

# Cosatu ban: state hopes to smash apartheid resistance

COSATU has recently been in the forefront of the attack on the mass democratic movement as the state moves to try and smash all forms of resistance against apartheid.

Months of threats from government ministers and senior police officials finally culminated in the restriction of the federation on February 29 — together with the outright banning of 17 organisations.

The banning under the state of emergency, effectively bars the organisation from involvement in key areas of struggle directly affecting its one million members.

It comes at a time when the country is facing one of its deepest crises. On the economic front, the government has run into serious problems as the country staggers from one crisis to another with every year that passes.

And on the political front, the mass democratic movement has ensured that black local authorities have lost what little credibility they previously enjoyed.

Mass resistance campaigns also deepened the crisis that had been created by years of apartheid rule.

The divisions between state and capital became more apparent as the government's failure to address

the crisis threatened the bosses' ability to continue increasing profits.

The government responded to the situation by moving to smash all forms of democratic resistance. It declared the state of emergency, detained thousands of people and introduced tough press curbs.

These measures, coupled with the wage freeze and privatisation, have bolstered bosses' confidence in the government once again.

At another level, vigilantes and clandestine hit squads bombed trade union

offices, attacked and killed workers and abducted leaders and activists.

## VIGILANTES

Vigilantes and the clandestine hit squads have proved to be powerful destabilising forces. Much of the grassroots militancy and organisational energies have been deflected away from the state and capital as people are forced to form defence committees to repel these attacks.

Street committees have been smashed through

detentions and harassment, which has forced many activists into hiding.

The programme of building organs of "people's power" has been brought to an almost complete halt.

Cosatu was less vulnerable to the attacks than most other organisations. As a result, it provided an important focus of resistance under the circumstances.

The Living Wage Campaign and the adoption of the Freedom Charter provided the basis for joint action with democratic allies in many areas. The best exam-

ple of mass resistance in the middle of the state of emergency was the massive May 5 and 6 stayaway.

The response from the state was to ban the living wage campaign, bosses resorted to mass dismissals and police laid siege on Cosatu House. Hit squads resorted to arson attacks and bombings to destroy Cosatu offices.

The combined effect of the state of emergency and the physical attacks weakened organisation at every level. But the government

was not satisfied and still considered them a threat. It banned 18 organisations.

Among them are national structures such as the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), the United Democratic Front (UDF) and Sayco.

The bannings are viewed as an admission on the part of the state of the limitations of the emergency as a permanent weapon of control.

## CRACKDOWN

And the crackdown is seen as pre-emptive action aimed at forcing the trade union to limit itself to economism while destroying the progressive mass democratic base that has been built since 1983.

In this way the government hopes to regain political control.

But the unity of workers has not been destroyed by the restrictions. This was reflected in the massive demonstration during the Sharpeville stayaway on March 21.

This also demonstrates that while the government has through its state of emergency and bannings weakened the democratic organisations, it has not been able to win any political support from among the oppressed.

## What the restriction means to Cosatu

THE restrictions make it clear that Cosatu can only take part in collective bargaining around narrow trade union issues like wages and working conditions.

It cannot call for the unbanning of banned organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

It cannot call for the release of detainees or political prisoners. Participation in the campaign for the release of Moses Makenko, general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa) and chairperson of the Alex-

andra Action Committee and four of his comrades, is illegal.

The federation also cannot call for the release of Nelson Mandela and other leaders serving life sentences. Nor can it call for the release of thousands of detainees held under the emergency.

## REPEAL

It cannot call for the repeal of death sentences. In terms of this restriction, it will not be able to participate in the "Save the Patriots Campaign" which was launched by youths and workers to stop the

killing of imprisoned activists for their role in the struggle.

Cosatu also cannot respond to the municipal elections due to take place in October.

The commemoration of important days in the history of the oppressed, for example, Sharpeville Day and June 16 is also outlawed.

The federation cannot support or organise rent boycotts.

These are issues that directly affect all its members who come from oppressed communities.

It is important to note

that the restrictions on Cosatu do not say anything about its affiliates. Therefore, while restricting Cosatu, the banning does not restrict the affiliates which make up the federation.

## RESTRICTIONS

But the restrictions directly affect the United Front that Cosatu and other progressive democratic organisations were building. The restrictions, therefore, are also aimed at preventing unity and united action among all progressive democratic forces.

## Attack on media: Botha govt out to silence opposition

THIS could be one of the last copies of COSATU NEWS you will ever see.

The Botha government is determined to silence any views that promote a South Africa free from exploitation and oppression.

To do this Stoffel Botha has introduced a whole lot of laws under the emergency regulations which seriously restrict what newspapers can say.

And they are using these laws to ban newspapers which, according to Botha's judgement, are not obeying his laws.

Already The New Nation newspaper has been banned for three months. The New Nation covered the kind of issues that the bosses' newspapers ignore — like the struggles COSATU workers are fighting.

Because of that The New Nation has a lot of support among COSATU members and in the mass democratic movement. Botha regards the combination of progressive ideas and mass support as too dangerous — so he banned the paper.

A number of other papers have also been threatened

with bannings. They include the South, Grassroots and Out Of Step newspapers in Cape Town, the Saamstaan newspaper in Oudshoorn; the Sowetan newspaper and Work In Progress journal in Johannesburg.

Long before the media regulations were introduced, COSATU's media was under heavy attack from the government. In the period between April and July 1987, the security police confiscated literally hundreds and thousands of copies of issues of COSATU NEWS and other COSATU publications. Two issues of COSATU NEWS were banned outright. Our offices, our printers and our distributors were all regularly raided by police looking for COSATU publications.

On one occasion the police confiscated 200 000 pamphlets in one go.

Because of the seriousness of the attack on our publications — which was costing COSATU tens of thousands of rands without COSATU members getting the information that was needed — COSATU stopped publishing the news-

paper in August last year. Since then the publishing of COSATU NEWS was further delayed by a lack of response from affiliates as to their distribution needs.

Now COSATU NEWS is coming out again when the lights of the progressive newspapers are being put out one by one. It is unlikely that COSATU NEWS will be able to survive very long in this situation — especially when it is "illegal" to write stories on most of COSATU's policies and resolutions.

Not satisfied with the silencing of progressive newspapers in the country, right wing elements are conducting a massive disinformation campaign.

Hundreds and thousands of fake pamphlets are being regularly distributed on the mines and in the factories. They almost always claim to come either from COSATU or one of its affiliates. Great care is taken to make them look genuine.

Their aim is to cause confusion and division and to undermine the campaigns that COSATU is mobilising around.



Workers stage a protest march upon hearing the news that The New Nation newspaper has been suspended.

COSATU workers will need to be vigilant to guard against the effects of the disinformation campaign. In a situation where all avenues for reliable information are being closed down, disinformation can lead to dangerous rumour mongering, slander and division.

COSATU is trying to counter the effects of the

clampdown on our own and the progressive media by setting up media units at every level of the organisation.

These units will be accountable to the structures they come from — at local and regional level — and will be responsible for communicating information to and from COSATU. In

addition, the media units will be able to produce media and information on a more local basis.

COSATU hopes that through the media units a basis will be laid for a truly grassroots workers media to emerge in South Africa — no matter how much repression there is against workers ideas.