

## WORKERS' SELF-INTEREST

There is a last reason why international solidarity between workers is difficult to build. Many workers in the industrialised countries of Western Europe and North America enjoy a good standard of living. Through organisation they have managed to win good wages and conditions.

Some of these workers don't want change in the less industrialised countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Workers' struggles in the poorer countries may threaten the profits of the multinational companies there. If this happens, they fear that these companies will start to cut the wages of workers in the more industrialised countries. So they are afraid to support struggles of their fellow workers in poorer countries.



*Defending what they have won: since 1945, many workers in Europe have enjoyed good hospitals and other services*



## WORKERS AND NATIONALISM

It is difficult to get workers from different countries to work together. Sometimes workers are not interested in international solidarity.

Workers often know little about the problems of their fellows in other parts of the world.

So each union is organized for a particular country. Unions become the national thing of the people of a country. So, many workers are interested in improving the conditions of workers in their own country. This nationalism sometimes makes it difficult to build unity between workers from different countries.



nationalism: Workers in Tanzania Independence







## LOOKING FORWARD

We have seen that there are many problems in international trade union organisations. The question now is:

**How can the international trade union organisations be of more help to workers in the future?**

Here is a last story which gives one answer to this question. These cuttings from newspapers begin the story, which follows on the next page. This is about South African metal unions, and the international trade secretariat for metal unions, the International Metal Federation (IMF).



Newspaper reports on the IMF and South African unions



#### THE IMF AND SOUTH AFRICAN UNIONS

The International Metal Federation has had links with South African unions in the metal industry for a long time. At first it worked with the conservative TUCSA metal unions. These unions did not believe in organising all workers, black and white, together.

In 1974 the IMF formed a co-ordinating council which brought together all the metal unions in South Africa. The IMF hoped that this organisation would help to build black worker organisation in the metal industry.

At first the conservative white unions controlled the affairs of the co-ordinating council. The IMF listened to them. But slowly, non-racial metal unions started to grow strong - like MAWU, and the other unions that later formed NAAWU. These new unions clashed with the conservative TUCSA unions, because they were not helping non-racial unions to build up their organisation. Sometimes the TUCSA unions even tried to weaken the new unions.

Slowly worker support for the non-racial unions grew stronger. This increased their strength on the co-ordinating council. Now the IMF started to listen to them.

In 1982 the IMF held a big meeting in Rome. All the member unions sent representatives to this meeting. The non-racial unions accused some South African metal unions of being racist. They said they were trying to weaken black worker organisation. The IMF meeting agreed with this. It expelled two white unions from the IMF, and two other unions were given a year to get rid of apartheid in their organisations.

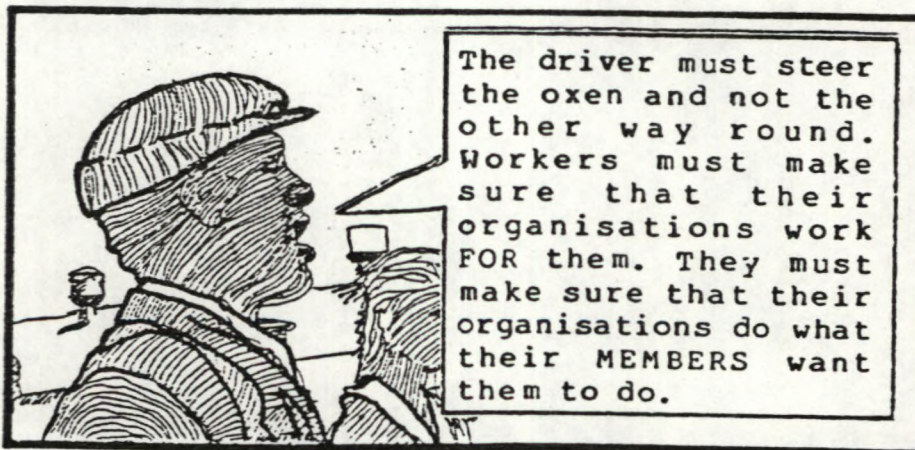


So the IMF changed its mind about unions in South Africa. At first it worked closely with the conservative white unions. But in the end it supported the new non-racial unions and even acted against white racist unions.

