

Workers are publishers too



The story of SACCAWU's Parental
Rights Publications

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The SACCAWU-ILRIG team:

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...OUR
CHILDREN
CRY FOR
CARE!

WORKERS
are
PARENTS TOO





From 1996 to 2000 SACCAWU was involved in the production of educational materials for negotiators and shops stewards around the issue of Parental Rights. This led to two publications:

Parental Rights Negotiating Manual: The Right to Balance Family Life and Work

A booklet for workers and leaders: Workers Are Parents Too

This booklet will briefly describe how these publications were produced, the impact of the publications on the union's struggle for parental rights and gender equality, and some of the future challenges raised by the publications.

How these publications were produced

The publications were done through a partnership with ILRIG, a labour service organisation based in Cape Town. From the beginning a serious effort was made to ensure that workers had a strong say in the content and structure. To ensure the participation of workers, a reference group was set up. The reference group was made up of members of the SACCAWU gender structures in the Western Cape.

It was one thing to form a reference group and another thing to get it to operate. Reference Group member **Rhoda Brazier** recalls: "we were struggling to get people to really help...some came and went. "In fact, the first two



Future SACCAWU member

groups which were formed did not manage to meet. At a certain point it seemed that this manual was just another good idea that would never come to anything. Only with the third group of people did an actual meeting take place.

Once the reference group got together, the process began to take shape. A plan of work was agreed upon. Most

importantly, the SACCAWU members of the reference group took on a number of tasks. **Fihliwe Lusu**, an administrator in the W. Cape office, took responsibility for carrying out a number of interviews with workers. This was her first experience of research. By talking to workers, Lusu found out many things about the actual practice of parental rights. She discovered companies where “some of the things we negotiated workers were not aware of.”

Brazier had a similar experience where “only the shop steward knew there was an agreement.” She used the interviews as a chance to mobilise workers. “one worker who was pregnant phoned the office and I called the worker in to be part of the interview...us doing the research opened the eyes of workers.”

Researching and preparing the manual also helped to advance the debates around gender and parental rights within the union. While national office bearers were behind the manual, regional leaders, mainly men, were sceptical. “We had to convince them...” recalls Lusu.

Regional Chairperson **Jan Kotze** was one of those who had to be won over. As he put it, “there’s a general understanding of the males that things that relate to parental rights is a thing for women”.

Working on the manual helped build the confidence and enthusiasm of many of the reference group members. **Brenita Cloete**, for example, was sceptical at the beginning. She felt that giving up her Saturdays for reference group meetings was a bit too much to sacrifice. But after she attended the first meeting her views changed. “I couldn’t wait until the next meeting,” she says.

Producing the manual was a very long process, almost two years passed from the first meeting until the launch of the publication in February 1999. The final product was a volume of 134 pages covering nearly every topic which might be relevant to a negotiator on Parental Rights. More than 500 copies of this file were distributed to negotiators throughout the union as well as a few to COSATU and other affiliates.



Luise Thipe, First Deputy President of SACCAWU

The booklet

Once the manual was completed there was then the need to produce a shorter more popular material which could be read by shop stewards and workers. To this end, the reference group, plus a few new recruits, reconvened in

early 2000. This time there was no hesitation. The group met, made its plan and carried it out with precision. Every meeting was well attended, every deadline was met.

Most of the research on the topic had already been done by the first reference group. The task for the booklet was simply to summarise and to come up with a structure that would be accessible to workers. In this regard, the SACCAWU members of the reference group made a number of suggestions to make the material more “worker-friendly.” The final structure of the booklet



Manny Jacobs

included a number of fictitious SACCAWU members who served as “tour guides” for readers of the booklet. The use of these characters along with drawings of their faces, made the somewhat technical content of legislation like the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the UIF Act come to life. A launch of the booklet was held on Women’s Day 2000 in Cape Town. Some 9 000 copies of the booklet were

printed and circulated to the union. The booklet was even given a review in the Mail and Guardian newspaper.

