

The new superunion CEPPWAWU

On 24-26 February 1999 a new superunion was launched. The Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (CEPPWAWU) was formed in a merger between the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PPWAWU).

The new union has 92 000 members and includes the following sectors: pharmaceutical, glass, rubber, plastics, consumer chemicals, industrial chemicals, petroleum, pulp and paper, printing, wood and furniture.

Why merge?

CEPPWAWU general secretary, Muzi Buthelezi, explains why the merger took place:

'CWIU and PPWAWU were COSATU affiliates. In terms of politics we came from the same school or political tendency. Both unions recognised the need to form a bigger union with employers becoming more powerful.'

Both unions had realised that they had to follow international trends and become more powerful. This was explained in the secretariat merger report: 'The decision to forge unity was informed by the need for both unions to grow and be powerful enough to deal with the challenges of globalisation being imposed on our members by employers. Most unions

CWIU and PPWAWU recently merged. Tanya van Meelis reports.

overseas are aligning themselves for survival and strengthening their power base through large and dynamic organisations which command respect and influence in the society'

Buthelezi explains that increased power will not only be a result of increased membership numbers, but also of the ability to take action across different sectors of the economy: 'Industrial action taken in 12 sectors will be very powerful. We can already stop the country with a strike only among petroleum workers. We are also organised in very strategic industries.'

The deputy general secretary, Bengeza Mthombeni, states that the new union must benefit members: 'For two unions to come together it must benefit members. With the merger we are now more united, stronger and better able to tackle the challenges that face us. We will be bigger, more efficient and we will deliver a better service to members.'

Ensuring a successful merger

CWIU and PPWAWU used a number of strategies to ensure the success of the merger.



CEPPWAWU brings together CWIU and PPWAWU.

Getting advice

CWIU and PPWAWU got the advice of NUMSA on what to do to ensure a successful merger. After discussing mergers with comrades from NUMSA, CWIU and PPWAWU decided on what would work best for this merger.

Task teams

The unions set up task teams with clear terms of reference to discuss merger matters and make recommendations to constitutional structures. Task teams dealt with a number of issues including the new union's constitution, demarcation, structures and procedures, policies, membership, finances, staffing, staff conditions and offices.

Sharing information

Mthombeni explained that one of the reasons the merger was successful was that both unions shared information fully. If information was requested and could not be provided immediately, the union would go and get the information to present at the

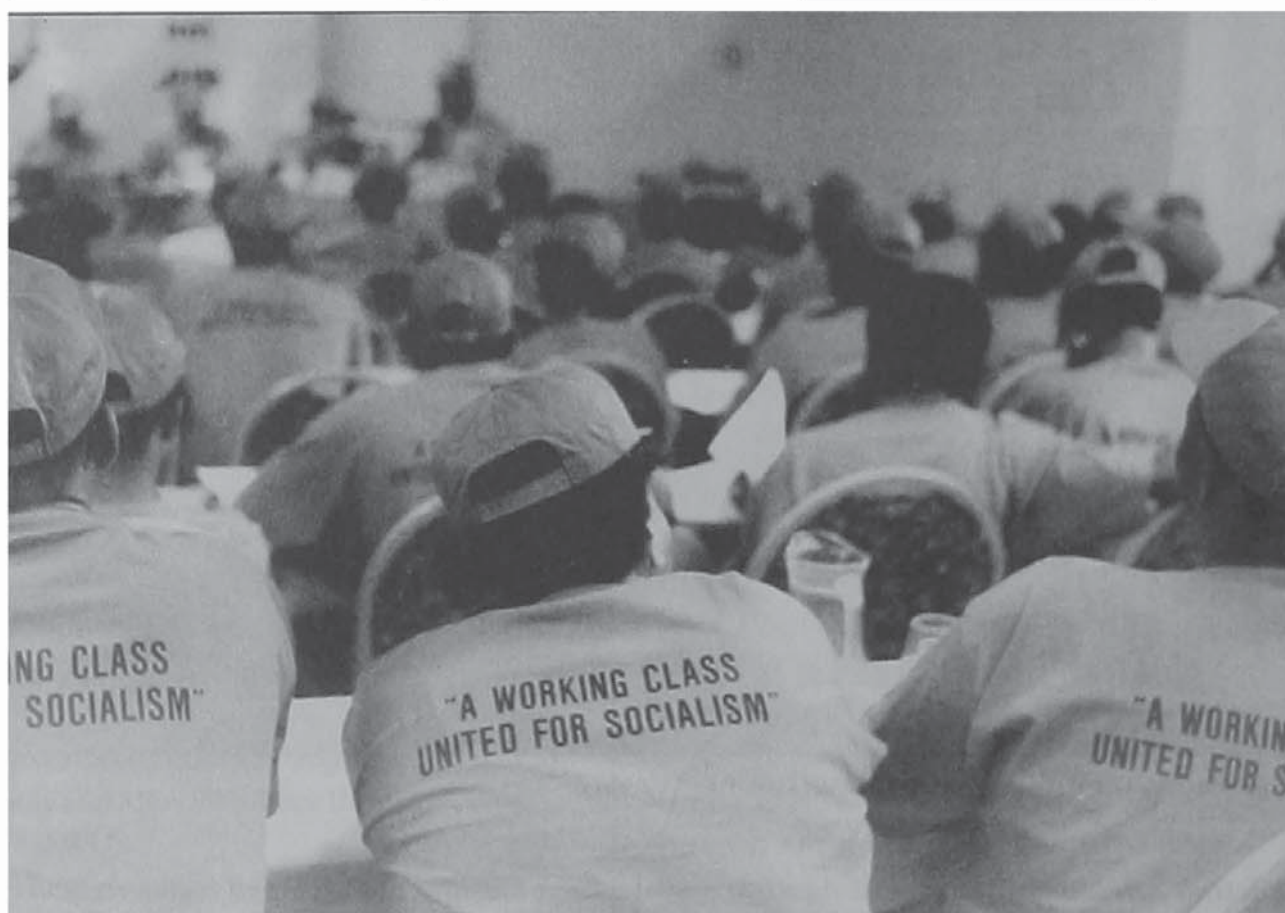
next meeting. Branches and regions had meetings between the former unions where information was shared to enhance co-operation. An example of where this took place was in KwaZulu-Natal.