The IMF did not change on its own. It changed as the new unions grew stronger. The strength of these unions showed the IMF that THEY represented the majority of South African workers. It showed the IMF that it must oppose racism in the unions if it really wanted to help workers in South Africa.

Trade unions can no longer choose whether they want to be part of the international trade union movement or not. The development of multinationals has brought workers all over the world together. Together they can work to oppose the system that exploits all workers.

The international trade union organisations are one important weapon that can help workers in this task. They can help unions to grow strong. But workers remember what one trade unionist said:





## MORE INFORMATION ON INTERNATIONAL WORKER ORGANISATION

If you have questions about things in this book, or if you would like more information on international trade union organisations, please write to ILRIG. We will try to answer any questions, or send more information to you.

Here are two other books that deal with questions of international worker organisation:

D. Thompson and R. Larson :  
Where Were You Brother?

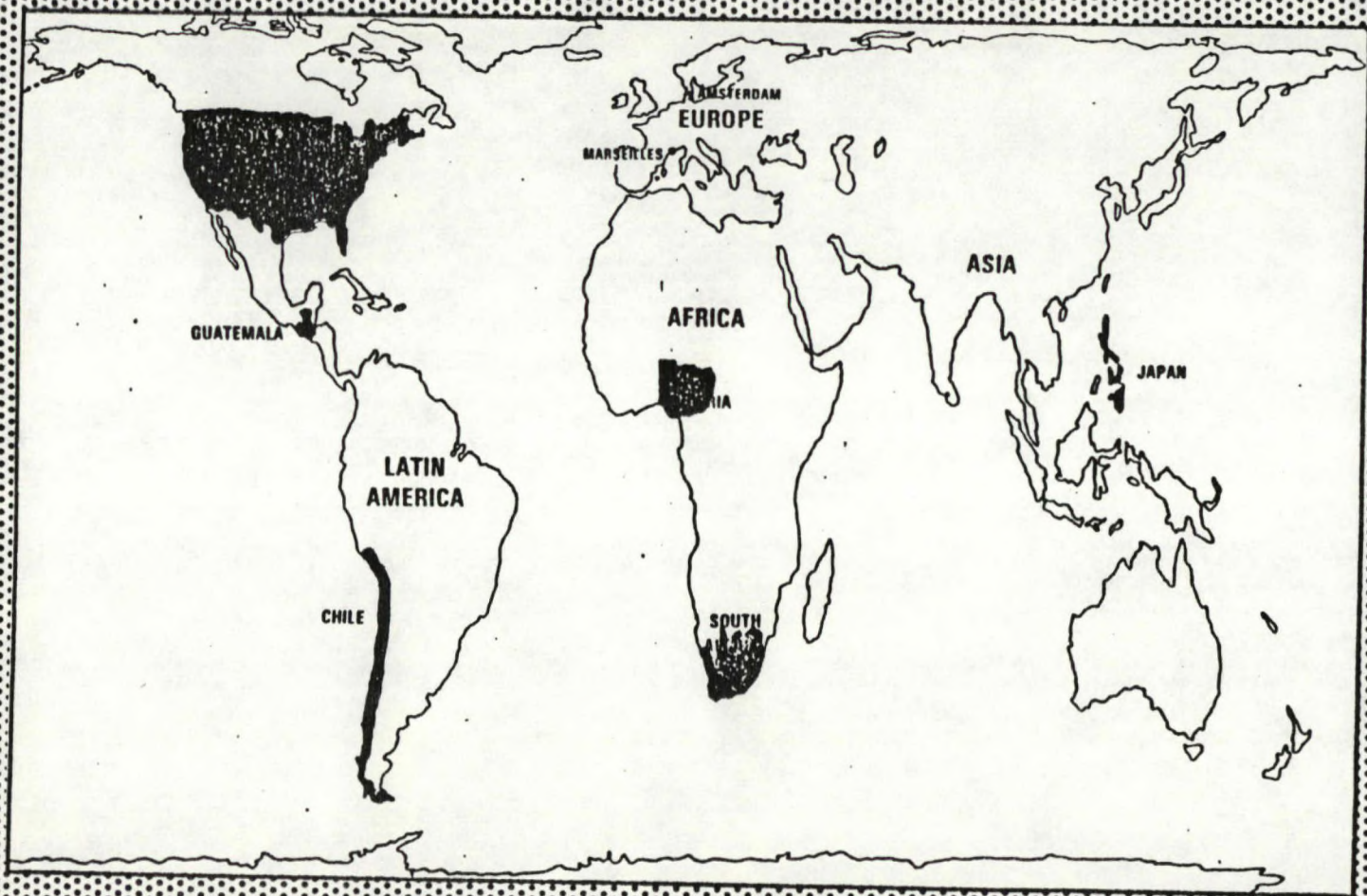
Latin America Bureau: Unity is Strength

You can also read articles about international trade union organisation in these issues of the South African Labour Bulletin:

Volume 5, Number 8  
Volume 8, Number 3  
Volume 9, Number 6

Ask your union for copies of the South African Labour Bulletin.







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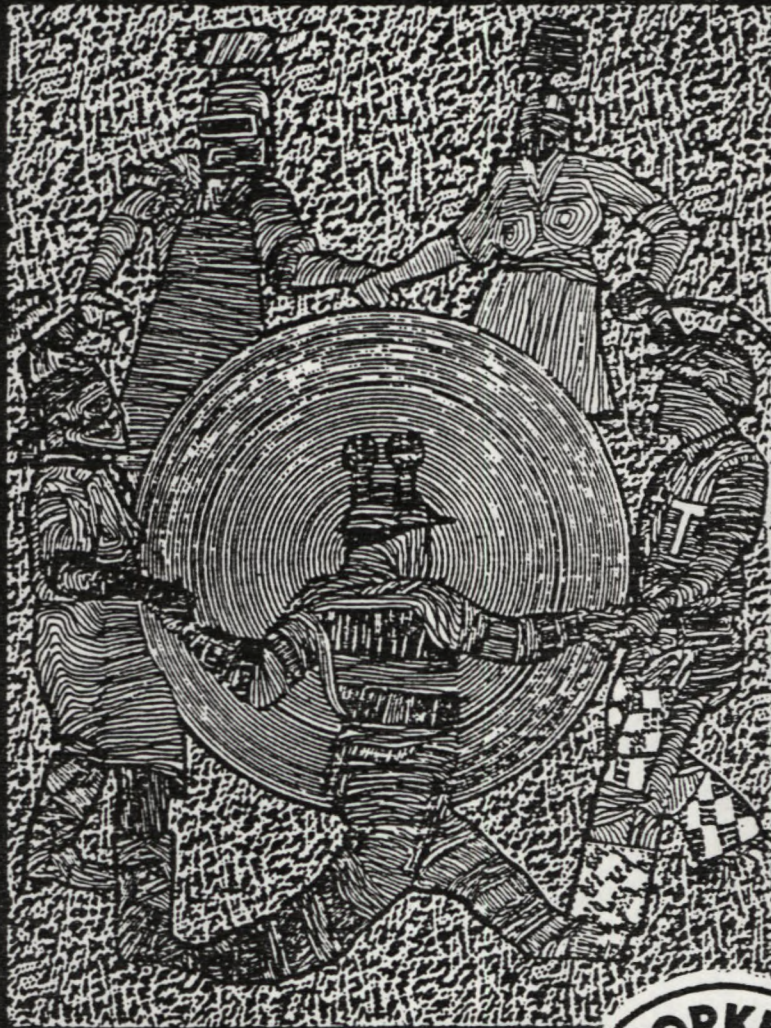
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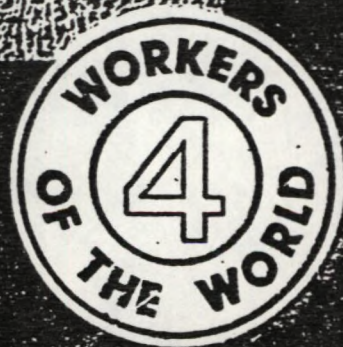
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# SOLIDARITY



# OF LABOUR





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