

# the NGA and the SATU

Activists in the National Graphical Association began a campaign in the 1970s to have the South African Typographical Association expelled from the International Graphical Federation until work in the South African printing industry and membership of the appropriate trade union was not defined by colour and race.

The pages below tell just some of the story from the verbatim reports of the NGA's Biennial Delegate Meetings of 1982, 1984 and 1986.

Friday 2 July 1982

## INTERNATIONAL GRAPHICAL FEDERATION

**Mr. J. Ward** (London Region) moved the following motion, as amended by Manchester:

**“Further to the NGA's support of motions for the isolation of the apartheid regime in South Africa at this year's Labour Party Conference and at the TUC, this BDM calls upon the National Council to campaign for the expulsion of the South African Typographical Union from the International Graphical Federation until such time as work in the printing industry in South Africa and membership of the appropriate Trade Union is not defined by colour or race.”**

**The General President Elect:** I understand that the Manchester amendment has been accepted. Does Conference agree that the Manchester amendment be accepted? (*Agreed.*)

**Mr. J. Ward:** The idea of moving this motion is simply to ensure that we have a common policy throughout the NGA with regard to the anti-apartheid movement. At the moment we have got two different camps in the Union playing two different roles, and I will attempt to indicate exactly what the position is.

The South African Typographical Union is totally out of step with everything that we believe in. They belong to the Trade Union Council of South Africa, which supports the regime and, in fact, has always been in favour of the apartheid system. That organisation, the Trade Union Council of South Africa, has already been rejected by the Labour Party in this country, the TUC and, of course, basically ourselves through our involvement with the anti-apartheid movement. There are independent Unions that have been formed in South Africa, because they found that those affiliated Unions organised their closed shop to ensure that the apartheid system continued within the Union, as John Jackson has already indicated. Those independent Unions now belong to the South African Congress of Trade Unions, and that particular body is supported by the TUC financially and educationally; in fact, their members are brought over to Britain, are educated by the TUC and are sent back to do the work within the Unions, both on top and working underground.

The Labour Party have had investigations into the position of the Unions in South Africa, and I would like to quote an extract from a document circulated to members of the Africa Sub-Committee of the Labour Party this year: “The first task is to distinguish those trade unions that can genuinely be considered to be independent and non-racial from those that are not. Unions affiliated to the Trade Union Council of South Africa cannot be accepted.” That is quite a clear and categorical statement. They have investigated. They have looked in depth into the position of these particular Unions such as the South African Typographical Union, and they have indicated that they totally reject their position. They are completely and utterly part of the apartheid system.

With regard to the South African Congress of Trade Unions, to which I have

# the NGA and the SATU

referred, they themselves have formed Conferences, and in fact they had their first Conference last year, to which all Unions opposed to the apartheid system and sympathetic to the anti-apartheid movement were invited. It is significant that the South African Typographical Union were not invited to that Conference. That Conference met for the second time in April of this year, and again the South African Typographical Union were not invited.

The Media Workers Union belongs to the South African Congress of Trade Unions, and that has been recognised by the TUC to the extent that eighteen months ago, when they had a dispute with the Argus group of companies out there, the TUC sent Ken Ashton, the NUJ General Secretary, out there to see if he could assist. Ken got as far as the airport where he was detained and put on a plane and sent back to this country. I think that indicates the situation there.

What we are saying is that we must break our links with the South African Typographical Union. We are an affiliated body to the Labour Party, the TUC and the anti-apartheid movement, and we find it absolutely ridiculous that we should continue, through the IGF, to have links with a body that everybody else refuses to have anything to do with. I also think it is absolutely ridiculous for us to expect that, through the IGF, we could achieve something that the major bodies cannot do.

We ask Conference to support this motion. We do not wish to give any more credence to the South African Typographical Union.

