

Book One:
WHY
and
HOW
we must
organise

LET'S GET ORGANISED!

A Handbook for Trade Union
and Community Activists



Let's Get Organised!

A Handbook for Trade Union and Community Activists

This publication has drawn on much of the content of its predecessors of the 1980s and 1990s such as the supplement of the *New Nation* newspaper, "Learning Nation" and the TULEC Organiser's Manual of the Labour Research Service.



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United Front Song

And because a man is human
He'll want to eat, and thanks a lot
But talk can't take the place of meat
Or fill an empty pot.

So left, two, three!
So left, two, three!
Comrade, there's a place for you.
Take your stand in the workers' united front
For you are a worker too.

And because a man is human
He won't care for a kick in the face.
He doesn't want slaves under him
Or above him a ruling class

So left, two, three!
So left, two, three!
Comrade, there's a place for you.
Take your stand in the workers' united front
For you are a worker too.

And because a worker's a worker
No one else will bring him liberty.
It's nobody's work but the worker's own
To set the worker free.

So left, two, three!
So left, two, three!
Comrade, there's a place for you.
Take your stand in the workers' united front
For you are a worker too.

— Bertolt Brecht

LET'S GET ORGANISED!

Many existing working class organisations, like trade unions are plagued by serious weaknesses including a lack of democracy and poor participation by their members.

There are deep-seated historical reasons for the poor state of working class organisations and politics today that have resulted in a deviation from our organisational principles of;

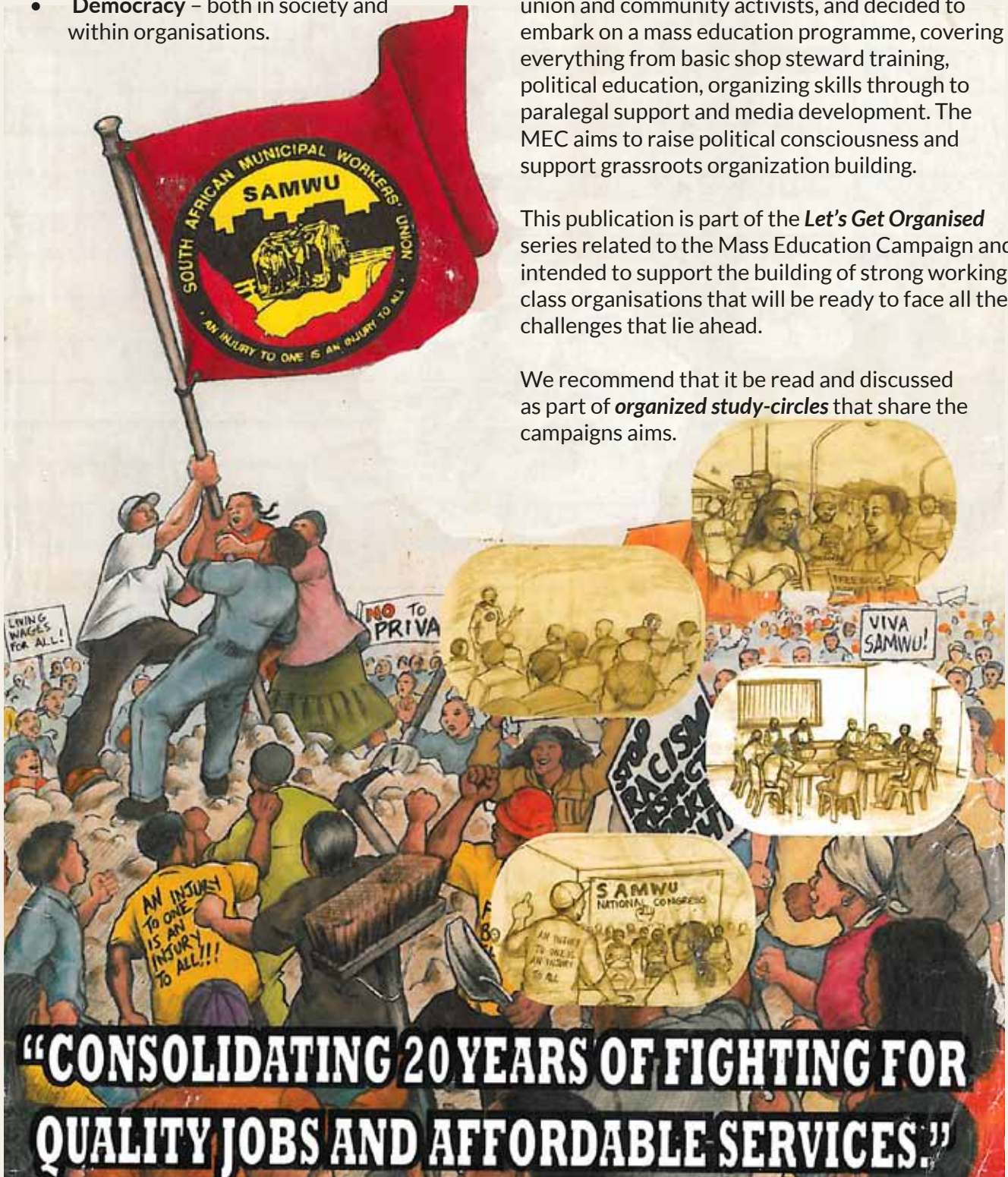
- **Unity** of workers and working class people.
- Organisational and political **independence**.
- **Democracy** – both in society and within organisations.

