

# Editorial



**T**he new South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu) aims to organise casualised, migrant, informal workers and the unemployed. However Saftu unions mainly have experience of organising in the formal industrial and public sectors. It could take some tips from an innovative Advice Office on the East Rand.

Contrary to stories many unions tell the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO) believes the mainly labour brokered workers it services can be successfully organised. Indeed the article documents many victories.

The CWAO gives advice in person or on the phone to individual workers but also uses its office as a springboard from which casuals can organise themselves. Through advice and connecting them to state and other institutions, these workers become conscious of their rights and collective power.

Mimicking successful ways of organising in the 1980s, brokered workers come together fortnightly in the Simunye Workers Forum. It's a worker controlled structure bringing together people from hundreds of different workplaces.

CWAO's success is partly due to its communications strategy. Recognising that many workers can't afford smartphones and airtime it relies on pamphlets, which are distributed widely in communities, to advertise its free service. Its *The New Worker* also brings news of struggles and discussions which other workers can learn from.

Another article shows how CWAO has used labour laws to good effect. A Labour Relations Act amendment in 2015 stipulated that brokered workers must become permanent after three

months and enjoy the same benefits as other permanent workers. CWAO has used this law to insist workers are insourced within this period.

However confusion remained on who was the primary employer of these workers. A recent Labour Appeal Court judgment held that brokered workers are the responsibility of the client and not the broker who provides the workers. Workers can now demand to be insourced with the client company.

However employers are contesting the judgment but in a proactive manner the CWAO distributed pamphlets informing workers of their right to claim permanent status.

An interview with previously outsourced general workers at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) was a victory gained in a different manner. It demonstrates how power and solidarity can overturn a seemingly intractable situation where workers had long demanded the university become their primary employer.

The Wits' Fees Must Fall movement included insourcing in their demands. When students won a no fee increase in 2015, they continued to support workers who were ultimately insourced with significant wage increases and benefits.

An article on the R20 per day minimum wage points to increased wages for thousands of workers in South Africa. However the authors outline that important issues, such as coverage and deductions, have not yet been settled despite the looming 1 May 2018 implementation date.

These are stories mainly of hope, but Liz Fouksman reminds us that many of us may experience some kind of unemployment in the future.

With increased productivity due to mechanisation and new technology, humans are making themselves redundant in the workplace.

But she sees this as an opportunity to introduce a Basic Income Grant (BIG) where the whole population gets a monthly cash contribution to meet basic needs and do whatever they choose with it. This could stimulate entrepreneurial activities, give time to enjoy sport and the arts or do caring activities in the community without fear of homelessness or starvation.

Did you think apartheid would ever end? Well isn't this BIG utopia also possible? Thabang Sefalafala writes of research amongst retrenched mineworkers in Welkom and the alienation, humiliation, rejection and loss of masculine identity they suffer because they are workless. The BIG could provide an alternative for them if they are able to move beyond their wage worker identity.

Two articles speak to land issues one of which also raises unemployment. William Beinart argues for individual and family land tenure arrangements in rural communal land areas and in peri-urban areas. But land is rapidly being destroyed by mining, particularly coal mining, which cannot be rehabilitated. Will we have enough land to distribute and raise crops on, let alone deal with the mines poisoning our water?

We suggest Saftu who is organising the unemployed launch a joint campaign to introduce BIG and replace coal energy with renewables. This would offer much hope for the future of South Africans. **LB**

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Guest Editor