**Mr. M. Carver** (London Region): I second the motion. I probably do not need to try to convince most of you of what it is like in South Africa, but perhaps I may refresh your memories a bit. Eighty-three per cent of the population are Black or Coloured, and they have absolutely no democratic rights. They have no vote, and, according to the Prime Minister recently, they never will have. The citizenship of 8 million Africans was recently taken away, and they are now only allowed to live in Bantustans which are called homelands, even though they never were there. Two million Africans have been moved from their homes in towns to these rural ghettos. There have been 12 million arrests under the Pass Laws. The unemployed are forced away from the cities and towns, away from the centres of employment where they might get a job, back to these ghettos when they lose their jobs. An African has to have a permit to be in an employment area at all. The registered Unions have to negotiate through Industrial Councils which are biased in favour of the employers, and any illegal striker—illegal under the terms of these laws—loses his permit to work. There are security laws which in 1980 caused 21 Trade Unionists to be detained; that is the known number. In 1981 that number grew to 306. In 1982 it is still rising. Often these people are detained for months, and then released without charge.

Then there is the other side of the coin. Trade Union leaders just disappear. A White Trade Union leader in the canning industry was recently killed. Two Trade Union leaders were blown up in a car bomb explosion in Swaziland recently.

How would you like it if, as a condition of getting a job, you had to leave your family and friends and live in a dormitory in a hostel? That is the state of things for most Black Trade Unionists. We ask you to support a campaign against the South African Typographical Union. It has got a veneer of equality over its actions in collaborating with the apartheid system. We ask you to follow the TUC line of supporting Unions committed to the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

**The General President Elect:** Can I now call in John Jackson on behalf of the National Council.

**Mr. J. Jackson** (Assistant General Secretary): Colleagues, the National Council and the NGA are resolutely opposed to apartheid—no one can have any doubt about that whatsoever—and to all the disgraceful discrimination against Coloureds and Blacks that is part of it. We are just as much against it when Unions practise it as when Governments practise it. We are wholly determined to put our full weight to those who are opposed to it and want to end it as quickly as possible.

# the NGA and the SATU

The South African Typographical Union are in membership with the IGF, but it is a very minimal membership. They pay their contributions—just over 17,000 Swiss francs last year—but beyond that, the occasional one turns up at the Congress, and nothing more.

The IGF is now mounting an exercise on this very question of SATU co-operating with apartheid with the co-operation of the Scandinavian Unions, at the next Congress. What we would like to do is lend our full weight to a public outcry against apartheid at the Congress and beforehand, because if we simply say “We will expel you if you don’t fall into line” they will go; they will not stay for a public condemnation by the IGF. We would much rather have this under our belt. Please, let us carry on with this IGF exercise, already started, so that we can go ahead with that examination at the Congress this year.

I assure our London colleagues that I am not asking them to duck it—certainly not—but please will they play along with us to this extent, so that we can get the maximum benefit out of it—publicity, pressure and the widest possible support in the international Trade Union Movement.

**Mr. W. Booroff** (London Region): We are prepared to remit, with the assurances given.

**The General President Elect:** Does Conference agree that that be remitted?

*Conference agreed that the amended motion be remitted to the National Council.*

# the NGA and the SATU

Friday 9 November 1984

## INTERNATIONAL SOUTH AFRICA

**Mr. S. Sibbald** (Mid Anglia): If the South African print union are not kicked off the IGF, will the NGA be withdrawing from that organisation?

**Ms. G. Cartmail** (London): Mr. President, delegates, we are in some difficulty with this section of the report because can I draw delegates' attention to the last paragraph which says "The NGA representatives have made it clear to the IGF Executive that the report of the IGF visit to South Africa will be given to our Delegate Meeting this year, and if our Delegate Meeting remains convinced that SATU is part of the apartheid system, the NGA 1982 will progress a resolution for their expulsion from the IGF at the 1985 IGF Congress." Emergency Motion 1 would enable the National Council to formulate a motion to put to the IGF Congress. Over two years' work has gone into formulating this policy, and I want to ask the National Council why there is no report before Conference. Actually if the emergency motion is not debated today is it not the case that this paragraph is a nonsense, and is it not a case that we would have to refer this paragraph back, which I do not think any delegate would want to do. Clearly in the report I have seen—because this is something that the London Region have been involved in—a report subsequent to the Commission's Report by Lonnie Mahlein, indicates that to say that SATU is a racist union is perhaps an understatement. It is a union that collaborates with apartheid. How do the National Council intend to deal with this question?

