

CIRCULAR TO ALL REGIONS AND UNITS

Comrades,

As previously reported the PB held an extended meeting together with key trade unionist Party members to discuss the role of SACTU in the general political struggle as well as its relations with the new trade union federation, COSATU. Our Industrial Sub Committee was instructed to examine guidelines which would deal in greater detail with the role of SACTU, particularly in relation to its tasks inside the country.

In preparation for the SACTU NEC meeting to take place in August, a SACTU sub-committee has produced a discussion paper which we consider to be excellent basis for a further consideration of the question.

We attach a copy of this discussion paper and we request all Regions and Units to discuss the paper and to forward any comments they may have to the PB as soon as possible.

Communist Greetings

PB SECRETARIAT

AUGUST 1988

DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE ROLE OF SACTU IN THE  
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

1. INTERNAL

After more than thirty years of active political struggle, SACTU 's principles remain a guiding spirit for the revolutionary trade union movement and the working class in South Africa. It is precisely because of its open identification of the cause of the workers with the movement for the national liberation, that SACTU commands the respect and confidence of the workers of our country and continues to be a major reference point for a united and revolutionary labour movement.

Neither able to live nor struggle without trade unions, the workers have always found ways and means of organising themselves and forcing the state and employers to recognise the existence of their unions. SACTU's contribution to this process as well as to the arduous struggle over many years, of forging a united working class, under a single trade union federation, has been significant and formative.

The emergence of COSATU is a product of this process. Its development has transformed the potential to take the struggle to new heights; eliminate the legacy of weak, small and fragmented : , unions and to create viable and democratic industrial unions, capable of confronting monopoly capital with the organised strength of a revolutionary united working class. The new situation has opened up great possibilities for the further mobilisation and unity of the working class and poses a major challenge to the forces of national and class oppression. As Comrade John Nkadimeng told SACTU's National Executive Committee a few months after the inception of the new body:

"Our view has always been that the formation of COSATU is a resounding victory for the liberation and progressive forces of our country, and has, of course, undoubtedly delivered crushing blows against the reactionary circles of imperialism and backwardness, who stand diametrically opposite our course of struggle for freedom, happiness and security in our troubled land.

"It is also a great tribute to the collective efforts of our democratic movement that this giant trade union body is born ... challenging and reducing to a state of weakness the seemingly granite wall which only a few years ago looked very strong and invincible."

The road to victory, however, is a long one and much work still needs to be done to complete the unity process and to forge strong and revolutionary trade union movement. The tactics and strategies to be followed require careful consideration and to take into account the dramatic development of COSATU. This has led comrade to argue that the dynamic and revolutionary message of SACTU has made its indelible mark on the organised working class and that with the formation of the new co-ordinating body, an entirely new phase of trade union struggle has been entered, requiring a re-assessment of the role of SACTU and the setting of new tasks. Others go further and question the need to continue in the old way.

The question to be asked is how different is the role of SACTU from COSATU in the tasks set for the coming period? to what extent do their paths coincide and is it tactically correct for the democratic trade union and national liberation movements that they should both co-exist? Will the continued presence of SACTU be seen to strengthen or confuse and/or detract from COSATU's independence and development? The aim of this discussion paper is to enable open discussion of all these controversial issues and to make the correct assessment at the end.

The answers to these important question depend partly on the extent to which COSATU is able, and given the space, to consolidate its organisation and defend the working people. It also depends on whether COSATU would not be better assisted by the presence of SACTU to defend the legality of the trade union structures, and whether the coexistence of the two organisations would be complementary in emphasising the revolutionary linkage of the workers' struggle with the cause of national liberation.

In many respects SACTU and COSATU have the same concerns. SACTU is deeply anxious in this formative period to help in the building of a united, revolutionary trade union movement based on the principles of industrial unionism. It is also concerned to persuade unions to eliminate the divisions wrought by NACTU; to strengthen COSATU's efforts, to mobilise the organised and the unemployed; to secure the democratic organisation and class unity of all workers, including the white, Indian and Coloured workers. It is concerned also to see that measures are taken to reduce or deal with state aggression meted out to strikers by the police and the army; to prevent the recruitment of scabs from the rural areas to break strikes in the mines and other industries.

In all these aspects, SACTU's role is to give the movement and COSATU, revolutionary guidance and to do all in its power to defend its activities and structures as well as safeguard its legal status. There seems to us no contradiction in these aims and in certain instances, where the State makes it illegal for the trade union movement to voice its concerns without inflicting reprisals, SACTU is will placed to fill the breach. It is indeed an important contention that as long as the apartheid state exists, intergrity and independence of the democratic trade union movement is threatened, SACTU will need to keep in place its underground machinery, in order to continue to give voice to the aspirations of the working people. In these respects, SACTU can fulfil its role of building the unity of the movement by talking, organising, publishing and defending the movement, as well as exposing personal divisions and ambitious

careerists and provocateurs in the trade union movement.

In addition to all this, there is a role that would be less easy for COSATU to play - that is the inculcation of an understanding that the struggle for national democracy and economic emancipation, headed by the ANC, in alliance with the SACP and SACTU are indispensably linked. Shop floor struggles, democratic structures and independent unions, which have at all times to be respected, are essential in the day to day work of trade unions. But if the labour movement is not to be unnecessarily restricted, alliances with the mass democratic movement are equally important to add strength and a working class presence to all the sites of struggle.

