

Towards one South African teachers' union*

by IAN MOLL

"COSATU shouldassist or strengthen where they do exist, the formation of democratic Parent-Teachers-Student-Associations.... This would mean in practice, representation from four clearly defined sectors: parents (through civics), teachers (through progressive teachers unions), students (SRCs) and workers (COSATU education structures elect delegates at each level). The exact workings of such structures would be an issue for further debate in COSATU. The goal would be to encourage one single-constituency, national organisation for each sector (e.g.) - a democratic teachers union."

This recommendation was made by COSATU at its Education Conference in 1987. The COSATU workers joined their closest allies, the United Democratic Front (UDF), and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC),² in saying that all teachers' organisations of the oppressed should be united according to

the principle of "one industry, one union".

In 1989, teacher unity talks are well established under the wing of COSATU. All of the traditional black teacher federations and all of the progressive teacher unions have participated in the talks, and even some traditional white teacher organisations

* This article was written before the latest round of teacher unity talks in March 1989, and therefore it does not take into account any developments that may have taken place there.

Teachers' organizations in South Africa in 1989

The first group are federated in the African Teachers' Association of South Africa (ATASA), which has around 65,000 members in African schools.

1. Transvaal United African Teachers' Association (TUATA)
2. Cape African Teachers' Union (CATU)
3. Natal African Teachers' Union (NATU)
4. Orange Free State African Teachers' Association (OFSATA)
5. Ciskei Teachers' Union (CISTU)

The next four bodies are federated in the United Teachers' Association of South Africa (UTASA), which has approximately 27,500 members in coloured schools.

6. Transvaal Association of Teachers (TAT)
7. Cape Teachers' Professional Association (CTPA)
8. Society of Natal Teachers (SONAT)
9. Orange Free State Teachers' Association (OFSTA)

10. Teachers Association of South Africa (TASA) which has about 8,600 members in Indian schools.

The following participate in a statutory body called the Teachers' Federal Council (TFC). Their membership is based in white schools.

11. Transvaal Teachers' Association (TTA)
12. Transvaalseonderwysersvereniging (TO)
13. South African Teachers' Association (SATA)
14. Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie (SAOU)
15. Natal Teachers' Society (NTS)
16. Natalse Onderwysersunie (NOU)
17. Association of Orange Free State Teachers
18. South African Association for Technical and Vocational Education

The organisations listed below are collectively known as the 'progressive teacher unions', although there are no formal links between them. They have a combined membership of roughly 5,000.

19. National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA) *
20. Western Cape Teachers' Union (WECTU) *
21. Democratic Teachers' Union (DETU) *
22. Education for an Aware South Africa (EDASA)
23. Eastern Cape Teachers' Union (ECTU)
24. East London Progressive Teachers' Union (ELPTU)
25. Progressive Teachers' League (PTL)
26. Progressive Teachers' Union (PTU)
27. Mamelodi Teachers' Union (MATU)

The organizations marked with an * are effectively banned in South Africa.

UNIONS AND DISPUTES

have shown an interest in them.

