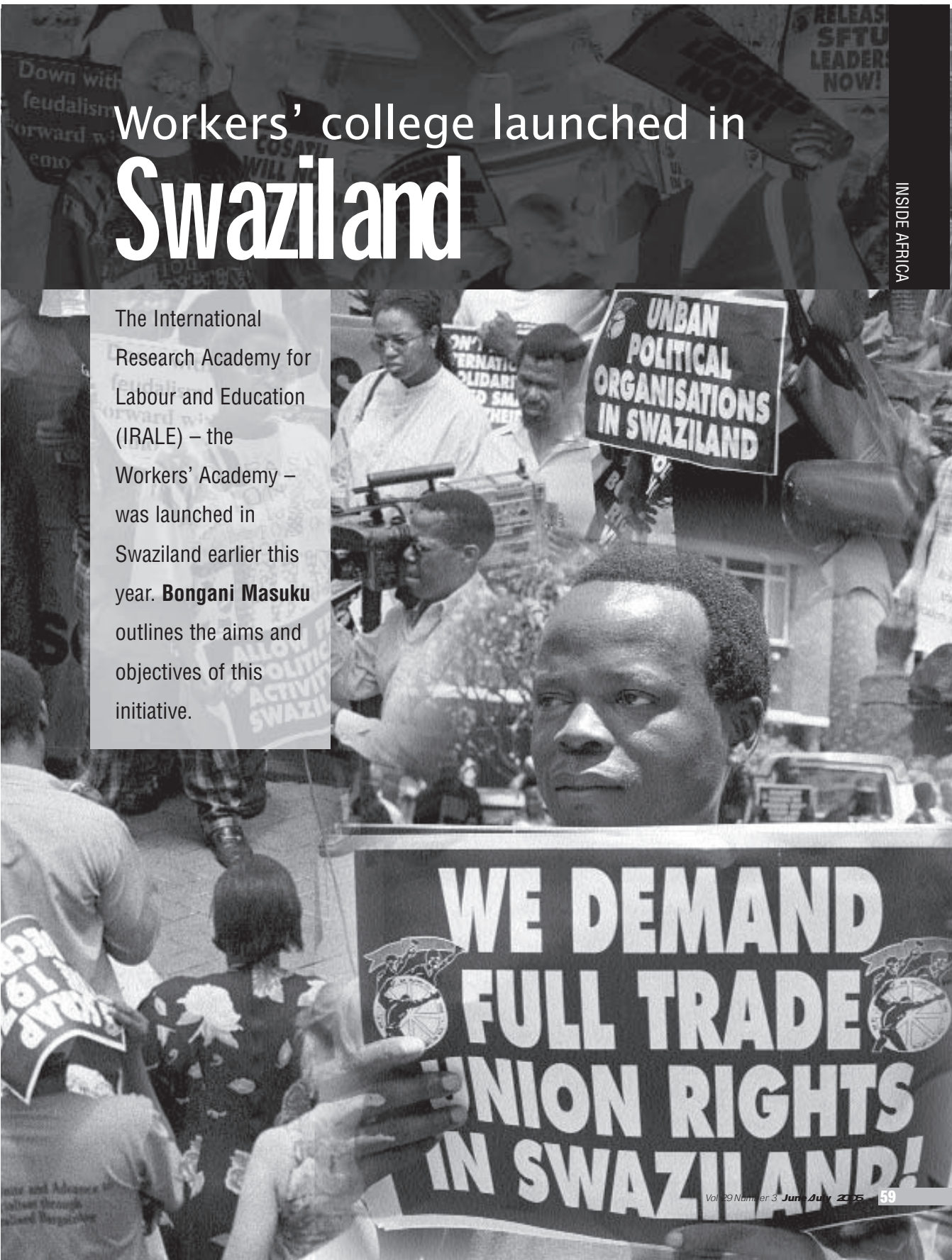


# Workers' college launched in Swaziland

The International Research Academy for Labour and Education (IRALE) – the Workers' Academy – was launched in Swaziland earlier this year. **Bongani Masuku** outlines the aims and objectives of this initiative.



WE DEMAND  
FULL TRADE  
UNION RIGHTS  
IN SWAZILAND!



Workers' movements cannot make the desired impact without accurate information and facts to engage, campaign and develop strategies for effective advance. This is why it is important for an effective working class movement to engage in research and education as critical pillars of the struggle for new and workable alternatives. No motto could be as relevant as: Building social consciousness through working class education.

Until fairly recently, the Swaziland labour movement lacked a labour service provider and support centre – an institution, which would specialise in providing the requisite tools and weapons of worker development in all spheres, so as to fight the evils of a system that disempowers workers. In view of the many challenges facing workers in Swaziland, a Workers' Academy was formed to provide workers with the necessary weapons of research, support and capacity building in an effort to defend their interests.

The launch of this ideological engine of workers is a landmark in the history of the Swazi working people's struggle to conquer and abolish the system of royal slavery,

semi-feudal oppression and neo-colonial exploitation, characterised as tinkhundla aristocratic rule in Swaziland.

Swaziland is a society marked by a serious crisis of ideology and politics. There has been a tendency amongst sectors of the progressive movement, particularly the trade union movement, to discourage the development of progressive ideas, hence the discouragement of political education, debates and research on critical issues affecting workers and the poor in general.

This is the primary reason why there has been such a terrible decay of cadreship and revolutionary activism in the whole movement, as well as rampant opportunism within the ranks of the workers' movement in general. The struggle to defeat the tinkhundla regime needs to begin with a clear leadership rooted in working class understanding and a clearly progressive programme for change. For this problem, the political movement must also be blamed for its failure to effectively deliver clear leadership and advanced analysis out of the confusion; instead it has engaged in political gymnastics with the trade union movement, without offering clear and viable alternatives to the leadership dilemma.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE ACADEMY

Aside from providing research capacity and overall capacity building, the Academy will also serve to promote unity amongst the different worker federations, as well as different forms of worker organisations in the country. It will also work with other social structures, amongst them; youth, students, women, community organisations, academic institutions and other components of social development. It is hoped that the Academy will serve the critical purpose of developing alternative and progressive development paradigms for the forces for change, particularly in support of trade union and workers' demands for a radical change in society, with the full backing of scientific facts and information, as well as the necessary capacity building.

The Academy was established to provide the following:

- support trade unions and community organisations through capacity building and leadership development;
- conduct research and provide information to unions for negotiations and campaigns work;
- develop worker activists and shop stewards to become quality operators;
- link workers' issues at the workplace with broader social issues facing our country and society in general.

A number of special projects have been identified and include:

- Workers' culture project – an initiative to popularise workers' culture and promote information about the rich history of workers' struggle.
- Gender and economy project – building women leadership and deepening gender and class-consciousness in society.
- Youth and work – a project meant to promote the active participation of young people in trade unions, engaging with the school curriculum to promote working class values in the education system.

*This is an edited version of a paper presented during a Ditsela support school for the Swazi trade union movement held in May 2005. Masuku is the founding chairperson of the initiative. He is also the secretary general of the Swaziland Solidarity Network and coordinator of its trade unions sector. He is currently Cosatu's national educator.*