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AN INTRODUCTION TO  
**THE FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS**

- F O S A T U -

JUNE 1983

P83/371 TRADE UNIONS - ORGANIZATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

FOSATU was formed in April 1979 as a federation of independent, non-racial trade unions. At that time its affiliates had a total signed-up membership of some 30 000.

In December 1982 FOSATU had 9+ affiliates and 105 000 signed-up members in the affiliates.

The present affiliates are:

Chemical Workers Industrial Union	- CWIU
Jewellers and Goldsmiths Union	- JGU
Metal and Allied Workers Union	- MAWU
National Automobile and Allied Workers Union	- NAAWU
National Union of Textile Workers	- NUTW
Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union	- PWAWU
Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union	- SFAWU
Transport and General Workers Union	- TGWU

FOSATU operates in 5 Regions being:

Eastern Province  
Natal  
Northern Natal  
Transvaal  
Western Province.

Its affiliates operate from 20 local offices spread through these five Regions.

+(By April 1983 this had become 8 with the merger of Eastern Province Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union and the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.)

## FOSATU - A BRIEF HISTORY

The formation of FOSATU is part of a long history of struggle to organise the Black workers of South Africa into independent, non-racial trade unions.

Black worker resistance in South Africa is as old as the introduction of wage

labour but the first effective recorded trade union organising black workers was started in 1917 to be followed by the more famous ICU (Industrial and Commercial Workers Union) in 1919.

Ever since then unions have fought against State and employer hostility to the unionisation of black workers. Other federations rose and fell. The 1950's marked a great rise in political and worker organisation with the emergence of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) as part of the Congress Alliance.

Severe State repression led to the 1960's being a low point of worker organisation. However, growing economic problems of inflation, unemployment and poverty plus a very much larger industrial working class led to an upsurge of worker militancy in the early 1970's. This gave rise to new union organisation in Natal, Transvaal and Port Elizabeth. By 1974 new coordinating bodies had emerged in Natal and the Transvaal.

The need for greater unity was clear in the face of hostility from the State, employers and established unions - both the racist white unions and those in the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA).

Explanatory talks were initiated by the Port Elizabeth based National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa (NUMARWOSA) in early 1977.

These talks were to lead to the formation of a feasibility committee. Participants in this committee were the four affiliates of the Trade Union Advisory and Coordination Council (TUACC), NUMARWOSA and the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and three unions that broke from the Transvaal based Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions (subsequently to become the Council of Unions of South Africa - CUSA in 1980).

Numerous meetings of workers and representatives culminated in an Inaugural Congress of 150 delegates at Hammanskraal near Pretoria to form FOSATU.

The Second Congress of FOSATU was again held at Hammanskraal in April 1982.

### FOSATU STRUCTURES

It was a basic commitment to rank and file worker participation in unions, opposition to racism and the desire to pool limited resources and skills that brought unions together in FOSATU.

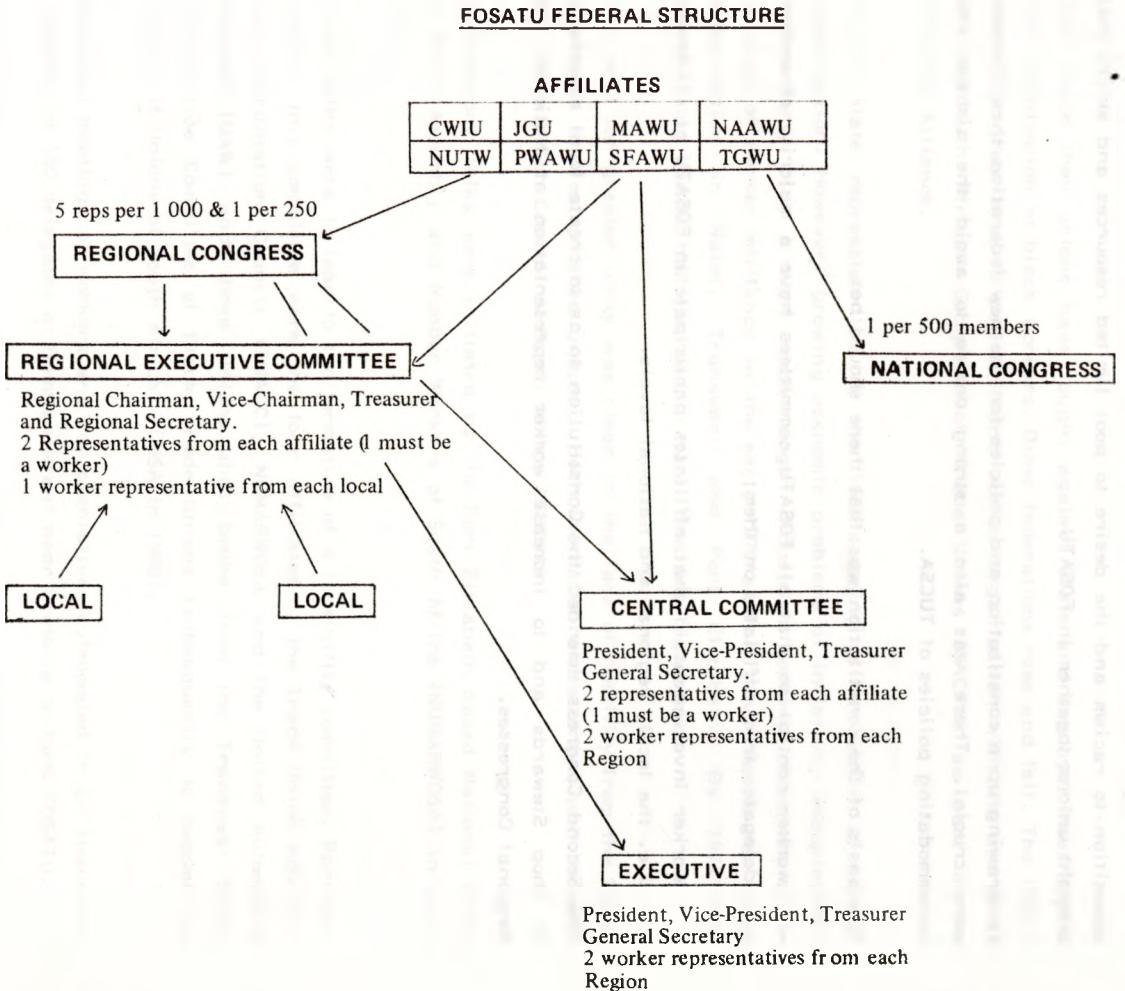
In drawing up a constitution and policies for the new federation these factors were crucial. There was also a strong desire to avoid the aimless and accommodating policies of TUCSA.