The forthcoming period internationally is likely to continue to be characterised by social and political upheaval and we do not have the luxury of time to prepare. We need to hastily GET ORGANISED into strong, united mass based, democratic and independent working class organisations.

In response to the weakened state of working class organization in South Africa we, together with Cosatu's national education desk initiated the **Mass Education Campaign (MEC)** during 2010. We identified serious capacity problems among trade union and community activists, and decided to embark on a mass education programme, covering everything from basic shop steward training, political education, organizing skills through to paralegal support and media development. The MEC aims to raise political consciousness and support grassroots organization building.

This publication is part of the *Let's Get Organised* series related to the Mass Education Campaign and intended to support the building of strong working class organisations that will be ready to face all the challenges that lie ahead.

We recommend that it be read and discussed as part of *organized study-circles* that share the campaigns aims.



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Introduction

Since the end of the 1980's we have seen a steady decline in the number and strength of working class organisations in South Africa. This is despite the fact that strong working class organisations were most needed then with what was to follow since. Today, unlike at the height of the anti-Apartheid struggle, we hardly have a united national movement of working class organisations with a common enemy and ongoing struggle campaigning. This is despite the fact that today South Africa is the most unequal society in the world and many still live in poverty with high unemployment and no access to basic and decent social services (housing, healthcare, education, water and electricity).

Over the past 10 years we have seen several community protests, most often for "service delivery" and increasingly more militant with the masses resorting to burning barricades and taking out their frustration against corrupt government officials by destroying state buildings and public facilities. The police have generally responded with repressive violence to working class protests. Similarly we have seen several major national strikes, including 100's of thousands of public sector workers. Yet there is very little evidence to show that even those who participate in these mass actions emerge stronger with strong grassroots organisations. Many of the struggles in communities and trade unions blow up and when ended, lay dormant and inactive for several years with later uprisings that seem unconnected, with different participants from the previous struggles, often around the same issues.

Many existing working class organisations, like trade unions are plagued by serious weaknesses including a lack of democracy and poor participation by their members.

There are deep-seated historical reasons for the poor state of working class organisations and politics today that have resulted in a deviation from our organisational principles of;

- **Unity** of workers and working class people.
- Organisational and political **independence**.
- **Democracy** – both in society and within organisations.

By 1990 there were major political shifts internationally that accompanied the collapse the Stalinist governments of the Eastern European countries. This was effectively the end of the "Cold War" and represented the triumph of capitalism globally and the death knell of socialism and the severe discrediting of socialist ideology. This laid the basis for a rightward political shift globally and fertile ground for neo-liberalism in South Africa.

By the end of the 1990's we had experienced the full impact of this shift and the democratic counter-revolution of the negotiated political settlement in South Africa. The most damaging trends at the time that weakened the working class and its capacity to organize and resist were the:

- Rightward political shift of the working class movements like the trade unions, driven by the leadership to place faith in the ANC government and "social partnership" to deliver better living and working conditions. This had the effect of working class people abandoning their struggle orientation and self-organisation.
- Loss of leadership to government and big business by community organisations and trade unions, especially Cosatu at all levels.
- Severe impact of neo-liberalism on the living standards of working class people and what it represented politically, i.e. an attack on workers' unity by creating new structural divisions within the labour force of outsourced, labour broker, casual and/or part-time workers.

The Current State of Class Struggle

The Marikana massacre of mine workers during August 2012 has in many ways been a watershed political moment in South Africa that brutally exposed the class character of the ANC government and the lengths it is prepared to go to protect the interests of white monopoly capital and their black capitalist cohorts in the ANC's leadership. It is the class pressure from below like the mineworkers' strikes and farmworkers' uprisings that have contributed towards the trade union leaders in Cosatu's political battles that could result in a split and realignment of the trade union movement with more divisions.

Already Cosatu's biggest affiliate, Numsa has broken politically from the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance, refusing to support the ruling party in the forthcoming elections. The union is also leading a mass campaign against the youth wage subsidy legislated by government last year and towards a broad united front similar to the UDF of the 1980's to lead working class struggles. Numsa is also investigating the prospect of leading the formation of a mass workers' party and will decide on this during 2015.

These are major political developments within Cosatu and come on the back of the NUM losing thousands of members in the platinum sector to rival union, AMCU and its federation, Nactu.

Internationally too there have been significant political developments in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Region and Europe since 2010 with mass uprisings, protests and coups. These have at times resulted in worse situations against working class interests, such as in Egypt that is once again dominated by the military junta.

Underpinning these uprisings internationally is increased poverty with worsening and widening inequality with the World Economic Forum expressing concern about this phenomenon – *"impacting social stability within countries and threatening security on a global scale."* We can see why even capitalist organisations are expressing concern about the situation when we consider the statistics such as the fact that:

- Almost half of world's wealth is now owned by just one percent of the population.
- The wealth of the one percent richest people in the world amounts to \$110 trillion. That is 65 times the total wealth of the bottom half of the world's population.
- The bottom half of the world's population owns the same as the richest 85 people in the world.



