

18 labour

THE CAPE TOWN

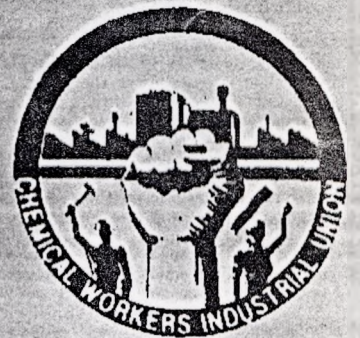
SALHA 6a: CWIU

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Profile on

## Chemical workers Industrial Union

CWIU



Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) was launched in November 1974 following a wave of strikes by workers in Durban, who were demanding better wages. During those dark years when repression was at its highest peak, workers had no trade unions to assist them. In the chemical, transport, textile and paper industries, workers formed trade unions to take their struggle forward. They also formed a tight federation, the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee (TUACC). At its launch in 1974, CWIU was concentrated in Durban and had just under 1 000 members. In July 1980, a branch was opened in the "old" Transvaal. In building a national union, CWIU merged with Glass and Allied Workers Union (Gawu) in 1982. In the interim, other branches were launched throughout the country, though it was not easy task with security cops keeping surveillance on every movement of union officials. To build a stronger united worker-front, CWIU took a quantum leap when it merged again with Plastics and Allied Workers Union in 1986.

**Membership:**

The current national membership stands at 46 000.

**Affiliation:**

Cosatu.

**Regional offices:**

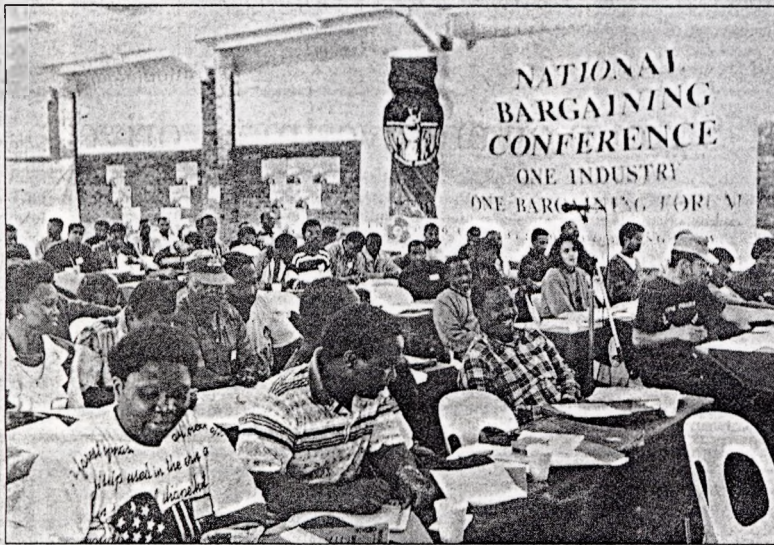
Witwatersrand,  
North Eastern Transvaal,  
Natal,  
Eastern Cape,  
Western Cape.

**Work process:**

- Workers work with large amounts of dangerous chemicals,
- Dangerous work processes,
- Often engineers make changes to machines and "forget" to tell workers or supervisors about the changes,
- High exposure levels to dangerous chemicals,
- Technical failures,
- Many companies use old technology. When machines are replaced, management "forget" health and safety issues.
- Contract workers often have no training.

**Sectors organised:**

- Petro-chemical (gas, oil)
- Industrial rubber,
- Plastic,
- Consumer chemical (pharmaceutical products, soap, cosmetics)
- Glass and ceramics,
- Energy AEC (atomic energy corporation).
- Coal mines in Secunda.

**Minimum salaries:**

National bargaining Conference was held at Shaft 17 in Nasrec near Soweto last year

Currently, there is no centralised bargaining in chemical industry and as such, salaries for membership differ from factory to factory. Wages range from very low, for example a little as R500 per month in some companies in the former homelands - to minimum wages of over R2 000 per month in other sections of the industry. However, the union is also a proponent of the living wage campaign initiated in 1987 by Cosatu. However, the current average monthly salaries are:

- Petro-chemical R600 - R2 260 per month;
- Consumer chemical R11 00 - R2 190 per month;
- Rubber R1 426 per month (one company)
- Glass R600 - R1 892 per month.

**Centralised bargaining chamber:**

Bargaining in the industry takes place on a company by company basis. This means that the CWIU has to negotiate wages and conditions of employment every year in over 600 companies.