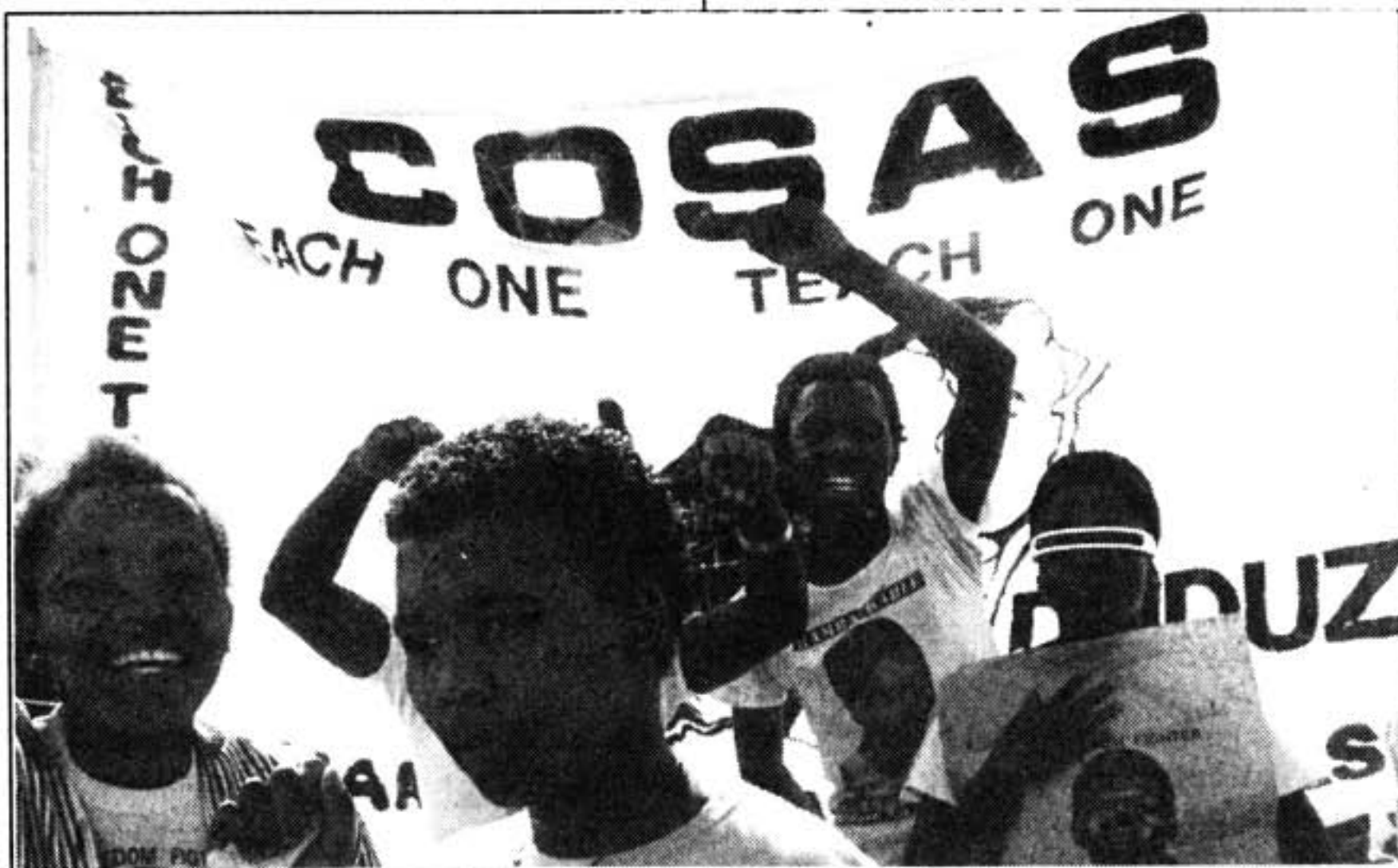
The political context

There are many who argue that the mass democratic movement has been completely on the retreat since 1986, and that the state has been all-powerful. But in significant areas of social life, this is not the case, as the progress towards teacher unity shows.

One of the most important events in the education struggle was the first Consultative Conference on the Edu-

been largely student-centred *protest* action. But now education struggle had become rooted in communities as a whole, seeking to transform and take control of education. All sectors of society were now involved. Secondly the strategic goal was a *challenge* for the control of education, rather than simply a protest.

Of course, the apartheid state has since fought back using the State of Emergency, and popular forces have suffered a number of defeats, but the terrain of educational struggle remains



Student action 1985 - where did teachers stand?

Photo: Gill de Vlieg/Afrapix

cation Crisis which was hosted by the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee (SPCC). Delegates to this conference resolved to form the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC). This represented a qualitative leap forward in the nature of educational struggle. Before 1986 education struggles had

qualitatively different to that of earlier periods.

Since the 1985 Conference, state repression has seriously weakened the NECC and student organisation as national political movements capable of leading education struggle. None-the-less, dissatisfaction with and

resistance to apartheid education has remained on the ground. There have been ongoing sporadic outbreaks of protest and community action at local level throughout the country.

Despite the fact that the NECC's structures have been virtually destroyed, the political gains that it made in the 1986/87 period continue to influence and shape education struggles. One sign of this is that the concept of *people's education* continues to dominate the thinking and practice of anti-apartheid education projects and organisations. The idea of people's education was developed in the struggles of 1985/6, and it continues to influence the education sector. Another sign is that teacher unity is taking place *within* the mass democratic movement for the first time ever.

When one looks at teacher organisations in 1989, it is impossible to argue that the mass democratic movement has suffered a comprehensive political defeat. All the mainstream teacher organisations which oppose apartheid have moved significantly towards the position of the broad liberation movement over the past four years. The political forces at work in the country continue to shift the balance of forces in teacher organisation in this direction.