**Mr. J. F. Wade** (General Secretary): If I can take the first question and deal with that one, the question of whether or not the NGA will withdraw from the IGF in the event that there is not a resolution at the next IGF Congress to expel SATU, that will be a matter for the members of this union. Our rules prescribe that we must be affiliated to the IGF. Therefore, the Council will have to take a decision as to whether they recommend the membership in a ballot to withdraw from the IGF or not. That will be a matter for the members at that time.

The question that Gail has raised puts me in a difficulty because the realities are that there has been some misunderstanding about this. If you refer back to the last Biennial Delegate Meeting, John Jackson asked the London Region to remit a motion on the expulsion of SATU on the understanding that we would report to this Conference on the outcome of an investigation that was taking place by the IGF into the activities of SATU and its association with apartheid. The realities are that we have had the report,

and what we have done is what we originally intended to do at the last Conference: that is that we have discussed it with representatives of the London Region. As a result we reached the conclusion which is set out in the second paragraph of the report. The report from the IGF simply confirms what is in that second paragraph.

As a consequence, can I say to Conference that if we get to Emergency Motion 1 the National Council will be giving its full support. In the event that we do not get to it, let me give the assurance to Conference that the National Council will submit a motion for the next Agenda of the IGF Congress for the expulsion of SATU from the IGF.

**Ms. G. Cartmail** (London): Brother President, delegates, I did not doubt the sincerity of the National Council on this question. I know, having seen the reports, that the National Council has done an admirable job over these past two years. Special thanks have to go to John Jackson. I was concerned that by noting this paragraph in the report we were in danger of making a nonsense of ourselves. May I take this opportunity to urge the National Council to make this resolution to the IGF very strongly worded because I do not believe that we can negotiate with apartheid and with racism.

**The General President:** I hope we do get to the Motion, Gail, but if we do not get to it we will use the London Emergency Motion wording.

# the NGA and the SATU

Thursday 3 July 1986

## INTERNATIONAL GRAPHICAL FEDERATION SATU

Ms Gail Cartmail (London Region) moved the following motion as amended by Dublin.

“This Biennial Delegate Meeting of the NGA '82 congratulates the delegation who attended the Congress of the International Graphical Federation in achieving the union's objective, as expressed by this delegate meeting, of winning the expulsion of the South African Typographical Union from the international organisation.

This victory should lead us to further action and in this regard this BDM instructs the National Council to require the IGF to declare that SATU members no longer have access to the international transfer document 'green card'.

Further, to circulate all NGA '82 branches to this effect to ensure SATU members do not automatically become NGA members when entering Britain.

The NC should also take action under the provision of Rules 18 (7) and 19 (4) to actively discourage Association members accepting work in South Africa and later returning to Britain.

This B.D.M. recognises the right of members of the Association who, in following their conscience, refuse to handle work or equipment bound for or emanating from South Africa.”

She said: Brother President, colleagues, we gladly accept the amendment from Dublin. The London Region extends its warmest congratulations to the NGA delegation who, at the 1985 IGF Congress, moved the resolution calling for the expulsion of the South African Typographical Union – SATU – from the IGF. Colleagues, the IGF Congress decision was a milestone for the international printing trade union community. Our successful efforts at the IGF do not mean, however, that we can rest on that laurel. Instead, we must build upon this.

Motion 73 calls upon the IGF to declare that SATU members no longer have access to the international transfer document, the green card. The green card enables members of recognised fraternal print unions to transfer their membership to Britain and seek work. This is permitted within the rules of the Association. This is a tidying-up exercise and is a logical action following SATU's expulsion from the IGF.