However, conditions may soon change in view of negotiations between employers and CWIU together with other unions, including Nactu-affiliated SA Chemical Workers Union.

**Highlight of victories:**

- In October 1984, the Congress of SA Students called for a two-day stay away which was honoured by, among others, 8 000 CWIU members employed at Sasol powerhouse in Secunda in the Eastern Transvaal.

When the workers refused to return to work on the second day, management fired all of them. After three months of pressure from the union, Sasol offered to reinstate 70% of the dismissed workforce and to sign recognition agreement with CWIU.

● Pressure by the union for centralised bargaining resulted into a settlement being reached with employers who now agreed to centralised bargaining at industry level for 'social issues' and sector level for wages. If agreement is reached, it would be effected in 1 July.

● Achievement in establishing a joint CWIU/employer provident fund - Chemical Industries National Provident Fund.

**Current campaigns:**

- The major campaign centres around centralised bargaining.

**Current dispute/s:**

CWIU, together with other unions operating in the same industry, have deadlocked with employers on negotiations to establish centralised bargaining forums. However, there are other meetings being planned to find a way to resolve the dispute, failing which the unions will be preparing to embark on industrial action.

**Head office:**

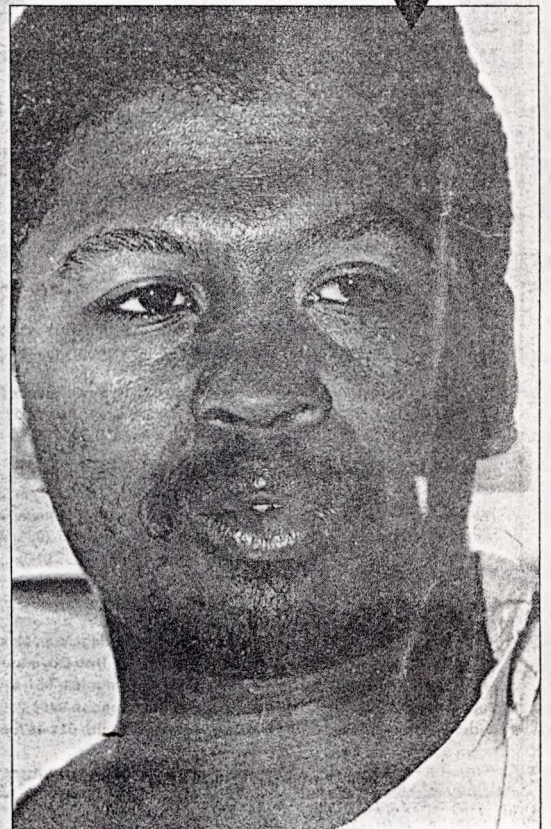
McCarthy Centre  
34 Eloff street  
Johannesburg  
Tel: (011) 331-0801/2.

Compiled: Sello Seripe

**President:**

ABRAHAM AGULHAS - BP  
(CAPE TOWN)

Agulhas joined CWIU in 1986 while still employed by BP in Cape Town and became a shopsteward of the union at the plant. Two years later, he was elected Western Cape branch chairperson. From 1988 until 1991, he served the union as vice president. Congress in 1993 elected him president, a position which he occupies to this day. He also seats in the national executive committee of Cosatu and also, Cosatu representative in Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Committee. He is also a the union representative in one of the Nedlac chambers. By virtue of his position, he also represents the union in the Belgium-based International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers Union, which CWIU is an affiliate of. Agulhas is also a fulltime time shop-steward.