27 teacher organisations in a divided land

For someone who does not fully understand how apartheid education has divided people, the situation of

teacher organisations in South Africa looks very strange. About half of the roughly 250,000 teachers in South Africa are organised, but their organisations are divided and fragmented. At the moment, there are 27 teacher bodies located in 17 ethnic education departments. (See list on p. 61)³

Apartheid education has created ethnic and linguistic divisions as the basis on which the officially recognised teacher organisations are built. It has also meant that progressive, unrecognised teacher organisations have emerged in a number of small, isolated bodies rather than in one national body. Clearly, the programme of the broad liberation movement to build national unity has direct implications for teacher organisation: it is a crucial political goal to build unity amongst the broadest possible range of teacher organisations opposed to apartheid.

At the time of the SPCC Conference in December 1985, there were two kinds of teacher organisations to which black teachers in South Africa belonged.

On the one hand, there were three officially recognised teacher associations which were linked in practice to the ethnically defined education departments:

- ATASA, with a membership drawn from African teachers in the Department of Education and Training and in the education departments of "self governing" bantustans such as Lebowa, KaNgwane, KwaZulu, KwaNdebele and Gazankulu, as well as

the "independent" bantustan of Ciskei.

- UTASA, with a membership drawn from mostly "coloured" teachers in the Department of Education and Culture, House of Representatives.
- TASA, with a membership drawn from amongst Indian teachers in the Department of Education and Culture, House of Delegates.

Traditionally, these organisations had worked within the state education system. Their organisational work did not fundamentally challenge the apartheid state, although their members were not necessarily supporters of apartheid. Rather, their activities helped to work the machinery of apartheid education. They sat on official committees concerned with policy, conditions of service, curriculum planning, etc.

They often participated in state-inspired attempts to reform the education crisis from within, and were heavily involved in the HSRC's De Lange Commission of Inquiry in 1981. They were the only meaningful black organisational presence in the work of the commission (UTASA's Franklin Sonn and ATASA's Leepile Tuanyane were in fact "de Lange commissioners"). They were considered part of the state by progressive educational organisations such as COSAS, AZASO and the emerging NEUSA.

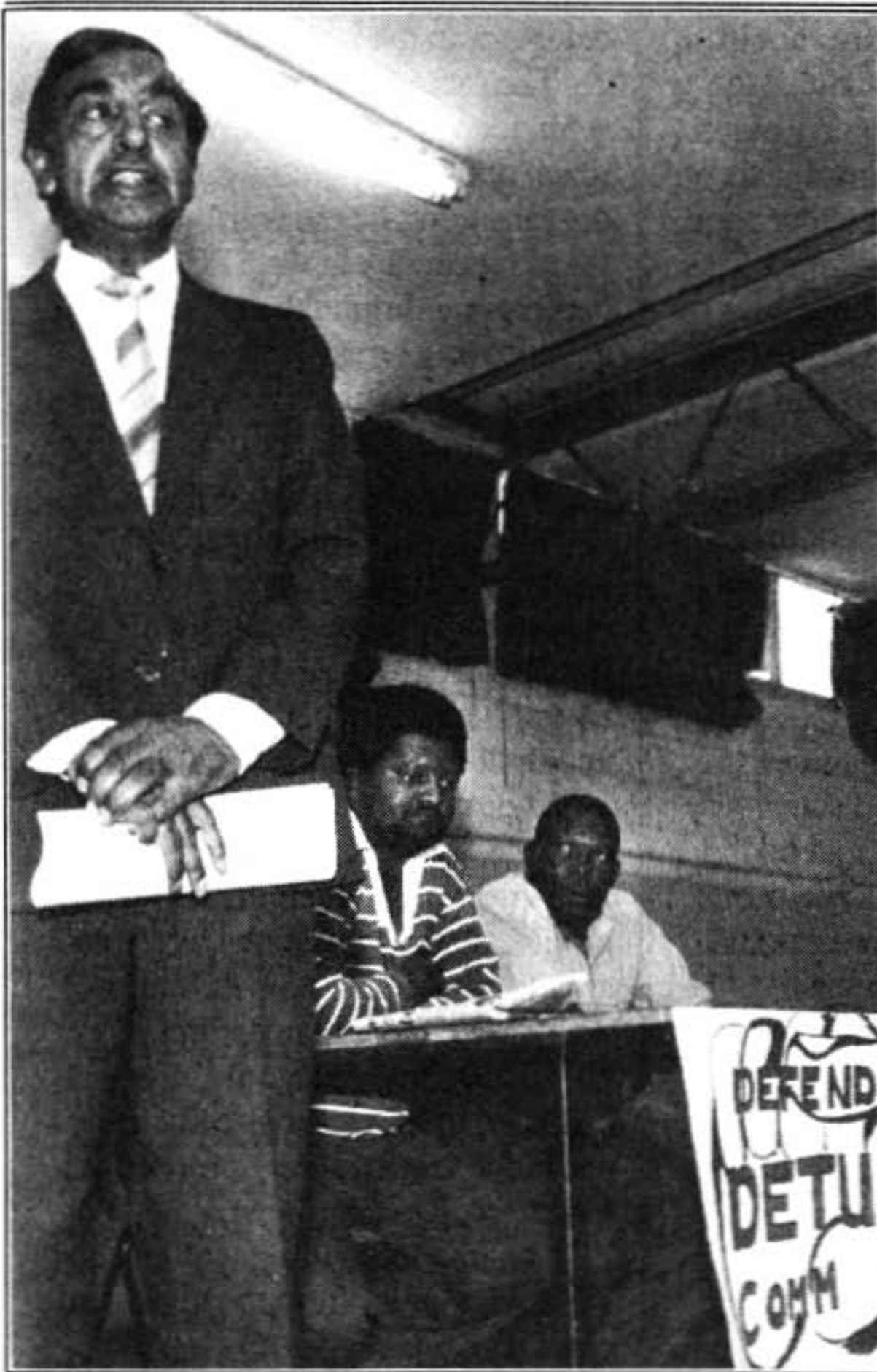
However, by 1985, mass struggles in the townships, particularly the wave of school boycotts in 1984/85, started to affect the position of these traditional teacher bodies. In Soweto