Commitment of leadership

A large amount of work and many meetings took place to ensure the success of the merger. Mthombeni remembers how he and Buthelezi often would meet at 7am to ensure that the process kept moving forward and issues were tackled. There was, according to Mthombeni, 'a commitment to achieving the objective'.

Deciding leadership positions first

Many mergers do not take place because of fighting of individuals over leadership positions. CWIU and PPWAWU avoided this problem in this merger by dividing up the positions of the national office bearers (NOBs) before the merger took place. CWIU got the following three positions: general secretary, first vice-president and second vice-president.



CEPPWAWU's motto is 'A working class united for socialism'.

PPWAWU got the following three positions: deputy general secretary, treasurer and president. Each former union held elections for the three positions they were allocated. This ensured that leadership were democratically elected and that leadership was established before the merger took place.

The honorary president is Blade Nzimande.

Stressing worker unity

Mthombeni explained that stressing worker unity ensured the success of the merger. It motivated comrades to work for the merger and to resolve problems that may have prevented the merger from taking place.

Worker control

The unions ensured that the merger process was subject to worker control and

democracy. Both unions had received a mandate to merge from their own congress.

The four task teams that dealt with issues related to the merger, included workers and officials. The teams reported to a plenary, which debated issues and submitted recommendations to joint structural meetings for further discussions and decisions.

Reports from the task teams were submitted to branches and regional structures to inform them of the progress and identify issues to discuss. Branches could submit recommendations. Final reports on the merger talks were submitted to a joint meeting of the CWIU NEC and the PPWAWU CEC which debated the issues and took decisions.

Mthombeni explains that CEPPWAWU will also act on the principles of worker

control and democracy. 'The challenge for the new union is to avoid creating a bureaucracy. We need to ensure involvement in all aspects of the new union. We need to build strong locals and regions. The new union offers the opportunity to go back to basics. Each worker should be interested in the new union. We pin the hope of revival on the shoulders of everyone.'

New structures

There will not be branch structures in the new union, but regional structures. They will be launched from March to May 1999. There will be seven regions: KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Free State, Wits and North West. Local offices will be spread over the country to ensure accessibility to members and provision of service.

The constitutional structures will be: national congress, national executive committee, national co-ordinating committee, regional congress, regional executive committee, local shop steward councils and shop steward committees.

Election of office bearers will take place in terms of the CEPPWAWU constitution. Mthombeni calls on all members and staff to build the new union. He says that national leadership will play an active role in reviving local structures. 'Leadership will go to the regions, locals

and factories. We need to go and address meetings etc to build the new union. National leadership must build the locals.'

Staffing

CEPPWAWU's total staff complement will be about 140 nationally. NOBs are expecting some staff to leave the new union. Mthombeni explains that it is human nature to fear the unknown, and explains that people may leave because they do not know what will happen with the new union.

While people may leave on a voluntary basis, there is a commitment in CEPPWAWU that staff will not be retrenched. However, staff will be redeployed in a fair and objective way. Mthombeni explains: 'While it is difficult for people to move we need to spread human resources. We need to use human resources effectively and efficiently. Deployment is not a form of retribution.'

If a member of staff does not accept a reasonable deployment request, the union will consider that as a resignation.

Organisers in each of the former unions will learn about the other union's sectors. Thus former PPWAWU organisers must understand the chemical sectors and vice versa. Organisers will be expected to service workers in all sectors as part of building the new union, as Mthombeni explains: 'We must avoid keeping the status quo - we need to say how do we ensure a new union emerges. People must be given new responsibilities.'

Another change that will be made regarding staffing is the possible employment of a human resources officer. By employing a human resources officer, the secretariat will be released to deal with policy, key negotiations and building the organisation.