The forthcoming period internationally is likely to continue to be characterised by social and political upheaval and we do not have the luxury of time to prepare. We need to hastily GET ORGANISED into strong, united mass based, democratic and independent working class organisations.

In doing so, we need to overcome some niggling weaknesses of low-levels of commitment to class struggle and insufficient volunteerism amongst activists, many who expect financial reward for their involvement and leadership role. Understandably, many are pressured by poverty and unemployment but at the same time it is not sustainable to “professionalise” working class struggle in this manner and it can cause serious divisions about who gets paid and who doesn’t, how much etc. and even corruption. Moreover it can create dependency on those contributing money and resources, who do not necessarily share working class interests.

The phenomenon has been worsened by some NGO’s, who, with their donor resources have substituted for mass organisation, led campaigns and paid volunteers like regular employees. It has become so bad that in some townships it is part of our organisational culture and even demanded by comrades who have employment and earn decent

wages. Within the unions it takes the form of “allowances” for travel, meeting attendance and higher up in the ranks generous “per diems”.

In response to the weakened state of working class organization in South Africa we, together with Cosatu’s national education desk initiated the **Mass Education Campaign (MEC)**. We identified serious capacity problems among trade union and community activists, and decided to embark on a mass education programme, covering everything from basic shop steward training, political education, organizing skills through to paralegal support and media development. The MEC aims to raise political consciousness and support grassroots organization building. During 2010 the campaign was launched at a national conference attended by over 200 representatives (see conference declaration on page 19).

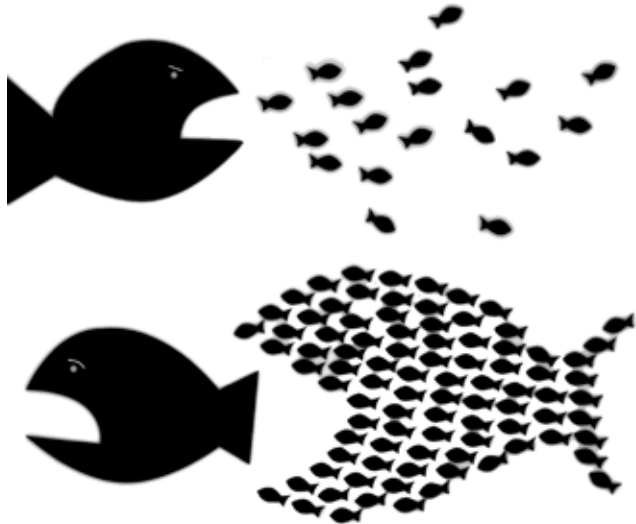
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“Without organisation, the working class is nothing.” (V.I Lenin)

1. BUILD YOUR ORGANISATION



1.1 Why Do We Need to Organise?

From our daily experience we know that there are constant struggles between the bosses with their state and the working class. These struggles are fought over a number of issues from wages, service delivery, to retrenchments, to housing, health and education. Through struggles working class people come together and build organisations. People know that it is only when they unite and organise that they will be able to begin to resist the oppression and exploitation of capitalism.

When the living standards of people are under attack they can either become demoralized or else struggle to resist these attacks. If these conditions are favourable this will add to heightened levels of struggle on the part of the working class. For instance there were heightened struggles in the 1970s as a result of the effects of the world economic crisis on South African workers and the fact that rapid monopolization in 1960's had brought the workers together in large factories and urban townships. Under these circumstances a number of working class organisations were built. Most of the mass organisations that existed at the height of the anti-Apartheid struggle in the 1980's had their roots in struggles such as the Durban workers' strike in 1973 and the students' struggles of 1976. Similarly today, the biggest mass working class formations, the trade unions like Cosatu and Nactu, have their roots in the 1980's when the mass movement was strongest.

1.2 Organisations and Conditions of Struggle

In general there is a direct relation between the level of struggle and the strength of organisation. During the period of higher levels of mass struggle all forms of popular organisation are boosted as the creative energy and interests of masses is increased.

On the other hand while organisations are products of various struggles it is also clear that organisations have an important effect on whether struggles succeed or not.

Organisation also has an important effect on whether struggles are sustained for shorter or longer periods. Struggles can not be fought without organisations to lead and guide those struggles, and organisation cannot arise without those struggles taking place. When we look at ways of building our organisations it is essential that we have a clear understanding of that relationship between organisations and struggles. For example, although the emergence of democratic trade unions in the early 70s was a result of the Durban strikes, the unions that emerged became important in sustaining and broadening the workers' struggle.

All organisations, of whatever kind, need to be understood in terms of struggle. But, you might ask "What about sports clubs or the burial society or the stokvel that I belong to? What have these organisations got to do with struggle?"

A sports club might not immediately appear be linked to struggle, but it reflects a struggle for leisure time and for the facilities needed to enjoy that leisure. Even a burial society reflects the harsh conditions of life in the city and the financial problem of burying our dead. Our participation in organisations such as burial societies has also taught us that there is more power in the collective struggle than struggling on our own.