and other parts of the country, student and community struggles placed great pressure on ATASA. When the SPCC was formed during the state of emergency in 1985, it incorporated ATASA into a broad anti-state alliance in Soweto. By December 1985, the Soweto structures of ATASA were working closely with community and student organisations in the SPCC, and making major political gains in opposition to apartheid education in the process. So it was that ATASA was fully represented at the SPCC Conference in December 1985. UTASA and TASA had also experienced these political pressures: school boycotts, and the mobilisation and politicization of the communities where their members lived, had started to change their political direction.

The second kind of teacher organisation which was represented at the SPCC Conference was the progressive teacher organisations. These had emerged in the 1980s within the folds of the progressive movement itself. These organisations were totally opposed to apartheid and they established programmatic alliances with COSAS, AZASO and other militant student organisations. They tended to appeal to younger teachers whose views were shaped by the post-1976 uprisings in the townships. Four of these organisations were represented at the December 1985 conference:

- NEUSA, at that point on the rise, with increasing membership and geographical influence, and with a particularly significant member-

TEACHERS UNITY



DETU, progressive teachers' organisation in Cape Town

Photo: Eric Miller/Afrapix

WECTU in the African townships of the Western Cape.

- ELPTU, which represented large numbers of younger teachers from the highly politicised East London/ Mdantsane/ Ciskei region.

The question of unity

The aim of the SPCC Conference was to develop strategies for responding to the education crisis so that the mass democratic movement could regain the initiative against the state. In these tasks the conference succeeded dramatically. This was shown by the successful return to school in 1986, and the establishment of the people's education movement.

ship of thousands emerging in the Eastern Cape.

- WECTU, which had been formed during 1985 during the schools crisis in the Western Cape, and which had about 2,000 members in the coloured schools.
- DETU, which emerged alongside

But there was at least one question which the conference did not debate adequately: the question of teacher organisation. It is true that *teacher unity* was placed on the political agenda of the democratic movement for the first time, but the resolution on teachers which was adopted contained the ri-

diculous idea that such unity should be achieved within one month of the date of the conference (which just goes to show how little the activists of the progressive movement understood teacher organisation at that time).

The conference was guided by a clear political principle - the principle of the maximum unity of all anti-apartheid forces. It recognised that all the teachers' organisations needed to be drawn into the programmes of the NECC. ATASA, in particular, could not be left out because it had within its ranks the majority of African teachers in the country.

It had become clear that, even though their leadership had acted very conservatively in the past, and had worked closely with state structures, the traditional teacher organisations could not simply be dismissed as agents of the state. They had a mass membership which was increasingly becoming involved in community and education struggles. The leadership was coming under similar pressures. If these organisations were left out of teachers unity it would mean leaving out the bulk of teachers.