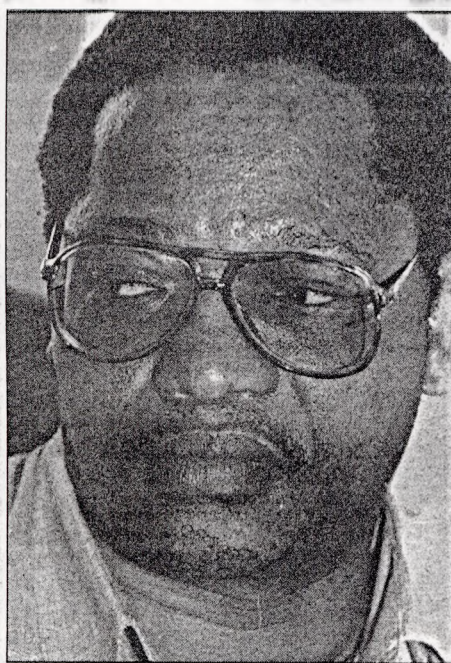


# National office bearers



**Vice president:**

**WELILE NOLINGO** - LENNON LIMITED (PORT ELIZABETH)  
Nolingó launched himself into unionism in 1981 when he joined General Workers Union of SA (GWUSA), which was a sister union to Motor Assemble and Component workers Union of SA (MACWUSA). He was elected a shop steward the same year while employed by pharmaceutical company Lennon Ltd. in Port Elizabeth. After the formation of Cosatu in 1985, his union (GWUSA) aligned itself with the federation's policy of one industry one union. Because GWUSA organised in all sectors, logic required workers at Lennon Ltd to join CWIU in accordance with Cosatu's policy. In 1988, Nolingó and others then "crossed the floor" to join CWIU. The following year, he was elected Eastern Cape local chairperson of the union, as well as National Executive Committee (NEC) delegate from the Eastern Cape branch. From 1992 until 1994, he served as Eastern Cape branch treasurer. From 1994 until September 1995, Nolingó served as chairperson of the branch. The special NEC meeting held last month elected him to the current position.



**General secretary:**

**MUZI BUTHELEZI** - HEAD OFFICE (JOHANNESBURG)  
Buthelezi joined CWIU in 1982 while employed in Richards Bay, Natal. He became NEC delegate representing Natal region in the same year. During the same period, he was also Natal regional treasurer of the now defunct Federation of SA Trade Unions (Fosatu). He also sat in the Fosatu central committee. In 1986, Buthelezi became national organiser of CWIU before he was elected assistant general secretary in 1987. Seven years later, he was elected general secretary of CWIU. Buthelezi is also a member of Cosatu's NEC and its Central Executive Committee (CEC). He was also a delegate to the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers Unions, representing the SA labour movement.



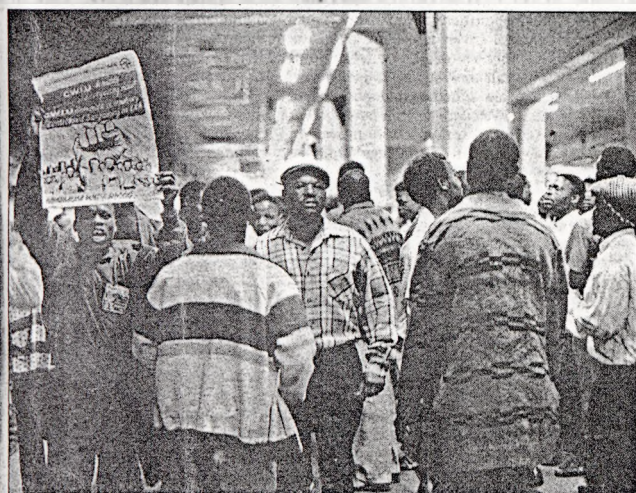
**Acting assistant general secretary:**

**NELSON MTHOMBENI** - HEAD OFFICE (JOHANNESBURG)  
The first time he joined a union - National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) - was in 1981 while employed by a privately-owned textile company called BraiTex, situated in Springs. He was immediately elected chairperson of the shopsteward committee before he was elected branch chairperson of NUTW for Transvaal. In 1982, he was vice president of NUTW, and elected its president the same year. He held the position until the demise of NUTW when a bigger textile union Amalgamated, Clothing and Textile Union of SA (now Sactwu) was formed in 1987. Mthombeni joined CWIU in 1989 as an organiser in the then Transvaal branch. In 1991, he was elected branch secretary of the newly demarcated Wits branch until August 1995 when he was elected to act as assistant general secretary. Mthombeni is also a member of Cosatu NEC.

**Treasurer:**

**RONALD MOFOKENG** - PG GLASS, DRIEHOEK (GERMISTON)

In 1973, Mofokeng was instrumental in recruiting workers at PG Glass outlets country-wide and did not mind using money from his pockets to reach workers where-ever they could be found. As a dedicated organiser, he was a founder member of the Glass and Allied Workers' Union (Gawu) which was launched in 1974. Later, Mofokeng was elected treasurer before he became president of Gawu in 1977. In 1980, the Federation of SA Trade Unions (Fosatu) was launched and he was elected Wits regional treasurer. His excellent accountability of every cent from union coffers saw him being elected Cosatu's Wits regional treasurer in 1985 before he became national treasurer of this giant federation. He was elected treasurer of CWIU in 1983.



**Centralised bargaining**

Chemical Workers Industrial Union members took to the Johannesburg streets in support of their centralised bargaining demand