The basis of the constitution was that there should be:

- worker control so that all FOSATU committees have a majority of worker delegates from affiliates on them;
- worker involvement in that affiliates participate in FOSATU at all levels i.e. the local, regional and national levels.

The Second Congress amended the Constitution so as to create local structures of Shop Stewards and to increase worker representation at National and Regional Congresses.

The basic organisational committees and the affiliate representation on them is shown in the accompanying chart.



FOSATU POLICY

FOSATU has been characterised as a 'tight' or 'disciplined' federation. This arises out of the close cooperation between affiliates at all levels and because of the common policy stands taken.

Policy positions adopted at the National Congress are binding on affiliates. Policy decisions taken at a Central Committee level are in general followed but are not binding in a constitutional sense.

The major binding FOSATU policies are briefly indicated here.

- Non-racialism - all FOSATU affiliates are open to members of any race, sex and creed. FOSATU is fundamentally opposed to racism in the worker movement. FOSATU's organising aims, however, are firmly focused on the needs and aspirations of the majority of oppressed workers in South Africa who are predominantly black because of South Africa's abhorrent apartheid policies.
- Worker Control - affiliated unions and the Federation should be controlled by the worker members of the unions. This control should be constitutional and effective.
- Industrial Unions - FOSATU believes in the goal of one union in each major industry. FOSATU strives to assist affiliates to grow into national unions. To achieve this it has encouraged four successful mergers among its affiliates in the chemical, motor and food industries.
- Shop Floor Organisation - FOSATU affiliates actively organise at the Shop Floor level and set up elected Shop Steward Committees in organised factories. Shop Stewards and full-time officials carry out negotiations and collective bargaining at

factory level. The right to factory level bargaining has been a major campaign of FOSATU and its affiliates.

● Worker Independence -

FOSATU has stated that it will not affiliate or support any party political organisation. This is not due to FOSATU wishing to be apolitical but because in South Africa at present political affiliations would be divisive of the national worker unity that has been developed.

FOSATU has stated its political position as being absolutely opposed to the apartheid regime and that it strives to build an effective and powerful worker organisation within the wider liberation struggle.

● International Worker Solidarity -

FOSATU has stated its belief in international worker solidarity and believes that worker to worker contact is the most effective counter to multi-national corporations. FOSATU believes that trade union or worker visits to South Africa should only be at the request of the independent non-racial trade unions that have emerged in South Africa. Visits should be for the purpose of building worker solidarity in the fight against multi-national corporations and the oppressive policies of the South African regime.

● Trade Union Unity -

FOSATU's Second Congress committed itself to trade union unity and decided that it was prepared to disband FOSATU if wider unity could be achieved. FOSATU believes any new federation should be based on policies of worker control and non-racialism. FOSATU also believes that there should be common political purpose

amongst affiliates. FOSATU is an active participant in the present unity discussions taking place.

#### FOSATU ACTIVITIES

Like any federation FOSATU is a coordinating body. Cooperation between affiliates is considerable. It is usual practise for affiliates to share offices in each local.

The direct activities carried out by FOSATU are:

##### Organisation:

FOSATU assists directly in organisation either through coordinated assistance to affiliates, particularly when affiliates are establishing new branches in a region or when they are mounting campaigns. The Local FOSATU Shop Steward Councils play a major role in this.

FOSATU also employs a limited number of organisers and administrative staff to assist affiliates.

##### Education:

FOSATU has run education programmes since its inception. The main emphasis has been on Shop Steward training and education.

Education also aims at full time organisers and general membership. Educational activities take place during the numerous general and Shop Steward meetings. However, due to the transport and accommodation problems created by apartheid most education takes place at week-end residential seminars using church facilities which are the only ones available.

Education takes place at different levels. FOSATU runs national courses and seminars. An example is the Labour Studies course run for two weeks three times a year. FOSATU also runs programmes at a Regional level.

FOSATU has developed a range of written material to help in such courses.