Likewise, the militant progressive teacher unions had to be a vital part of the NECC, as they had within their ranks a number of young activists who had been trained within the mass democratic movement and who were committed to furthering the struggle in the schools. These political points were clear, but unfortunately the situation on the ground, and particularly in the teacher organisations, was not debated or understood adequately by

delegates to the conference.

The fact of the matter is that there were deep conflicts between the traditional and the progressive teacher organisations. These conflicts surfaced repeatedly at the SPCC conference, despite their common allegiance to a broad anti-apartheid alliance. Many of the delegates from the progressive teacher organisations argued that the ATASA leadership were the very principals and inspectors who carried out state repression, victimising progressive students and teachers. ATASA, they said, were first and foremost collaborators with apartheid education.

The ATASA delegation, not to be outdone, rejected these accusations, and apparently felt strongly that the progressive organisations were "an insignificant fringe group of hotheads" who did no more than disrupt proceedings.⁴ It is these antagonisms which have had to be systematically ironed out in the teacher unity process as it has developed up to now.

The important thing was that a call for teacher unity from the mass democratic movement was now on the agenda. In 1986, the different teacher organisations all debated the issue and tried to get to grips with its implications. This process was not easy. For example, during 1986 NEUSA frequently accused "ATASA members" of being responsible for the victimization and dismissal of progressive teachers in the Eastern Cape and Border regions.⁵ ATASA, in turn, accused NEUSA of using a strategy of "threats and intimidation" to under-

mine ATASA structures in East London and Queens-town.⁶ Although both organisations denied these allegations as a matter of policy, there was obviously a great deal of tension between them on the ground. Reports of similar friction between WECTU and the CTPA, and between DETU and PENATA (a subgroup of CATU), in the Western Cape⁷ suggest that the problem was widespread as the different organisations tried to locate themselves within the movement represented by the NECC.

At the second National Consultative Conference on Education, called by the NECC in Durban in March 1986, the conflict threatened to bubble to the surface, with a walkout threatened by the progressive teacher organisations in protest at the presence of ATASA and UTASA members.⁸ In the event, the absolute political need for unity won the day, although a compromise resolution still reflected the tensions.

Nonetheless, during this whole period, the NECC and the UDF in particular continued to emphasise the importance of seeking a basis for teacher unity.

Teacher organisations and the emergency

The second State of Emergency in June 1986 struck serious blows at the mass democratic movement. The majority of the NECC leadership was in detention by the end of the year, and the UDF and the NECC were seriously disrupted on the ground. Most of

the unity and direction in the education struggle which had been built up by the two NECC consultative conferences were destroyed by the increased repression. Teacher organisations also came under attack. H. H. Dlamlenze, the General Secretary of ATASA, was detained for a long period, and more than 100 members of the progressive teacher organisations (especially NEUSA, WECTU and ELPTU) were in detention at various points during the height of the emergency in 1986 and early 1987.⁹

The result was that teacher unity ceased to be a central issue for teachers' organisations during 1987.

Teacher organisation as a whole, however, was not necessarily on the retreat. The period 1986-1987 saw the emergence of a number of other progressive teacher organisations: the PTL, the PTU and MATU in the Transvaal, and in the Cape, ECTU, and the now defunct Port Alfred Progressive Teachers' Union. While these new organisations were isolated from other progressive teacher organisations by repression and the lack of national co-ordination, they nonetheless reflected the continuing dissatisfaction and militancy of teachers at a local level. ATASA and UTASA also continued to show signs that their membership was more politicised by developing their links with the NECC and other progressive initiatives in education. There were two important signs of this. Firstly, in 1986 the ATASA executive committee decided to withdraw from the structures of the DET. Secondly, there

were important shifts in the political orientation of the CTPA, particularly its moves towards the adoption of the Freedom Charter.

Unity talks begin

Teacher unity remained a strategic priority for the democratic movement at large. As has been pointed out, the UDF, COSATU and the NECC all made calls during 1987 for teacher unity to be pushed as hard as possible. By the end of 1987, the various teacher organisations were again acting on these calls.

Unfortunately, the old divisions between the recognised and the non-recognised teacher bodies remained, although they were no longer expressed as antagonistically. The result was that two parallel sets of teacher unity talks emerged at the end of 1987.