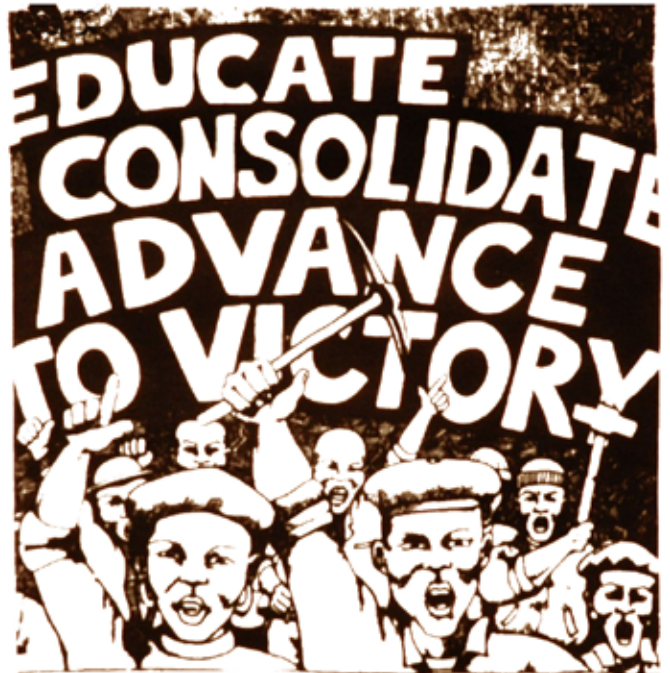
1.3 Different Kinds of Organisations

Let us now look at the variety of organisations that our struggles have produced. The range of organisations extends from social to economic, to political forms or organisations.

Social forms of organisations can generally be seen providing for the cultural needs of people. They are those in which people come together to support each other. Social organisations do not necessarily understand themselves as expressing direct opposition to anything. They do not necessarily aim to change conditions but are more concerned with serving the immediate interests of their membership to share and to enjoy and, at times to escape the harsh reality of life under the capitalist system. Examples of social forms of organisations are sports clubs, drama or cultural groups.

In response to problems such as wages and working conditions, the working class has formed organisations such as trade unions to improve its material life. We can refer to these organisations as the economic defense organisations of the working class. They started to emerge with the rise of industrial capitalism, especially during the 19th century in Britain and the rest of Europe. Broadly speaking we can say that they differ from the social organisations as the economic organisations of the working class.

Over many years, the conditions of life of the working class and the struggle to improve these conditions have taught the working class that its problems cannot be separated from the political system in the country. In order to ensure a lasting solution to its daily problems, the working class and the other classes have struggled for political power. It is out of these struggles that political parties have emerged. Unlike its economic and social organisations the political organisations of the working class tend to address both the immediate questions of defending the workers' wellbeing and also put forward a vision of how these problems can be solved in a lasting manner.



It would be wrong to think that if an organisation was set up in response to an economic struggle that it cannot take on different social or political issues. A trade union federation may have been established to struggle over daily economic issues such as wages and retrenchments. At certain times, however, it can change from simply defending the rights of its membership and can actively challenge the state and raise specifically political issues. We can also see this process when we look at sports organisations. In South Africa, the apartheid system led to struggles in which sports people said that there can be no normal sport in an abnormal society. This led to the expulsion of South Africa from many international sporting bodies.

We can see that under capitalism and the struggle against it, the divisions between the social, economic and political issues and the forms of organisation which take up these issues are frequently blurred.

In conclusion, we can see that conditions under capitalism lead to a struggle for survival and this sometimes gives rise to organisations which can take these struggles further. In turn struggles give rise to different forms of organisation. These forms can be defensive or offensive, depending on the different conditions which exist. In the process of struggle, organisations can also be transformed and can play a completely different role.



ORGANISATION IN RUSSIA & the Struggle against Autocracy

In the process of taking up different issues an organisation may well assume a completely different form. An example of how organisations can change their form and role is that of the soviets in Russia. Soviets arose out of strike committees and government commissions, dealing with essentially economic issues. In the course of struggle, they rapidly became mass political organisations which included all layers of working people. As the struggle intensified, the soviets started taking over functions which were formerly done by the government. The soviets became so well organized and strong that the Czarist government could not do anything without getting their approval. This created a situation of dual power where political power is contested between the working class organs of power and those of the capitalist state. The soviets also laid the basis for alternative political organs of power in the post-revolutionary and early period of socialism in the former USSR.

So we see that organisations that may initially have been set up to serve the immediate social or economic interests of their members can, under certain circumstances, become organs of political struggle and working class power.

2. ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR ROLE

2.1 Defending and Advancing in the Interests of Membership

For as long as we live under capitalism, the working class will be constantly faced with oppression and exploitation. It is for this reason that almost all kinds of organisations created by the working class play some kind of defensive "role" by protecting the interests of their members against the attacks of the ruling class. Trade unions struggle to ensure that their members get a living wage, safe working conditions and shorter working hours. Sport and social organisations may also struggle for improved facilities and to increase the amount of leisure time workers and their families can enjoy. Students and youth organisations have struggled for access to quality education and for a secure future with decent jobs available. In all spheres of life the working class is threatened by attacks from the ruling class. Workers have come to the understanding that their only weapon against such attacks is their unity and organisation.

It is this organised strength that enables the working class not only to defend itself against attacks from the ruling class but also to advance its own interests. We can see from the lessons of the trade union struggles how organised workers began to challenge the apartheid regime over "peoples' holidays" like May Day and June 16. This challenge extended up to the point where COSATU, NACTU and non-aligned unions jointly

challenged the state over VAT and the state's imposing economic policies without consulting the organised workers. Likewise, it was the organised strength of students who, through the establishment of PTSA's in schools, began to lay the foundation for a more democratic system of education.

