

TRADE UNION

COSATU

the state of emergency, where thousands of our comrades were detained and killed, could not prevent a significant victory. This was the birth of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions).

After four years of painstaking discussions, 33 unions representing almost half a million workers launched COSATU. The launch took place in Durban from the 30 November to the 1 December 1985.

POLITICS

COSATU has repeatedly said it wants to develop working-class orientated policies which eventually it will make the politics of the oppressed people of South Africa. Such a politics is long overdue in a country where racial oppression co-exists with a developed capitalism.

The political potential of COSATU is great. The fact that COSATU is not affiliated or subordinated to any political organisation means that it is able to unite workers across a broad spectrum of political views. Democratic debate within COSATU on its political direction must be encouraged and not stifled. Members must not be prevented or intimidated from putting across their views.

PRINCIPLES

Five major principles are contained in the constitution of COSATU. These are:

- (1) one industry, one trade union
- (2) worker control over trade unions
- (3) democratic internal representation
- (4) non-racialism within trade unions
- (5) national co-operation of trade unions



Over the past four years of "unity talks" (from August 1981 to June 1985), no less than thirteen meetings were held. Debates ranged over issues of registration, industrial demarcation, participation in industrial councils, when the federation should be formed, its form and voting structure, financing, affiliate voting strength, the role of paid officials, relations with political organisations and the international trade union movement, and the position of so-called "whites" in the trade union movement.

At one of the last unity talks the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Federation of South African Trade Unions' (FOSATU) affiliate the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), staged a walkout over a suggestion by the UDF unions that in the new federation unions should have one vote each. This, as one commentator explained, would have meant that a small union with 50 members would have an equal say with a union as strong as the 250 000-member NUM or 70 000-member MAWU. Later a compromise position incorporating proportional representation was reached.

Although COSATU has brought many unions together, tensions still exist. Now it has the enormous task of welding these unions into a powerful and effective federation. Fundamental to this task is the merging of unions to create one union per industry. The Secretary General stressed: "It's absolutely essential that we achieve the mergers as soon as possible. We can only be a powerful force on the shop floor and in the struggles outside if we are based in national industrial unions."

MERGERS

COSATU's inaugural congress demarcated industrial sectors and set March 1986 as the deadline for mergers. If progress is not satisfactory by then, a special mid-year congress will be convened to assess developments in this regard. The mergers will have to triumph over past hostilities and differences in organisational methods, structures, politics and personalities.

We salute the formation of COSATU. But the road to unity is not yet at an end. COSATU is only a beginning, even if a major breakthrough on

ONE COUNTRY ONE FEDERATION

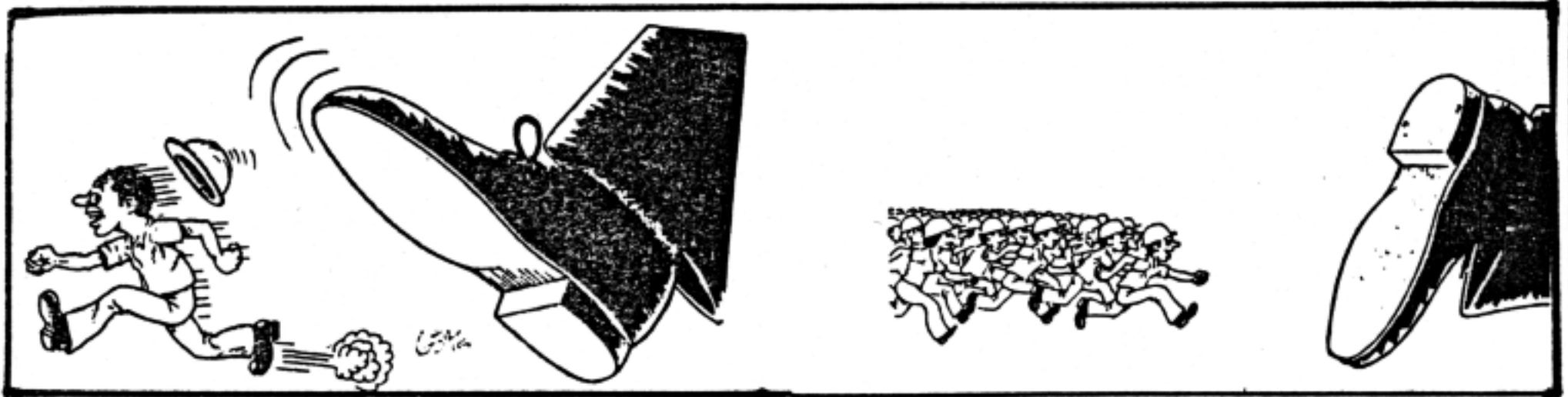


UNITY

that road. There are two major tasks which remain to be accomplished. Firstly, outside COSATU are other independent black trade unions, some of them powerful. (CUSA and AZACTU claims to have 250 000 signed-on members) The rivalry between unions and union federations can only cease if all independent unions

operate under a single federation. It is important that all these unions inside and outside COSATU work strenuously for all the unions to link together. A divided trade union movement can only serve to benefit the bosses and their political and economic system of oppression and

exploitation. Secondly, COSATU although the biggest federation of labour in South Africa, only represents a small proportion of the total workforce - 560 000 out of nearly 10 million. Thus an urgent task for the unions is to organise greater and greater numbers of black workers into unions.



CUSA/AZACTU

The Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) and the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions met a while ago to discuss the the formation of COSATU. We print here a part of the statement issued afterward.

"Noting the formation of COSATU, CUSA and AZACTU wish to place on record the following:

- * We believe in the principle of worker unity based on the material conditions workers are exposed to.
- * We believe in the principle of worker control based on anti-racism / non-racialism to build a non-exploitative, democratic society based on the leadership of the working class.
- * CUSA and AZACTU remain committed to discussing the basis of working class unity with truly worker - controlled organisations.
- * CUSA and AZACTU have agreed to the following and therefore invite all organisations of students, parents, community, civic, political and workers, including COSATU, to join us in:-
 - establishing trade union regional solidarity committees,
 - develop a worker manifesto,
 - begin an unemployed workers' project,
 - form solidarity alliances in the community, establish national May Day Committees."