The third paragraph of Motion 73 deals with putting that policy into practice, and here the onus is on branch officers. It's you, colleagues, who will have to ensure that South African emigrés, formerly SATU members, are not allowed to slip through the net.

The fourth and final paragraph seeks to actively discourage Association members from accepting work in South Africa and then later returning to Britain, only to rejoin the NGA with impunity.

# the NGA and the SATU

In moving the NGA motion at the IGF, our President, Bryn Griffiths, drew attention to the documentation produced by Lonnie Mahlein, in whose memory we stood in respect this week, and with those documents it was proven without doubt that SATU is operating as a tool of the Botha regime. And the IGF, in considering the NGA motion, gave a full and adequate opportunity to the SATU delegates to state their case. Indeed, the two SATU representatives both spoke in the debate and tried to justify their position, but every other union of the IGF, which delegates will know covers all the continents, all voted for SATU's expulsion.

Colleagues, Botha's current state of emergency is the regime's answer to the recent massive increase in the intensity of the struggle in South Africa. At lunchtime John Willats pointed out, during the South African fringe meeting, that if we fail to increase our anti-apartheid activity, particularly at the grass roots of our Movement, we are ourselves contributing to our own downfall. Reaction and repression are not the sole prerogative of Botha's regime. Our failure to respond to our South African brothers and sisters can only be interpreted as weakness and the green light to repression in our own country.

John also said that our problems are real, but they pale against the struggle being conducted by the people of South Africa. Indeed, Norman Willis spoke this morning about the huge numbers of people, especially trade unionists, who have been detained without charge, or indeed trial, since the imposition of the state of emergency on June 12th of this year. Our colleague from SACTU, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, informed us at lunchtime that the 19 deaths, the four and a half thousand detentions, the imposition of curfews in 15 districts and the imprisonment of two entire church congregations, who were brutally beaten before their arrest, are only a part of the story. There are 900 verified cases of trade unionists being held in detention. They include the president and general-secretary of South Africa's largest non-racial trade union federation, their equivalent to our TUC, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions, COSATU, and only four or five days ago Zwaleki Sisulu was arrested. Hooded men, without uniforms, seized him from his home at midnight. Zwaleki Sisulu is the son of Walter Sisulu, our ANC comrade, jailed for life, serving his sentence side by side with Nelson Mandela. International pressure forced the regime to name him as a detainee. Less fortunate – if I can use that word – prisoners seized by masked men are being murdered by the regime. Their detentions haven't been recorded.

Colleagues, international pressure against the racist regime of South Africa is effective. The people of South Africa are leading the struggle against apartheid, and of course that's quite right. COSATU have given the Botha regime an ultimatum. They demand an end to the state of emergency, the release of all detainees, that all bans imposed on all organisations, including the African National Congress, be lifted. They call upon all employers to end the harassment, intimidation and victimisation of COSATU members. They demand the right to facilities to assist them in representing their members. If these demands are not met, colleagues, COSATU have declared that on July 14th their members will engage in a 24-hour strike.

Colleagues, they will win, apartheid will be defeated, and Nelson Mandela will be freed. Our solidarity at the grass roots can help that day come sooner rather than later. Our support must not end with applause, but action must fuel and fire our resolution. Colleagues, to the SACTU comrade in the gallery may I say, yes, we agree with you, your struggle is our struggle, your defeat is our defeat; yes, comrade, an injury to one is an injury to all. I move. *(Prolonged applause).*

**The General President:** Our colleague is up in the gallery. I inform Conference that the National Council fully support. Are you prepared to formally second?

*The motion was formally seconded.*

Thank you very much. All those in favour please show. Any against?

*The motion was carried.*

The National Graphical Association had merged with SLADE in March 1982 to form NGA 82. In 1991 it merged with SOGAT to create the Graphical Paper and Media Union. This then went into Amicus in 2004 as the GPM Sector. Amicus merged with the TGWU in 2007 to form Unite.