The opposite is also true. When the working class is disorganized it is weak and unable to withstand the attacks of the ruling class. We experienced this disorganization and weakness during the late 1980's for example, when the regime under the State of Emergency used the police and the army to destroy organisations. It was under these conditions of general disorganization and weakness within the working class that the regime tried pushing through its Labour Relations Amendment Act (LRAA) even though the labour movement successfully defeated it by 1990. It was also in this period of declining class struggle, combined with severe attacks by the state on our leadership and organisations that led to democratic structures such as the Peoples' Courts turned into instruments of abuse by thugs.

Today many of our areas are plagued by criminals and thugs and the police being ineffective against them. This in turn makes our people, especially women, reluctant to attend meetings at night. Without strong organisations the working class has no means of defending itself nor does it have the ability to sustain its victories.



2.2 Training the Working Class to Lead

In South Africa today, the majority of people are still denied access to basic social rights such as free quality education, decent housing, water, electricity, culture and other social activities. The working class is still forced to make do with poor housing, gutter education, sport and other cultural activities of a poor quality when compared to what the ruling class enjoys. Under capitalism the working class cannot find the means which will enable it to educate itself and raise its level of culture so as to become the ruling class. Our state structures, institutions and organisation continue to serve the ruling class and further enslave the working class.

It is only the organisations of the working class which are built and controlled by the working class which can act as the “school” which can educate and train the working class for its role as the new ruling class of society. All organisations of the working class contribute in one way or another to this important role. It is through participation in these organisations that the working class begins to experience what it is like to be in control of its own destiny. It is also in the “school” of organisation that the working class experiments and through experience develops its own ideas, values and methods – by which it sees fit to run its own organisations. At all times the working class struggles against building its organisations in the same way in which the capitalist class builds organisation.

We can clearly see this in the different ways in which organisations of the working class and organisations of the ruling class approach the question of democracy. The organisations of the ruling class are designed to limit democracy to the minority capital class. For example, membership to influential organisations of the capitalist class, such as business, sports and cultural clubs is based on how much wealth you own. In this way, ordinary workers and their families are denied access to these organisations. On the other hand organisations of the working class struggle to expand democracy as wide as possible. Working class organisations try to draw in the broadest layers of the working class and other oppressed layers such as the left-wing intelligentsia and sections of small shopkeepers and middle-class elements on the basis that their own interests can only be realized through the working class becoming the new ruling class of our society.



2.3 Uniting Our Experiences, Knowledge and Skills

When people unite in organisation to struggle against the capitalist system, they also bring with them their past experiences of struggle, their experience of organisation and their skills. All these factors contribute towards ensuring that the organisations can draw on these valuable resources to the benefit of the organisation.

The ability of organisations to draw on past organizational experiences, the wisdom of its members, both new and experienced, helps them to avoid repeating past mistakes or having to start from scratch.

It is important for us to ensure that the way in which our organisations function, the valuable experiences, wisdom and skills which is to be found amongst the membership is unified for maximum enhancement of the organisation. It is equally important to ensure that these resources become the common property of the membership of the organisation. In this way the general awareness and levels of skills of the membership is raised to a higher level.

At all times organisations of the working class serve to defend and advance the interests of their members and the broader working class. Organisations contribute towards ensuring continuity in the struggle against oppression and exploitation through uniting our different organizational experiences, the knowledge we have gained through struggle and the individual skills of its membership.



3. HOW ORGANISATIONS WORK

3.1 The Significance of Democracy and Organisational Political Principles in Working Class Organisations

Change cannot be accomplished without the active participation of the masses. The task of working class organisations is to encourage the active involvement of the masses in the process of their own liberation. This is why working class organisations must be UNITED, DEMOCRATIC AND INDEPENDENT.



These principles are an important reference for unionists and community activists. They need to be approached critically and creatively. For example, industrial unionism has developed as a central feature of union organisation, but this does not mean that general unions cannot be a form of trade union organization in certain circumstances and under different conditions.

These principles need to be understood as living traditions that must constantly be built and defended. They are products of struggle. The experience and practice of any principle is affected by changing conditions of struggle and organisation. For example, the development of corporatism in industrial relations since the 1990s has seriously undermined the conditions of worker control and democracy that were developed and practiced extensively in the 1970s and 1980s.

3.2 Internal Democracy – the Lifeblood of Strong Working Class Organisations

Only if working class organisations are democratic and independent of other class interests and organisations will they reflect the aspirations of their membership. In order to ensure this, the membership must be actively involved in making and implementing decisions without the influence of outside parties or groups.

Democratic spaces must be there for members to be involved in these decision-making processes and implementation.

For the membership to be actively involved in the decision making process, there must be proper consultation. This process affords the membership the opportunity to shape the direction of the organisation. In the process of making decisions the membership will be able to discuss and debate their points of view.

Consultation also ensures that the membership is able to exercise control over the organisation. This ensures that the organisation reflects the aspirations of its membership at all times. This process exposes those leaders who are no longer acting in the interests of the organisation. The membership has the right to recall such leaders, that is, remove them from office even if their term of office has not expired yet.