The publications of these booklets have served three purposes for SACCAWU. Firstly, they have provided negotiators, leaders and workers with well-researched information on Parental Rights. These materials can play an important role in forwarding the struggle on these issues. Secondly, the production of the booklet, helped to

build the strength of the gender structure in the Western Cape. By coming together and discussing the issues of the materials, as well as carrying out actual research for the publications, members of the gender structure became experts in the area of Parental Rights. They learned new skills, such as interviewing. They were able to win over more members to the cause of parental rights and gender equality. Thirdly, production of the materials demonstrated that a participatory process in producing publications for workers can be effective. While the reference group battled to come together at the start, by the end of the booklet, the



Fihliwe Lusu

group was clear on its role and relationship to the LSO. The important issue was that the roles of the reference group and the LSO were clearly spelled out. Workers had the task of ensuring that the material met the needs of workers and was written in a style that was “worker friendly.” At the same time, the writers and researchers from the ILRIG were given a mandate to carry out their work without having every detail reviewed by the reference group.

At the end of the production of the booklet, many of the reference group members came together to reflect on their experience of producing the materials. In the following pages, some of these workers speak about their work on the publications, as well as airing their views on parental rights and gender.

Workers speak

What will further the issue of gender in the union..if we want to be champions of gender we must put it high on the agenda, you'll find that we put it on the last day and we're leaving..when we have a COSATU region there will be only two lines at the end of the report."

Jan Kotze, Chairperson, Western Cape Region

When we strategised on how we were going to produce the manual...we did not have the capacity (we thought) the best thing is to work with an LSO but the process should be driven by the union. "

Patricia Appolis, SACCAWU National Gender Co-ordinator

Due to staff turn over particularly after the first democratic elections, there was a need to put down in writing the experience of SACCAWU. The production of the manual would be a process of empowerment of shopsteward negotiators as well.

Jeremy Daphne, Researcher and former SACCAWU Negotiator

The first meeting went okay. I couldn't wait for the next meeting to take place. From there I really started encouraging people to participate in the gender structures. "

Brenita Cloete, Reference Group Member

Before the manual "the perception of men was that we must run this organisation...by educating this leadership the shift began slowly...the start was made.

Manny Jacobs, Reference Group Member

When I started with gender structures, I didn't know much...I didn't go to communities where they do workshops...I'm learning in the process

Bella Maneli, Reference Group Member

According to the bosses , the father should be a person who is married. We always have a problem with this."

Luise Thiye, First Deputy President SACCAWU

New Challenges

"For us as the union we need to do more to educate males in terms of their roles and responsibilities, that it's all about shared responsibilities and most of us, when I grew up, were not used to this as a shared responsibility."

Jan Kotze, Chairperson, Western Cape



While the booklet has contributed to SACCAWU's work on parental rights, researching and thinking about these issues has shown that there are a number of challenges in this area which still need to be taken up. Some of the most important of these are:

Child care

While there have been many victories in the field of parental rights, not a single employer has agreed to provide child care. This remains a key demand for future struggles.

The gap between companies in the sector

Many big companies such as Pick n' Pay, 3M, Shoprite, Diskom, Click's and Woolworth's have relatively good agreements on parental rights. But many of the smaller companies lag far behind. As the worker-researchers found out, many workers and even shop stewards are not even aware of existing agreements. There is much work to be done to close the gap.



Rhoda Brazier

Casuals

Casualisation is a fact of life in most companies in the sectors where SACCAWU organises. So far, most casuals have not been won over to supporting the union. This means that they are left out of parental rights agreements — and can potentially undermine the gains that have been won.

Payment

The present UIF Act is under revision, but it is unlikely to create a situation whereby a worker on maternity leave will receive full wages. At present a worker can only collect 45% of their wages from UIF benefits, with 33% being added by the employer. If the employer puts in more than 33%, the 45% from UIF is automatically reduced. Given the relatively low wages of most workers, many mothers cannot afford to take full maternity leave since they do not receive full pay during leave.

Women leaders

While the union has made great advances in the area of gender equality and parental rights, there is still a long way to go. In a union where women are the majority of the membership, most leaders and negotiators are still men. While some men support parental rights, there was a feeling within the reference group (and even amongst some male negotiators) that parental rights often falls off the agenda during bargaining. As one worker leader put it: "Parental rights is a bargaining chip, one of the first items to be sacrificed."



These, then are some of the key challenges for SACCAWU in the field of parental rights. Hopefully the educational materials and the cadre of the reference group will prove to be powerful tools in taking up these challenges for the working class.

Are the publications useful to workers?

"we might say we've done a a very good job publishing all this but are they really utilised to the fullest and the very people who are targeted for the usage of the booklet..the shop stewards, the entire membership, do they really read them? Do they understand exactly what it means and do they extract in some areas that may assist them...how do we monitor to see that this has been a very successful exercise?"

Luise Thipe, First Deputy President, SACCAWU