The case for the existence of SACTU, as an essential partner in the liberation alliance, to give guidance to the labour movement in this respect, is an important factor to be taken into account.

Comrades ask if SACTU is necessarily the organisation to do this and whether it is the appropriate body for trade unionists from home to talk to? Is not the ANC in the best position to guide the movement on the liberation struggle and address trade union concerns? Our view is unequivocal on this point: Trade unionists should be encouraged to seek out the ANC and the SACP to consult and/or seek guidance on all matters. Throughout our history, we have explicitly emphasised the close connection between the cause of the labour movement and the liberation alliance.

SACTU is an essential partner in this alliance and is also more specialised in dealing with specific trade union matters than its partners, who are engaged in many sites of struggle. This has nothing to do with the priority they accord to the role and importance of the working class. On the contrary, it is a question of how best to confront the many strands of the struggle and arriving at an appropriate division of labour. Trade unionists seek out the ANC, SACP and SACTU because these organisations are concerned with the life & death struggle being waged by the labour movement. But they also appreciate the capacity and specific focus that SACTU - by virtue of its history and organisation - is able to extend to trade union

and political struggles. Trade unionists understand the language of trade unionists but they consult and seek guidance from whomever it is in their interests to meet, not least of which, the organisations comprising the Liberation Movement.

Would not a Labour Front of the ANC equally serve the purpose? The question is sincerely asked. But in all truth, history cannot be re-made. SACTU did not relinquish the struggle when its open adherence to the Congress Alliance led the apartheid regime to treat it as an illegal organisation and effectively made it impossible for it to function within the country, or maintain its affiliates and win the immediate formal affiliation of the emerging trade unions. It restructured itself and contributed its utmost to assist in the formation of unions and the achievement of the class unity that is essential to confront the monopolies and the repressive apartheid state. Is it desirable, that an organisation that enjoys the confidence of the trade union movement and which continues to offer its guidance and render it assistance, should no longer continue in its present form?

This is a specially pertinent question, particularly since SACTU is not a banned organisation and is (tactically) advantageously placed to deal with trade union activists in the current climate of state repression. In this respect, it is important for the liberation alliance to encourage some of its leading cadres to work in SACTU and strengthen its structures, so as to enable it to persuade workers more effectively to identify with the democratic and revolutionary cause - and thereby make all the components of the movement stronger? Should not high priority be given to SACTU to enable it to live up to the expectations that the working class have come to expect from it, in its most formative period of growth, socialist consciousness and struggle for unity? Is this not the moment when SACTU has its most significant role to play, rather than the occasion for its eclipse?

In all this, if SACTU is to realise its revolutionary role, it is very clear that future work can only be done effectively if there is consultation, clarification of function, demarcation of tasks and resources, as well as regular meetings between COSATU and the liberation alliance. To carry out its tasks, SACTU needs effective organisation both internally and externally, functioning in the closest cooperation with all arms of the liberation alliance and COSATU. In general, the internal structures and contacts must act under the direction of SACTU's NEC and must live up to the most rigorous standards of revolutionary discipline demanded of them.

A number of questions still remain to be discussed in connection with SACTU 's internal work. For instance, should SACTU have factory units and does it openly support the armed struggle? In answer to the first, SACTU already has its leading cadres who project the policies that strengthen COSATU and bring workers closer to the liberation movement. They are in every sense underground activists whose function is to help to complete the unity process; to give guidance in strategic and tactical problems and especially, to work towards the achievement of a single, united trade union federation under COSATU. It does this in the course of winning support for the liberation movement and its policy of armed struggle.

In all this, it is highly conscious of the fact that by the very nature of the fascist condition under which the trade union movement is forced to operate, there are certain areas which require input from a revolutionary trade union movement, which SACTU, as part of the Alliance, is best suited to pursue. This flows from the clandestine or semi-clandestine nature of such tasks, particularly in politico-military areas of work. These tasks need to be effected in such a way as to avoid formal connections with the leadership collectives, which could jeopardise their legality. But the contacts and structures created internally for these purposes must always act in a way which respects the democratic process of COSATU and the individual unions.

Finally, the question needs to be asked: who is SACTU's constituency

Our present constituency consists of trade unionists, workers and those who have worked full time for SACTU for three years. This has worked adequately and should be the normal requirement, although it is felt that comrades who have proved their commitment to the working class and the trade union movement should, in some circumstances, be eligible for election to SACTU's committees and offices. In view of the conditions under which we operate, this is however, a matter which still needs further thought and discussion.

The question of SACTU's international role requires extensive and separate treatment, if justice is to be done to this important area of work. But in brief outline, it seems self evident that SACTU's role is to present to the world the case for sanctions, boycotts, disinvestment - especially as legal constraints may make it difficult for COSATU to project these activities. SACTU is well placed to give guidance in these matters to the international trade union movement.

The main job internationally however is to guide the solidarity work of trade unions; to educate workers of the correctness of our struggle - and since the regime does not enable the trade union movement to choose its international affiliations freely - to expose the dangers of the imperialist agencies, whose aim it is to coopt the trade union movement and detach it from the liberation alliance.

It is equally important, that SACTU encourage international coordination; seek support of sister unions against multinationals; canvass support for COSATU in the Socialist Countries and do all in its power to marshal the solidarity of the international labour movement in defence of trade union activists in the wake of the State's design to crush the working class and their dynamic federation.

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!!