The process of democratic debate helps the membership to learn from each other. This is also important in the sense that it gives the membership an opportunity to reflect collectively on their experiences and in that process learn from them. In working class organisations, decisions are made to be implemented. Members must have a thorough understanding of decisions that have been taken so that they can implement them to the best of their ability.

In the process of arriving at a position members have the right to put forward different points of view. They also have a right to belong to different factions that are bound by the discipline of the organisation. A faction is a group of members who share common views within an organisation. Factions have a right to openly propagate their views whilst bound by the discipline of the organisation. Whilst the organisation is in the process of making decisions there must be the fullest debate, but once a decision is taken there must be complete unity in its implementation. Those who had been a minority in the process of debates must be bound by majority positions.

Individual members must be accountable to the organisation. Whenever tasks are allocated they must be implanted vigorously. There must be regular report backs on the progress of implementing decisions. This ensures that members are able to follow developments closely.

Through debates and discussions, members are able to give proper mandates to their leadership and to those who have to perform specific tasks. Mandates give clear guidelines on how the leadership must take forward the tasks facing the organisation. They also help the membership to test the ability of the leadership to lead the organisation. These mandates also reinforce the control of the membership over the organisation.

3.3 Organisational Structures

An organisation must be structured in such a way that it ensures the involvement of the widest layer of its membership. At all times the membership must have total control over the organisation through its structures.

For an organisation to operate effectively and efficiently, the role and decision making powers of different structures must be clearly defined. These structures must give the membership the opportunity to exercise control over the organisation. Structures are not fixed for all times but change in order to meet new challenges. In most organisations, guidelines of its structures and functions are usually outlined in the constitution.

Decision-making powers of various structures must be clear to members. This must be aimed at ensuring democratic practices within an organisation. So the membership must have ultimate powers to decide on everything that affects the organisation. For example these executive committees must be accountable to the general members.



3.4 The Role of Leadership in an Organisation

In any organisation, not all members are at the same level of understanding, skill or experience. This is due to the experience that individual members bring with them to the organisation. Some members, because of their past experiences in struggle, find it much easier to adapt to the internal life of an organisation, whereas others take time to get used to how an organisation operates.

The leadership is the most advanced layer in an organisation. This is demonstrated by its ability to analyse the situation and give clear direction and co-ordination to the organisation. This does not mean that those who have not been elected into leadership positions do not have the responsibility to ensure that the organisation executes its tasks.

A democratic leadership does not impose its rights to lead on the membership. The leadership must win its position through persuasion and practical example. The leadership must explain patiently to the membership. They must always struggle to ensure that the entire membership understands all positions that have been adopted. At times the membership will reject positions that have been put forward by the leadership. The leadership must ensure that such positions are implemented as well. The correctness of these positions will be determined through practice.



Remember...

So far we have outlined the role of organisations and how they develop. Let's remind ourselves of some of the things we learnt about organisations.

We noted that:

- Organisations emerge out of struggle and take struggles forward
- Organisations can strengthen, democratic practices and accountability
- Organisations can serve as training ground for the working class, enabling them to take on the task of leadership
- In the process of building an organisation, people become more conscious of issues around them and of their own class position in society
- Through organisations, the membership is educated and armed with information in order to strategise and take action. In this process the confidence of the membership is built.



4. CAMPAIGNS

4.1 Membership and Recruitment

We have seen that organisations are nothing without their membership and that people will only form an organisation or be drawn to an organisation around particular issues which are in their interests. What role can a campaign play in this process? The key function and effect of any campaign is that it mobilizes people. We all know from the history of struggle in this country that the most effective campaigns have been campaigns which have mobilized the mass of the people. Campaigns such as the anti-pass laws, Living Wage, Anti-LRA and anti-VAT campaigns had mass support because they struck a chord with the people. These campaigns mobilized people to struggle around a specific issue, raised clear demands and were directed at a specific target. In the process of doing this, campaigns appeal to a wide range of people and drawn them into organisations.

Campaigns play a vital role in recruiting new members. As people are drawn into struggles around a campaign they often join the organisation that is campaigning and so increase the organisation's membership.

A campaign provides a central focus around which a wide range of people can rally and mobilize themselves. As far as possible we should try to draw in all the different groupings in our communities – workers, women, unemployed, students and youth. In this process of focusing our struggles around a particular campaign, the current weaknesses of our organisations can begin to be addressed.

4.2 Campaigns Show What People Are Struggling Around

We have seen that organisations emerge out of struggle and in turn, take struggle forward. Campaigns, as a clear expression of existing struggle, serve to accelerate and give a struggle more definition and force.

Once a particular struggle has been identified as being a key issue and demands are raised, people are mobilized around the issue and the campaign can serve to accelerate a particular struggle onto a higher plane. An issue may initially be seen as being purely economic or localized, but, during the course of struggle, the issue may become political and national as opposed to just economic and local.

For example, the struggles over wages could initially have been understood as being purely economic. When these struggles were taken up in the Living Wage Campaign and formulated in demands linked to issues such as a forty hour week and a ban on overtime, it posed the question of workers' control of the factories. The campaign shifted from being economic to posing questions of ownership and control of the economy and ultimately questions of political power.

