

## Western Cape Men's Hostel Association

"Dibanisa Intsapho" - unite families - is the motto of the newly-formed Western Cape Men's Hostel Association (WCMHA). But it is going to do far more than this. For the first time, migrant workers are uniting to fight for greater control over their lives.

In the Western Cape there are 27,000 men living in single sex hostels. Langa (Cape Town) boasts the largest hostel in the country with 11,941 inhabitants as at May 1. In the country as a whole there are some 270 single sex hostels holding 300,000 workers (this does not include the 400,000 living in mine hostels). As far as the government is concerned there is no intention of phasing out these institutions, and this year R11,5 million has been budgeted for future construction. (Cape Times 26.6.85)

More than 500 crammed themselves into and around the Presbyterian Church hall in Nyanga in the Western Cape to celebrate the launch of the WCMHA on June 1. Representatives from trade union, community, religious, and educational bodies, among them, AZAPO, the UDF, SALDRU, SAAWU, CTMWA, GWU and the Crossroads Executive Committee also attended.

The organisation, with a current membership of more than 1,000 and a potential membership of about 27,000, aims to fight for family rights for migrant workers living in hostels, a review of the qualifications for contracts for migrant workers and improvements in conditions and facilities at hostels.

Johnson Mpukumpa, president of the General Workers Union and organiser and publicity secretary of the WCMHA, said one of the bad things migrant workers faced was high rent:

We are among those people who pay the highest rent in the Western Cape ... and this is for rooms which are often overcrowded and without ceilings, and there are no street lights. When our wives visit us they have to wait outside until we return from work. We decided that people who have to live under these conditions should have one voice the authorities can listen to.

He said he found it difficult to understand why such an organisation had not been started before:

Workers have organised themselves into trade unions, often under very difficult conditions. Only now have we decided to unite at the places where we live. There is no end to the list of organisations established by the government to look after our interests but they have done nothing about our problems. We must attend to them ourselves.

Bishop Patrick Matolengwe questioned the nature of a government which prevented a man from living with his wife and family. "Your responsibility," he said to workers in the hall, "is to build this organisation so that it can serve you and improve your future. You must not rest until you have won the right to live with your wives and families."

Andy Johnson, speaking on behalf of the trade unions in the Western Cape who are party to the planned new trade union federation, said the unions were not simply fighting for better working conditions but a better society:

We cannot separate the struggle of workers from that of the community because when workers leave the factory they become part of the community.

He said there was a lot of dissatisfaction among workers but that mere dissatisfaction would not bring liberation. Only unity in struggle could do this.

The following people were elected to the WCMHA executive: Mr C Mahamba (chairman), Mr W Zenzile (vice-chairman), Mr S Nkatzo (secretary), Mr W Nodlela (assistant secretary), Mr N Maphundu (treasurer), Mr J Mpukumpa (organiser/publicity secretary), Mr L Mbebe, Mr R Qublilanga, Mr S Phike and Mr S Gatyeni (additional members). Some of the office holders are already active in trade union or community organisations - Mahamba and Nodlela are organisers for the Liquor and Catering Trades Employees' Union, Phike is the chairman of one of the Crossroads squatter groups, and Mpukumpa is president of General Workers Union.

(Cape Town correspondent, June 1985)