
| UNISA Administrative and Professional Staff Union | | 809 |
| Total | | 55 808 |