In this dynamic process of struggle organisations can themselves change their nature. They might change from being defensive organs to being offensive organs of struggle. Campaigns can play a role in accelerating this change.

4.3 Links between Campaigns and Broader Struggles

Campaigns will be strengthened if they are not just isolated incidents. They will gather a lot more force behind them if they are taken up on a national level. Smaller campaigns around a specific issue in a specific place, for example, electricity cuts in Soweto or the lack of decent sanitation in Khayelitsha can be linked to wider struggles. Demands can highlight the broader struggle around electrification and primary health care and so expose the current attacks on the living standards of the working class.

4.4 Democracy and Accountability

Campaigns can serve to strengthen democratic practice and accountability. Campaigns draw in more people and expose them to democratic ways of working. For campaigns to be successful, they require constant report backs and assessment of the gains made. In this process, membership learns to participate in debates and to express their own opinions. This helps to build democracy and accountability within the organisation.

Campaigns will not be responded to enthusiastically if they are simply declared from above in an undemocratic way. Campaigns usually emerge from struggles on the ground and are an expression of the needs and demands of the mass of the people. In the same way that organizational structures can become hollow shells if the membership does not participate actively, campaigns can also not get off the ground if they do not have the backing and democratic involvement of people.

4.5 Skills for Leading

Organisations act as a training ground for the working class to take on the task of leadership. Campaigns develop the organizational and leadership skills of people who participate. In the course of a campaign, people will develop a range of skills, whether it be how to draw up a pamphlet or make a poster, how to organise a mass rally or how to speak in public. All these skills equip the working class to take up the task of leadership.

4.6 Class Consciousness

In the process of building an organisation and in the course of campaigns, people become more conscious of issues around them and of their own class positions in society. We've seen how, through organisation the membership is educated and armed with information in order to take action and to strategise. While organizing around struggles members also tend to have a greater hunger for information and political knowledge to strengthen themselves. In this process the confidence of the membership is built and people gain a heightened consciousness of their position and role in society.

People develop a clear sense of the conditions under which they live and compare these to the conditions of other classes in society. In doing so, they increase and deepen their class consciousness.



5. SUSTAINING ORGANISATION

5.1 The Need for Consolidation

As we have discussed before, campaigns are an important way of sustaining organisations but we need to acknowledge that organisations cannot campaign, march and protest all the time. There are times when the working class will need to focus on regrouping and consolidating its forces. Sometimes, activists in organisations have pushed for militant campaigns and mass action which have not got off the ground because the membership does not have the capacity to mobilize around these campaigns.

There are times when we have to acknowledge the weakness of our mass organisations. We have to acknowledge that the economic crisis and the economic attacks on the working class are threatening the very survival of people. Most working class people are then preoccupied with individual and family survival. These attacks serve to weaken our organisations which are difficult to sustain at the best of times. Our people are distracted by their own survival and unable to contribute financially to building their organisations. During times when our organisations are weak we need to find different ways of sustaining them.

Organisations need to take up different tasks and focus on sustaining organisation in different ways during times of low activity in the mass movement. When an organisation realizes that it cannot draw the masses into action, it needs to look more carefully at its programme of education and training. It must find ways for its members to embark on a systematic process of summing up the results of previous struggles and actions. It then needs to undergo a period of consolidation in preparation for future struggles. This can be done by means of discussion, workshops, or a programme of developing the skills of the membership and deepening its political understanding.

5.2 Different Forms of Struggle

When considering how to sustain organisations, we need to take into account the different forms that organisations take. As we have said before, there are two fundamental forms of organisation. There are organisations which are rooted in a base which exists independently of any formalized organizational structure. For example, students go to school and workers go to work in factories everyday, irrespective of whether SASCO or the trade unions have organised them. It is far easier to organise and mobilize these sections because they are found in particular places i.e. universities and factories.

Under these conditions, recruiting members and sustaining organisation are both made a lot easier. It is a lot more difficult to organise and sustain organisation in a sector such as youth or the unemployed, which have no identifiable or consistent centre. Besides gathering in youth organisations themselves, there is no particular place where 'youth' can be found. It is therefore the case that it is far easier for youth organisations to collapse during times of low activity than it is for students or worker organisations. This has implications for strategies of organisation. While workers and student organisations can, at times, afford to neglect the more elementary and detailed aspects of organizing, this is not so for more fragmented sectors such as youth, community and women. Different kinds of organisations therefore need to be sustained in different ways.

We have previously noted that there are no strict barriers between social, political and economic organisations. Neither are there definitive differences between organisations taking on a defensive or an offensive role. For example, a trade union may choose to pay more attention to specific problems around issues like wages and retrenchments, worker education and the maintenance of structures. They may choose to do this, rather than attempt to wage ineffective militant campaigns supported by mass action which can't be sustained.

5.3 Education, Training and Leadership

During periods of mass upsurge and action, there is less of a need to focus on sustaining organisation because structures are being actively used by members who are mobilized around the burning issues of the day.

But in periods of lull or defeat, the education and training of members assumes a more important role. This is true irrespective of the type of organisations concerned. When organisations are not openly struggling, then their education programmes need to be very clear and focused. These programmes have a vital function in maintaining and developing the existing leadership core of the organisation.