Firstly, the PTU initiated unity talks between itself, NEUSA, WECTU, DETU, EDASA and the PTL in October 1987. By the end of the year, this initiative had been joined by MATU, ELPTU and ECTU, and it had established an in-principle agreement that all of the progressive teacher organisations would unite in one national body (*City Press* 22-11-87).

This agreement was established despite some tactical disputes in NEUSA on the matter. It was reported in November that the NEUSA National Executive had withdrawn from the talks; however, the Southern Transvaal, Natal and Northern Trans-

vaal regions of NEUSA continued to attend the talks and voted for the resolution to seek unity with the other progressive teacher bodies. The divisions in NEUSA were unfortunate because it meant that for a time there was no strong national African presence in these talks. As a nationwide, progressive, non-racial, but predominantly African teachers' union, NEUSA had a particularly important leadership role to play. But when its national executive withdrew from the unity process amongst progressive teacher organisations, it was unable to carry out this task effectively.

One major blow to teacher unity was the effective banning of NEUSA by the state in January 1988. By this time, the organisation had resolved its internal disputes, and had planned a campaign to popularise the teacher unity process amongst its members. It was now forced to shelve this campaign.

The second teacher unity initiative was that of ATASA, which convened a meeting attended by the affiliates of UTASA, TASA, the TFC and itself in November. The express purpose of this meeting was to respond to ongoing calls for teacher unity (*Weekly Mail* 27-11-87). By early 1988, these organisations, with the exception of the white Afrikaans-speaking teacher bodies, had also established an in-principle agreement that they would work towards unity amongst themselves.

The problem was that this unity was to be based on the "Charter for Teacher Unity" which had been de-

veloped by UTASA seven years previously: this document had previously been rejected by the progressive movement because it was in spirit so similar to the De Lange Commissions' proposals in 1981.

So parallel unity talks were now in progress, and the situation was clearly not in keeping with the COSATU, UDF and NECC resolutions. It is important, however, to point out that the divide between traditional and progressive teacher organisations was not as hard-line as it had been previously.

Significantly, ATASA had invited NEUSA to the talks they convened. Equally significantly, NEUSA declined to attend, not because of an in principle opposition to ATASA, but because its fellow progressive teacher organisations had not been invited.¹⁰ Likewise, in the unity talks of the progressive unions, it was recognised that ATASA, TASA and UTASA would "soon" have to be drawn into the unity process.¹¹ A thawing of attitudes had taken place, probably as a result of the strong emphasis of the democratic movement as a whole on overall teacher unity. The two teacher unity forums were starting to drift together, but the process was still too slow.

The Harare proposals

It was left to the All Africa Teachers' organisation (AATO) and the World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) to make a decisive intervention in the situation. Both of these organisations were concerned that teacher unity in

South Africa was not being realised, and they invited a range of South African teacher bodies to Harare in April 1988 to discuss the matter. ATASA, UTASA, TASA and most of the progressive teacher organisations from South Africa were represented at the meeting; so too were a range of other organisations which had an interest in the matter, including the ANC, SACTU, various African teacher unions and COSATU. After a week of intense discussion, all parties at the meeting unanimously agreed that the set of guidelines which appear on page 70 should be taken back to their organisations as the basis for future teacher unity in South Africa.¹²

The organisational basis and principles for establishing one national teachers' body within the anti-apartheid camp had now been established.

COSATU convenes unity talks

After the Harare proposals had been taken back to the various organisations, COSATU convened the first round of talks as envisaged by point 15 in August 1988. All teacher organisations, with the exception of those affiliated to the TFC, were invited to the meeting. All of them said the 15 points had been well received by their organisations, although in the case of ATASA, there had not yet been a full mandate from the organisation to adopt them as the basis for future participation in the unity talks. A notable agreement amongst the organisations present at the meeting was that they would in future participate in only one

Harare Document

**Recommendations unanimously adopted at
'WCOTP/AATO Seminar on Teacher Unity in S.A.',
(4-8 April, 1988, Kentucky Hotel, Harare)**

