

EAWTUSA: Under State Attack

The Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union of South Africa was launched in March 1986. It was formed after talks which started in 1983 led to a merger between Electrical and Allied Workers Union and the Electrical and Allied Trades Union. These two unions originally acted as "African" and "Coloured" parallel unions under the control of the conservative white-run South African Electrical Workers Association. The black workers, however, refused to accept subordinate status. The union they have created represents 25,000 workers in the electrical industries throughout South Africa.

Even before the new union was officially launched trade unionists in the old electrical unions were under attack: the Cape Town offices were ransacked in September 1985; Raymond Khoza, union president had his home in Mamelodi petrol bombed; four Cape Town unionists - B Williams, C Theys, M Bam and R October - were detained in terms of the State of Emergency; union member Andrew Odendaal was charged with arson; and Transvaal organiser Phillip Ndau was allegedly assaulted by police.

Recent developments

Now five Cape Town unionists - Brian Williams, Michael Bam, Gavin Cloete, Chris Appollis and Stan Croeser have been charged under the Internal Security Act - because they tried to attend the funeral of fellow union member, Moses Landane, who was shot and killed by police in Atteridgeville in September 1985. The case is due to be heard in July.

More sinister still, the union's advocate, J Strauss, has learnt that the state wants to secure a conviction so that the trade union activities of the five, and in particular of Brian Williams, can be terminated. Advocate Strauss has since sent a memo to the Attorney-General outlining these allegations. (For further developments phone Cape Town 419-1154; 21-7675)

(from an EAWTUSA communique, May 1986)

Postscript: Despite harrasment, the members of EAWTUSA have continued to struggle for improved conditions. In May labourers in the electrical contracting industry secured a 35% increase (58c per hour), their largest rise in 12 years.