

# Building unionism

## *challenging globalisation*

**D**uring the Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights (Sigtur) conference in Johannesburg, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and South Africa's SATAWU and TGWU signed a statement of intent. It attempts to link the ports of Fremantle in Western Australia and Durban in KwaZulu-Natal organisationally. It also serves as an example for other unions to possibly follow.

Paddy Crumlin of the MUA best voiced the aim of this linkage when he said: 'Every dispute is a collective dispute; every failure is a collective failure; every victory is a collective victory.'

### **Statement of intent**

'The impact of rapid globalisation of economic interest on union organisation requires new initiatives in the defence of workers.

These changes have resulted in extensive workplace restructuring. These processes have often been forced on workforces, have weakened our organisation, and often diminished working rights, conditions and entitlements. We have lost members, and unemployment has risen through the processes of downsizing, outsourcing and casualisation.

Globalisation has provided a set of conditions requiring more effective international trade unionism. In the

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transport industry economic deregulation has meant that national states are now more trade dependent. They need reliable transport shipping and communications. The two unions have developed this initiative in recognition of these conditions.

Over the past decade we have recognised the enormous potential of international action under the current global conditions.

When the rights of Australian unions were threatened, the South African transport unions responded magnificently.

In May 1995, their threat to boycott shipping to and from Australia led to a withdrawal of anti-union laws in Western Australia.

In September 1997, South African dockworkers stopped work and marched in protest against the renewed legislative attack on Australian unions.

In May 1998, South African dockworkers successfully applied boycott action against three Australian ships. They refused to unload the ships because of the extreme attack on the MUA.

When the dispute was settled, the MUA leadership visited COSATU in August 1998, to personally thank the dockworkers for their commitment and support of the



*SATAWU (TGWU) and the MUA will link organisationally.*

International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) campaign.

This experience led to the acknowledgement by both unions of the importance of effective international unionism and solidarity action. The challenge for the two unions is to consolidate and build the foundation for international unionism on an ongoing basis.

Workers cannot be called into action if they know little about the history, culture and current challenges of workers in other nations. These understandings and consciousness have to be built.

Organisation has to develop to foster this new internationalism.

With this in mind, the leaderships of the MUA and SATAWU (TGWU) wish to state their commitment to advancing this process.

The leaderships here present commit to advancing the process of linking the ports of Fremantle in Western Australia and

Durban in South Africa organisationally.

We commit to advancing this idea through our respective democratic structures.

We commit to calling for the establishment of the necessary sub-committees to examine the practical implications of linking these ports organisationally.

We make this commitment here today on 28 October 1999 before the SigTUR conference in order to inspire workers from other sectors to consider a similar direction.

Let us seize this historic opportunity.

Let us commit ourselves to build an international unionism, step by step, just as we organise individual workplaces step by step.

Let us mark the beginning of the new century with a vision, a commitment, optimism that we can build a new unionism for a new century! ★