1. All representatives of the teachers organisations present agreed on the need for the national unity of teachers, and committed themselves to discuss this in their various organisations and to propagate the feasibility of one national teachers' organisation.
2. The representatives of teachers' organisations agreed that organisations should get together to negotiate and decide on the form which the envisaged united organisation should take.
3. Such an organisation should be committed to a unitary, non-racial, democratic South Africa.
4. The organisation should commit itself to be part of the national mass democratic movement.
5. The organisation should commit itself to a free, non-racial, non-sexist, compulsory, democratic education in a single education system.
6. The organisation should protect and promote the rights of teachers as workers and professionals.
7. The organisation should implement as a matter of urgency a programme of political and professional education of teachers for them to play an effective role within the community.
8. Ideology should not be a precondition for unity.
9. The representatives of organisations agreed to urge their organisations that they, as well as the envisaged organisation, would abide by the principle and practice of non-collaboration with all structures of the apartheid system.
10. Negotiations with respective authorities should only be conducted with the mandate of the constituencies concerned.
11. The organisation commit itself to the realisation of the ideals of people's education in our country.
12. In the interim the representatives of organisations will urge their organisations to consult on ways to co-ordinate the various attempts and work together in formulating and implementing people's education projects.
13. Organisations are encouraged to organise joint projects which will facilitate national unity.
14. The representatives of organisations committed themselves to urge their organisations to maintain the spirit of comradeship, mutual respect and common purpose which has characterised the Harare seminar on teacher unity as a necessary element in the process of achieving unity.
15. The representatives of organisations agreed to urge their organisations to establish a negotiating machinery to pursue the objectives stated in this document. They request that as a matter of urgency COSATU should convene such a machinery having consulted and agreed with the organisations about the composition and powers of such a machinery. COSATU is further requested to consult with other sectors of the democratic movement to facilitate the unity process. ★

set of teacher unity talks, those convened at this stage by COSATU, and that all other initiatives would be dissolved.

The second round of talks took place in December 1988. At this meeting, the all white, "English-speaking" teachers' organisations (TTA, SATA and NTS) addressed the organisations present and indicated their desire to become part of the teacher unity process (*New Nation* 23-2-89). It was pointed out to them that their participation in various state education structures (including the TFC) at that point precluded them from the talks, but that if they accepted the fifteen Harare guidelines which had been adopted by the other organisations in the talks, then they would be welcome to join. Developments on this front in 1989 will be watched with great interest by the mass democratic movement.

The other important agreement at this round of talks was that regional co-operation would become a priority for the new year. All teacher organisations in each region who are participants in the talks will meet and try to develop joint regional activities to lay the basis for teacher unity at a local level. By the end of 1988, regional co-operation had developed well in the Western Cape, and had begun to happen in Natal. Regional teacher unity structures have also been established in the Eastern Cape and the Transvaal during 1989.

There were two important developments in 1989. ATASA, at its national conference in the first week of

January, completed the process of consultation amongst its affiliates on the Harare guidelines, and passed a resolution to continue with the unity talks on behalf of all its members and affiliates (*Sowetan* 10-1-89). It became clear, however, that there were serious tensions within ATASA on the matter: TUATA, the biggest affiliate of ATASA, had recently passed a resolution not to participate in the teacher unity talks convened by COSATU. This position was rejected by ATASA as a whole, but it is not clear yet how the differences will affect teacher unity, especially in the Transvaal.

On a sourer note, WECTU and DETU were added to the growing list of organisations effectively banned by the state. It is clear that state strategy is to silence the voice of militant teachers both publicly and within the unity process, in the hope that ATASA, UTASA and TASA might find their way back into the arms of the state system. This is obviously an insult to the political integrity of these organisations, and there are signs that they know it and will strengthen their commitment to teacher unity.

The CTPA, for example, has participated actively in the recent "Defend DETU" campaign, showing the depth which the teacher unity process has achieved in the Western Cape region (*Weekly Mail* 27-1-89). Another example is the very recent decision of TASA to finally withdraw from participation in all committees of the Department of Education and Culture, House of Delegates (*Sunday Tribune* 12-3-89).



Struggle for people's education: headmaster announces government closure of school - students and parents defied the closure and vowed to continue with school as normal (Cape Town 1985)

Photo: Adil Bradlow/Afrapix

Future tasks and debates

We have seen that the prospects for teacher unity in South Africa in 1989 are promising. The struggle to create one national teachers' union, however, is not over. There are a number of urgent issues which must be confronted by the teacher organisations if the goal of unity is to be realised:

- 1 Despite the call by all the major organs of the mass democratic movement for one national teachers' union, it appears that there is still some uncertainty on this question. ATASA, UTASA and

TASA for example, met with WCOTP in January 1989 and talked of the possibility of a federation between them being part of WCOTP.¹³

This move is difficult to understand, because previous teacher unity talks had reached consensus that the new organisation should be a non-racial body. If one examines the calls for teacher unity by COSATU, UDF and NECC, then it is clear that one unitary structure which can challenge apartheid education as a whole was envisaged.

