

South African Boilermakers' Society Conference

About 100 delegates attended the April triennial conference of the South African Boilermakers Society (SABS). To date SABS has ensured its "independence" by adopting policies and affiliations which often seem contradictory. The Society withdrew from TUCSA in 1983 because of the Council's inability to adjust to changing conditions in the labour movement. Since then SABS has played an active role in the South African Coordinating Council of the International Metalworkers Federation. SABS's simultaneous membership of the conservative Confederation of the Metal and Building Unions (CMBU) has resulted in a resolution requesting the executive committee to investigate continued membership of that body. This invidious position is often compounded by pressures from below, especially its growing black membership. The SABS's increasing concern with broader issues was reflected in the resolutions on black education and against influx control. More controversial, in terms of mainstream opposition politics, the SABS came out strongly against the disinvestment campaign, and the ICFTU's support for it.

Probably the most important decision at the conference was the constitutional amendment which entrenched the "multi-racial" (as opposed to non-racial) structure of the union. In effect this means, "that all race groups comprising its membership will have equal representation on the executive to ensure that no interest group can dominate the others". The Society's outgoing president, Mr Fred Athrends explained this division of the society into interest groups along racial lines in his address:

It so happens that these divisions at present exist and the representation is designed to create dialogue so that separate racial interest groups may soon become something of the past - we foresee that the interest groups will be based on industrial lines.

Despite these reassurances, this means that, for the time being, representation will be on "racial lines" to provide substance to the organisation's "multi-racial" philosophy.

(SALB correspondent, Johannesburg, April 1985)