In the past, some organisations failed to pay attention to the high turnover of their activists and leadership layers. For example, activists emerged in the 1976 period and through those struggles became equipped with leadership skills and experience. These activists were not always sustained and by the time next wave of activity arose in the 1984 – 1986 period, many of these activists with their accumulation of skills and

experience were no longer still around. Even worse to come was the huge loss of leadership at all levels during the 1990's to government and big business. This caused irreparable harm to working class organisation and we are still recovering from this today. If leadership is not sustained, it becomes more difficult for an organisation to evaluate and build on its past experiences. Building new layers of strong leadership in the absence of the old is extremely difficult.

It is therefore essential that the leadership layers and members are not lost during periods of low levels of activity. Organizational tasks in times of a low ebb in class struggle should therefore focus on consolidation. This may seem like a basic and simple process but in practice it is one of the more difficult and painstaking steps in building organisation.

We need to remember, then, that when the mass festivals in the streets are over, there is a need to assess the situation, and to sustain and develop our organisations. In this way, we ensure that organizational gains are maintained, and that the collective experience and skills of activists are preserved.



QUESTIONS FOR DEBATE

- Note down 3 specific advantages that a student organisation has over a youth organisation.
- Do you think that a youth organisation can ever be as effective as a student organisation? Give reasons for your answer.
- What strategies could be used to overcome the particular difficulties of youth or community organisation?
- It is possible that student organisations could ever be more effective than worker organisations?
- What do youth and women's organisations have in common? What do you think are the possible strengths of these kinds of organisations?

Appendix

Declaration of the Mass Education Conference, 13–16 April 2010

During the week the week of 13 – 16 April 2010, we, over 200 delegates from trade unions, labour service organisations and community organisations met in Johannesburg to assess the momentum of class struggle in order to initiate and plan a strong mass education campaign whose primary aim is to raise class consciousness and develop alternative forms of knowledge and struggle in order to build working class power.

Our Conference Aims were:

- To develop and enskill local groups of labour and community media and education practitioners in approximately 40 communities to regularly produce and disseminate education.
- To provide organisational and resource support to local working class communities' mass education initiatives.
- To develop a dynamic and sustainable local organisational base for labour education and media activities.
- To develop a popular publication on mass education.

The campaign and the conference was a strategic response by COSATU and WWMP to the increasing levels of exploitation, widespread poverty and oppression evident in the harsh reality demonstrated by the following indicators:

- Over 50% of our people living in poverty
- Over 40% unemployed with 1 million jobs lost in just one year
- South Africa is the most unequal society in the world.
- Over 1 million farm-dwellers evicted (1994 – 2004)

These indicators are demonstrative of the fact that the fault lines of the apartheid political economy remain largely intact, with the current growth path reproducing these fault lines. In economic terms, workers and the poor have little to celebrate.

The apartheid economy was characterised by massive inequalities and uneven development across industries and regions. There are five basic fault-lines that this economy has created:

- Inequalities in education quality and access,
- Inequalities in health quality and access,
- Inequalities in the provision of housing,
- High, racial- and gender-structured unemployment, and
- Deepening income and wealth inequalities

The conference self-critically acknowledged that:

- While much has been done, we have not done near enough to confront the challenges resulting from capitalism and the legacy of apartheid, particularly as regards raising and deepening class consciousness.
- In serving the interests of working class communities we must deepen a profound and radical agenda for revolutionary transformation.
- We have been weakened politically and organisationally to resist attacks upon the working class resulting in a serious decline in working class living standards.
- We have not been able to effectively enhance the unity of the working class, including our organisational responses.

We are not only confronted by “*Organise or Starve*” but “*Organise or Die*” as our average life expectancy has declined to 47 years (from 62 years in 1990).

Our biggest obstacle is the capitalist system and those who uphold it in the interests of the rich minority. Despite the fact that our hard-won democracy has created possibilities for change in the living and working conditions of the majority, it is evident that in many respects it has failed the working class and the poor.

Our response, led and supported by COSATU and WWMP, is to develop “**A Mass Education Campaign**” to assist in re-building us politically and organisationally on the ground, in communities and workplaces. In this regard we acknowledge and accept that the content of our mass education must be agitational and that it must challenge the capitalist system, strengthen existing revolutionary and working class formations, build such organisations where there are none, in order to assert working class hegemony and build alternative working class power in the process of struggle. Our mass education campaign and struggle activities are guided by our universal principles for the widest working class unity, political and class independence and the fullest possible democracy. This includes building international solidarity – in particular with our comrades from Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Palestine.

We therefore resolve to commit ourselves to vigorously, tirelessly and energetically implement our programme of action as agreed at this conference. We also agree to reconvene at a national mass education forum in 2012 to assess and further advance our campaign and struggle.

The powerful words of Haroon Aziz will be our inspiration moving forward:

“When a scientific knowledge of revolution is placed, through the patient and painful process of conscious struggle, in the hands of the people it becomes a powerful weapon of the revolution – the primary weapon which is necessary for the creation of a just order out of a relative chaos of an unjust political and social system. Without that knowledge, the people are as helpless as soldiers are without weapons. With it the people become the skilful soldiers of the revolution”

Agreed and adopted unanimously on Friday 16 April 2010 at the conference held at the Birchwood Hotel, Boksburg.