A federation of existing organisa-

tions would mean that teacher unity will continue to have the form of the separate ethnic education departments of apartheid.

This is an important debate which must be confronted urgently by teachers as they build their unified organisation.

- 2 Regional co-operation needs to be consolidated to build unity at the level of ordinary teachers. If the teacher organisations do not engage in joint activities at local level then the teacher unity process will never gain strength. The goal of building one national teachers union must become more than mere slogans at a national leadership level.
- 3 The banning of NEUSA, WECTU and DETU needs to be effectively challenged. The state is clearly trying to divide the teacher unity movement and weaken more militant elements. It will truly be a test of the strength of teacher unity to ensure that all voices and tendencies who are part of the talks continue to be heard. As state repression increases, more and more responsibility will be placed on ATASA, UTASA and TASA to ensure that this happens.
- 4 The emerging national (in the true sense of the term) teachers' organisation needs to be properly integrated into the broad national liberation movement. At the height of the NECC in 1986, teacher organisations were becoming an integral part of the mass-

based people's education movement. They were shaped by community-wide struggles, and in turn they were able to bring the expertise of teachers to the fore in shaping those struggles. Part of the struggle for teacher unity is to once again put teachers back in their rightful place as one of the pillars of the education struggle.

- 5 There is a strong probability that the new teachers' organisation will want to be a trade union. ATASA was as early as 1986 investigating the possibility of becoming a union for teachers within COSATU,¹⁴ and both UTASA and TASA had already discussed the issue before the current unity talks.

By the end of 1987 the progressive teacher unions had all committed themselves to the goal of becoming a trade union within COSATU. Despite this, however, there has not been enough debate about the implications of trade unionism for teachers.

The majority of teachers in South Africa are not highly qualified on paper and are therefore poorly paid (only well-qualified teachers get good salaries). Although the state has realised its weakness in this area and has introduced massive teacher upgrading programmes over the last five years, teachers still have serious wage and workplace grievances. Large numbers of them can be said to identify both politically and economically with the working classes.

The leaders and controlling structures of *all* the teacher organisations, however, are at this point well-educated, relatively well-paid petty bourgeois elements. There is little evidence that existing teacher organisations have fought effective trade union type struggles for exploited teachers in the past. The question of a trade union for teachers, in other words, still needs thorough discussion within the teacher unity talks, and also in COSATU and the mass democratic movement as a whole.

Conclusion

There is good reason, however, to be confident. The drive for teacher unity has developed slowly but well over the past five years, and all organisations involved see themselves as part of the broad liberation movement. The debates and challenges outlined above are difficult, but teachers have shown that they can forge a consensus on difficult issues. We can look forward with optimism to future rounds of teacher unity talks. ☆

References

- 1 Recommendations of First Cosatu Education Conference, 23 -25 October 1987. p.3.
- 2 See resolutions passed by UDF National Working Committee, March 1987; *NECC Consultative Conference on the Education Laws Amendment Bill*, September 1987.
- 3 See documents section of *Perspectives in Education*, 10:2, 1988.
- 4 Interview with Soweto principal who was part of the Atasa delegation at the 1985 SPCC conference, 3-2-89.
- 5 Eastern Cape Regional Report to the Neusa National Conference, Pietermaritzburg, 1987.
- 6 *Atasa Newsletter*, 1:4. October 1986.
- 7 Referred to by the Edasa delegate to the Second National Consultative Conference on the Crisis in Education, Durban, April 1986.
- 8 *Atasa Newsletter*, 1:4. October 1986.
- 9 According to figures released by the Detainees' Parents' Support Committee at the time. See also Hartshorne, K. "Conflicting perceptions of the education of black South Africans, with particular reference to 'alternative education'." *Africa Insight*. 18:1, 1988. p.15.
- 10 Letter sent by Neusa National Executive to Atasa, October 1987. (As reported by Neusa Vice-President to the National Consultative Conference of the Progressive Teachers' Unions, Johannesburg, October 1987).
- 11 *The Progressive Teacher*, January 1988.
- 12 *South African Labour Bulletin*, 13.7, 1988. p.3.
- 13 Pat Samuels, President of Tasa, in a report to the organization in January 1989.
- 14 *Atasa Newsletter*. 1:4. October 1986.