

Union presses on after Mavi's death

THE BLACK Municipal Workers Union changed its name to the Municipal and General Workers Union of South Africa at its recent annual congress.

The congress was held shortly after the tragic death of the union's president, Joe Mavi. Gatsby Mazwi, former secretary was elected new president.

Mazwi, explained the reasons for the change of name and also for the change of constitution.

He said over 2,000 workers were dismissed during the 1980 Johannesburg Municipal Workers strike and they had to look for work in other industries.

'When they came back to Johannesburg they still wanted to be

members of our union, and wanted the union to represent them in their new jobs,' he said.

'We found workers needed organisation. We believe intruding into other union's areas is not in the interests of workers. If workers are being organised by another union we will not intervene as long as they are organising in the workers' interests.'

Magwusa is not happy in its role as a general union, however. They prefer to minimise the confusion that comes with too many undemarcated unions, which they see as weakening the union movement as a whole.

'People will be scattered and the

unions will not have a solid base. General unions must be phased out. When the ideal of demarcation is practicable, we will dissolve as a general union,' Mazwi promised.

Further policy decisions at the AGM were to involve the union in community issues and 'to build closer relationships with progressive organisations'. They were actively involved in bringing a halt to the South African Breweries soccer tour.

A short term objective outlined at the annual meeting was to push for recognition from the Johannesburg City Council. At this stage, the Council will not recognise Magwusa as it is not registered, a step which the union resolved not to take.



Gatsby Mazwi, the new president

SATS trying to derail union on recognition

THE GENERAL workers union (GWU) is involved in a recognition dispute with the country's largest employer, the South African Transport Services (SATS) at the East London and Port Elizabeth docks.

This is the first time an unregistered union has attempted to deal with a state-owned employer and the dispute has significant implications.

SATS has so far adamantly refused to even talk about the issue with the union, despite pressure from workers, the International Transport Federation (ITF) and even some employers who are scared of international implications of a potential strike at the docks.

SATS' management says black workers on the railways must be represented by the 'sweetheart' Black Staff Association (BSA) which though it was only started little more than a year ago claims to have more than 50,000 members.

Workers at PE and East London

GWU demarcates in interest of unity

AT ITS annual conference in Cape Town in June the General Workers Union (GWU) decided not to operate in certain industries.

The main reason for this was to foster unity in the trade union movement and not move towards becoming an industrial union. A GWU statement at the end of the conference said 'demarcation disputes between trade unions are the single greatest cause of division in the trade union movement. The large number of general unions greatly adds to the potential for conflict.'

The GWU constitution was amended to exclude workers in the food and canning, textile and motor assembly industries and the commercial distributive trades. The GWU offered to help other unions in these industries where it could.

In another significant development it was agreed to contact the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) to discuss demarcation issues and general co-operation in the engineering industry where the GWU has made substantial progress.

A request was made to other general unions to follow the GWU example and give serious consideration to the question of demarcation.

The conference endorsed the moves towards trade union unity, calling for unity of all democratic trade unions and the establishment of mutually acceptable criteria to verify and monitor the attainment of basic democratic practices in each.

have been questioned and intimidated by railway police because they are GWU members and the chairman of the PE workers committee, Jeremy Toluana, was fired in January at 24 hours notice.

But this has not deterred the SATS dock workers at the ports who have remained members of the union, demanding recognition and refusing to be provoked into striking which would give SATS an excuse to fire them or break their organisation.

The SATS workers are receiving strong support from the stevedores who work alongside them at both ports. It was in fact the stevedores who first organised the railway workers, after they had won recognition for their committees at both ports.

The dispute has important implications. If railways management recognise the GWU then it opens the way for genuine unionisation of the country's largest workforce.

The power of an organised railworkers union would be immense, considering the importance of the country's transport system to the economy. SATS management must be well aware of this, but they must also be aware that the credibility of the South African Government's attempts to sell its labour reforms to the world would be seriously undermined if SATS refuses to even speak to the GWU.

Secondly, if the railway workers at the PE and East London docks strike, there is little doubt that they will be supported by the stevedores in PE, East London, Cape Town and Durban, effectively blocking cargo loading in all four ports. German and Dutch dockworkers have already pledged support in the event of a strike and there is a strong possibility that dockworkers from some of South Africa's major trading partners will refuse to handle South African goods.

In the meantime SATS management is playing for time but the patience of the workers cannot last forever. They are demanding that the union of their choice be recognised and will use every means possible at their disposal to achieve that end.