Buthelezi identifies the challenges:

- building a new union and bringing together workers and staff with different traditions;
- ensuring a big union is also efficient;
- building a strong militant union;
- dealing with collective bargaining in a broad way - the social wage;
- developing strategies to deal with globalisation.

Policies

The policies of the former CWIU and PPWAWU will be integrated over time. A task team will identify areas of difference between policies and attempts will be made to reach agreement. Congresses will take final decisions on policy matters.

NOBs will meet to discuss policy and find a way of operating until the union has new policies. Mthombeni says that there is a potential for new and dynamic policies to emerge: 'There has been a meeting of common minds looking at the new policies. We need to ensure that we have dynamic policies. We will continue in certain processes like Safcol. We cannot just abandon processes like that now. By examining and understanding what we are doing in different cases, the former CWIU will learn from the former PPWAWU and the former PPWAWU will learn from the former CWIU. We need to see what is happening and take the proper and best action. We need to understand things correctly to develop new policy. This presents an opportunity for new policy.'

Women leadership

CEPPWAWU has no women NOBs. Mthombeni regrets this and says the issue of women leadership must be addressed: 'The new union has taken a regressive step. CWIU had a woman NOB. I have always argued for women to be top of the agenda - we (the former PPWAWU) had a quota in COSATU. We should start in regions and locals to ensure that women are represented in leadership.'

Bargaining

Centralised bargaining

CWIU is in the final stages of setting up a national bargaining council which will

cover the following sectors: petroleum, pharmaceutical and wholesalers, rubber, glass, heavy chemicals and consumer chemicals.

The plastics sector will be covered by the Metal Industries Bargaining Council. The outstanding issue for the bargaining council is whether or not pharmaceutical wholesalers fall within the scope of the chemical industry. Nedlac has referred this to the Minister of Labour to take a final decision.

The former PPWAWU is now pressurising employers into centralised bargaining and is finalising collective bargaining structures with employers in the following sectors: pulp and paper, packaging, printing and publishing, saw milling, paper merchant, tissue/waste and paper collection and wood distributors. Employers still have to form an employers' association.

CEPPWAWU wants to consolidate centralised bargaining and draw other unions in: 'Tight co-ordination and rationalisation of sectors and collective policies will be done by the new union. Sectors to be combined have been identified to reduce the number of sectors.' (Secretariat report)

'We hope to incorporate SATU into centralised bargaining since a continuation of the sectarian approach taken by SATU is not in the interests of broader bargaining.' (Buthelezi)

Buthelezi also expects employers to resist: 'Employers are panicking saying we have gone too far with CWIU. PPWAWU employers will re-think centralised bargaining.' (Buthelezi)

Harmonising approaches

At the moment, the two former unions have different dates to start negotiations. According to Buthelezi bargaining arrangements will have to change: 'We

CEPPWAWU's message to bosses

'We are now stronger and speaking with one voice. We will not compromise on improving our conditions. We are leading members who are disadvantaged. For example some earn R300 per week. Bosses co-operate with us, or else we will use our strength to get what members deserve' (Mthombeni)

CEPPWAWU's message to members

'We ask every member to contribute to building CEPPWAWU by going to local, regional and national structures. This is your weapon

Workers only have their unity and strength – use it effectively to democratise the workplace' (Mthombeni)

need to harmonise the approach so that we will submit the same demands to all employers in PPWAWU and get them into centralised bargaining. It will also be a struggle to get companies to start negotiating at the same time because most companies have their financial year ending on their financial year'

CEPPWAWU also plans a three-year strategy around negotiations and will include social wage demands.

The area of provident funds also needs to be re-aligned. 'This is the most complicated area and it will take years to realign. Jan Mahlangu (the former CWIU's provident fund co-ordinator) is very dedicated and will ensure that the process is smooth. Co-operation will be very important.' (Mthombeni)

Difficulties in the process

Mthombeni identified difficulties in the process and things that could have been done differently: 'Time was a problem and not everything could be done to our satisfaction within the time frame. We could not present an integrated budget at congress'

More co-ordination and discussion could have eased the process. 'We could have had more meetings at the level of functionaries to co-ordinate. There has been a lack of discussion in some regions.'

More work needed to be done to ensure co-operation and deal with resistance: 'While leadership has emphasised co-operation it hasn't been realised. There were some elements resisting change at a regional level.'

The future

NOBs believe that there is potential for membership growth in the chemical sectors, furniture and in the printing and publishing sectors. Efforts will be made to recruit and increase membership to 140 000.

Mthombeni is confident that officials and members will be able to build a new union that will tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

'Comrades will have to work in co-operation to build the new union. We have an opportunity to break with the past and foster a new culture on the eve of a new millennium. It is not easy to build a new culture, but what is common is the need to deliver to members. This common aim must unite cultures. We must be professional in our work. We must modernise to tackle the challenges that lie ahead. We aim to continue on our good foundation but also build new styles of work. We must be a union that will be an example to others. We must ensure that our members speak in one voice and benefit.' (Mthombeni) ★