

SATAWU

The South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (SATAWU) will hold its launching congress in December. The new union is a merger of the Black Transnet Allied Trade Union (BLATU), a NACTU affiliate, the Transnet Allied Trade Union (TATU), which is non-aligned, and the South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union (SARHWU), which is affiliated to COSATU.

Triggers

The merger process was triggered by agreements reached in the Transnet Bargaining Council, which laid down thresholds for union eligibility to participation in the bargaining council and co-determination forums. The three agreements are:

- ❑ a 15% membership presence in Transnet;
- ❑ representation of 'critical grades' (which implies that unions must also represent skilled and semi-skilled grades throughout all the Transnet divisions);
- ❑ decentralisation of bargaining to cater for the privatisation of some of Transnet's key business divisions, like SAA and Autonet.

This triggered an alignment process of small and big unions. SALSTAFF and the Workers' Union of South Africa, which are both affiliated to FEDUSA, merged. The Technical Workers' Union is involved in

by Mojalefa Musi

talks with this new union. With the exception of the South African Footplate Staff Association (SAFSA), and a small group in Natal (DELATUSA), all the other unions organising at Transnet are part of SATAWU. The other considerations that gave rise to the mergers were:

- ❑ *Ongoing competition for membership.* The larger a union's membership, the more leverage it has in collective bargaining and rights contained within the LRA.
- ❑ *The political weight a majority union commands within a parastatal such as Transnet.* The union with the most pull will be able to influence policy and strategy development.

Membership

TATU, which is based mainly in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal amongst Indian and coloured workers, brings in a membership of 1 324. BLATU, which organises mainly in Gauteng, Northern Province and KwaZulu-Natal has 6 324 members.

SARHWU has always enjoyed the majority membership within Transnet. Membership has dropped from 37 000 to 35 000, as a result of retrenchments. The union's members are, however, mainly

African workers

Membership at Apron Services and the Airports Company, stands at around 2 000.

Congress

The SATAWU merger was facilitated by a programme of action that was approved by the NECs of the three unions. These culminated in a joint NEC. A programme for merger has now been adopted. SATAWU has been registered, but final decisions on a range of issues such as assets and liabilities, investment and investment policy will only be taken at the union's launching congress in December. Until this time, the unions will operate in parallel.

The regional structures of the new union will be established before the launching congress. The new union will have six regions: Gauteng, Northern Province, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Central (Free State and Northern Cape) and Western Cape.

Policy debates and discussions at the congress will centre on:

- international affiliation and foreign policy;
- building the Left and socialism;
- investment codes and investment policy;
- economic policy, restructuring and privatisation;
- union human resources development;
- gender and building the women's movement.

TGWU and the merger

COSATU's policy of 'one industry, one country, one federation' has not yet been



realised in the transport industry.

In principle, it has been decided to form one transport union. TGWU has been involved in discussions with SATAWU. It has been agreed that there will be a two-phase merger: the unions in Transnet will come together in SATAWU. A merger with TGWU is planned for May 1999.

SATAWU and TGWU have set up an organisational development process task team. Ditsela is the convenor of this team. This exercise is designed to help both unions to plan systematically for and manage, on both the micro and macro level, negative and positive changes that come with the merger.

Affiliation

There is general agreement that the complete union (SATAWU and TGWU) will affiliate to COSATU. The name, which will be formally adopted at the December congress, could be extended to the second merger next year. ★

Mojalefa Must is the National Rail Co-ordinator at SARIWU. He writes in his personal capacity.