One of the most unsavoury aspects of the whole dispute is the reactionary manner in which the white railway unions have insisted that railways management ignore the GWU. This is significant because white workers have always received a good deal from the railways in terms of housing, pensions and so on, while black railworkers are the lowest paid, worst housed and least secure workers in the country.



Joe Mavi, former President of BMWU, was buried last month

Tributes paid to a 'Man of the people'

JOSEPH MAVI, the man who led 10,000 Johannesburg municipal workers in a strike for higher pay, was buried on June 26, the 27th anniversary of the Freedom Charter's signing.

About 2,000 people from all over the country gathered for the funeral service at Soweto's Regina Mundi church. The service was delayed as mourners waited for a court decision on whether they could continue with the burial.

Police kept a close watch at Regina Mundi and heavily armed police, members of the SAP and the West Rand Administration Board were stationed at entrances to Soweto apparently to stop whites from going to the funeral. Even the few who did get into Soweto were prevented from attending the service

as police had thrown a tight net around the church.

During the service a unionist said: 'Joe Mavi was not an ordinary man — he was a man of the people'. Mavi had been a highly devoted trade unionist and had aspired to progressive unionism, he said.

The workers sang 'Mavi was a hero' and other freedom songs during the service and a green, gold and black flag was raised.

Most of the mourners walked to the Avalon cemetery, and as Mavi's coffin was lowered they sang 'Hamba Kahle mkhonto we sizwe' ('Go well spear of the nation'). Police in the procession kept a low profile.

At Mavi's house in Moletsane there was a mixed mood as family members welcomed the birth of his son, born a day before his burial.

Workers strike out against divisions

IN A display of solidarity 160 'Coloureds' and African workers at Motorvia in Uitenhage went on strike last month because Coloured women were receiving higher wages than their highest paid African male colleagues.

Workers found the 'Coloured' women workers were being paid

R60 a week whereas men in the highest category, most of whom were African, received only R53.

In response to what the workers saw as a management strategy to create division among them and underpay the African employees, the entire workforce went on a three-day strike.

Bosses try to intimidate workers with a new Bill from Rabie

THE RECENT industrial unrest in the Northern Natal has revealed the speed with which the state uses new weapons to deal with independent trade unions.

In this case the new Intimidation Act, a result of the Rabie Commission proposal, has been used for the first time to arrest and charge 15 workers from the Richards Bay Coal Terminal with intimidation.

They have been released on bail and will appear in the Umtuzini magistrate's court on August 18.

The arrests followed a wave of strikes in the area. The main ones were at the aluminium plant at Alusaf where 1,700 workers downed tools and at the Richards Bay Coal Terminal where 500 workers were involved.

Both strikes focussed on the issue of pensions. They came shortly after a speech by Owen Horwood in which he indicated that parts of the controversial Preservation of Pensions Bill, which was dropped last year after massive worker opposition, would be reintroduced.

After the speech the Registrar of Financial Institutions, Naas van Staden, announced that the government was not planning to 'freeze' pension monies.

The strikes involved Fosatu-affiliated unions. At Alusaf the members of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union demanded that their pension contributions be removed from the Seifsa fund and be placed in the company fund.

At the same time, 700 workers at Grinaker Constructions and 300 workers at David H also downed tools and 550 workers at Triomf Chemicals in Richards Bay boycotted their canteen over management's refusal to negotiate wages with the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union.

The Intimidation Act, which took effect on June 2, is very short but its definition are vague enough to cover a wide range of activities.

It covers any attempt to coerce or persuade a person to do or not do something, or to adopt or abandon a particular standpoint by assault or causing damage to that person or threatening to kill, assault or cause damage to that person. It will depend on the defence to prove that the accused can show he or she had a legal reason to do what he or she did.

The definition's widest part is the threat to cause damage. If such a threat is made with the intention of, for instance, persuading a worker not to 'scab' during a strike, it will amount to intimidation. It is also possible that a wide range of activities connected with consumer boycotts might also amount to intimidation. Clearly a boycott will cause damage to the employer concerned.

Much will depend on how the courts decide to interpret this Act. It is possible they will restrict its application. The maximum penalty for intimidation is extremely severe

10 years imprisonment and or a fine of R20,000.

Motorvia provides drivers for the transport of cars and trucks to other centres.

The company's manpower resources director, JPS Gouws, flew down from Johannesburg for talks with representatives of the Transport and Allied Workers Union, a Fosatu affiliate, after which workers returned to work.