

Labour voices on the airwaves

Between September and December 1997, a collective of labour service organisations carried out a radio pilot project, called Workers World. It consisted of 12 weekly 30-minute slots on Bush Radio, a community radio station, focusing on issues relevant to workers and the labour movement.

At the end of the pilot project, it was agreed to set up a semi-independent radio production project. This decision was based on the obvious need for radio productions focusing on labour-related issues.

Why Workers World Radio Productions?

Due to a variety of reasons, the profile of the labour movement and labour issues has declined since the mid-nineties. Most references in the popular media to trade unions and their activities are cast in a negative light and portrayed as harmful to investment prospects and economic growth. This is despite the positive contribution made by labour during the anti-apartheid struggle and now in transforming South Africa.

Radio, as the most accessible and highly popular medium, can play a vital role in strengthening the democratic process in South Africa and the labour movement. It is for this purpose that Workers World Radio Productions (WWRP) was set up.

The project plays a multi-faceted role for the labour movement, whilst still

retaining its independence for the programme producers. The role of the project includes providing the trade union movement access to the airwaves. It enables workers and trade unionists to express their views in the form of quality productions and consequently enhances their democratic role within civil society.

Pilot project

WWRP, together with the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF), developed a pilot project involving the setting up of weekly one-hour labour slots on over 30 community radio stations nationally.

Each week the slots focus on a selected topic. These topics are decided upon by a coordinating committee comprising representation from the key labour federations and labour service organisations. WWRP produces and distributes all the pre-recorded material to participating radio stations. Its labour news bulletins draw a lot on telephonic interviews with relevant trade unionists. Many trade unionists also use the WWRP labour news hotline, a 24-hour telephonic recording service based in the WWRP production studios (021) 447-6845.

Through this facility trade unionists are able to phone in from anywhere and tell their labour news story, which will then be included in the following week's labour news bulletin.