



Trade Union Library

Labour Research Service

BUSISWE VANANDA

Librarian

Background

The Trade Union Library and Education Centre was established in 1983 as the Cape Town Trade Union Library, with the aim of providing information and education to strengthen the organisational capacity of trade unions. It was aimed at serving all non-racial unions in Cape Town and the surrounding areas. Today it is known as the largest trade union library in the country, with a special collection on labour.

In 1999 the library merged with the Labour Research Service (LRS), as both these institutions had similar aims. Based in Woodstock, the library is aptly situated in Community House, which was once headquarters to a number of trade unions during the Apartheid era. The location of the library is convenient as it is the cradle of the trade union movement, and is easily accessible from all areas via public transport. By sharing the same premises, these two organisations developed a close working relationship, often providing joint programmes to trade unions and sometimes sharing staff. Both organisations received consistent support and service commissions from their trade union members. The Trade Union Library is now a unit within the LRS,

and continues to provide a comprehensive, research-orientated reference library.

The traditional role of the library was to provide information, education and resources to workers, and those individuals who serve the workers' daily needs and struggles. With the transformation of the country and its legislature, the library has taken on the task of ensuring that the workers are informed of all the implications thereof. The library aims to create awareness amongst the workforce in the safeguarding of their interests. The name was changed to the Trade Union Library so as to reflect the new scope of activities, serving a much wider base with its services being

required from other major centres and outlying areas of the Cape.

Services and facilities

The library provides a range of comprehensive services and facilities such as:

- *the reference department* which contains a substantial collection of reference books covering virtually all subjects relevant to the labour movement. It is used extensively by staff at LRS, as well as by students, shopstewards, trade unionists, academics and researchers. The reading room is frequented by visitors who want to consult the reference works and catch up on the latest developments in industrial relations by consulting the library's large journal collection. The library houses a collection of 383 journal titles with 15 139 records on the database specialising in issues relevant to labour, as well as publications and documentation on the various South African labour federations and unions
- *the lending department* which operates for members of the Readers' Club. These members are allowed to loan books and other resources from the library
- *an audio-visual collection*, the library's audio-visual collection that supplies

Below left: The Trade Union Library overlooks a brick-paved area for relaxing under the trees

Right: A most unusual mural on the wall of library showing the workers demanding their rights - a touch reminiscent of the Russian revolution

Below right: The well-stocked reference section where Nokuthula Mankuna, who is the resource co-ordinator, is helping a borrower



unions and other organisations with relevant videos for educational purposes

- *the workers' bookshop*, opened in 1981 in the reading room. The bookshop provides interesting and relevant material at affordable prices. It stocks the latest research, labour-related acts and policy papers that would otherwise not be available to workers
- *a computerised catalogue* - users can access the library's numerous records through the database
- *a workers' communication centre (Internet centre)* that is equipped with computers offering users the opportunity to make use of the Internet, as well as word-processing programmes. This facility is available for bookings by organisations that want to use it for training purposes. The centre offers users access to the Internet, e-mail, typing and printing services
- *consultancy* - the library is geared at empowerment as it provides consultation to trade unions in the setting up of resource centres, as well as provide training to its members in maintaining the running of the centre.

Projects

There are various projects that cater to the needs of the labour movement. The library endeavours to fulfil these needs through providing:

- *evening seminars* - during which topical issues affecting the labour movement are dealt with
- *analytical workshops* - to ensure a working knowledge on the subject matter. Experts in their field are often called upon to convene on these issues, thus allowing for the sharing of ideas
- *book boxes* - the library places book boxes in different union offices as a way of promoting access to information. This caters to the needs of workers who do not have time to come to the library and thus ensures easier access to books
- *Readers' Club study circles* - this programme promotes a culture of reading in the labour movement and society at large. It offers individual workers, community members and others interested

Left: The bookshop provides, amongst other materials, the latest research, labour-related acts and policy papers that would otherwise not be available to workers

Below left: The lending department which enables members of the Readers' Club to loan books and other resources from the library

Below right: A workers' Internet centre that offers users the use of the Internet, word-processing programmes and provides bookings by organisations that want to use it for training purposes

in labour and political issues, the opportunity to read together and share ideas. Other existing study circles also benefit from this programme as it provides access to reading material and a venue.

Staff

The library staff, a closely-knit family, are, librarian Busiswe Vananda, resource co-ordinator Nokuthula Mankune and library assistant, Mzukisi Njambathwa. The staff is at hand to provide effective and efficient services to all users of the library.

Publications

The LRS produces useful publications for unionists through its publications unit.

- **The bargaining indicator**
- **The bargaining monitor**
- **Ulwazi** (Trade Union Library newsletter)
- **Behind the label**
- **TULEC Manual for Trade Union organisers.**

The Trade Union Library strives to give trade unionists and workers in South Africa access to a wide range of information that will help them to effectively protect the rights of the individual worker and further the aims of the trade union movement. It plays a crucial role in providing information in accessible forms that can be transformed by workers into effective bargaining tools.

Opening hours

Monday-Friday 12h30-18h30

Saturday 10h00-14h00

For further information visit:

www.lrs.org.za or e-mail <tulec@lrs.org.za>.

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