

CCAWUSA Congress

320 delegates from 8 branches met over the weekend of the 12 to 14 June at Crown Mines (NASREC) and at Wits University for this years National Congress. It was to be the union's last National Congress before the proposed merger two weeks later with other unions in the retail and catering sector. (Report on the merger follows)

Congress this year was marked by heightened tension with minority branches of the union and a hard-line approach adopted by branches with the majority of delegates. A number of far reaching resolutions were passed on questions relating to (1) shop-floor democracy, (2) working class unity, (3) worker alliances in the struggle, and (4) the struggle for socialism. Tensions around the adoption of these resolutions resulted in four minority branches, who objected to the nature of proceedings, abstaining from voting. Two other branches were not given voting rights as they did not comply with constitutional provisions. The theme adopted indicated the general trend at Congress, "unite, organise, mobilize and educate for a socialist future".

Further resolutions were also passed on state harrasement of the worker movement, on physical violence, on the Freedom Charter, and on financial self sufficiency. Two proposed resolutions had to be withdrawn because of objections raised by some branches about insufficient time to discuss these.

After the President's opening speech the General Secretary delivered a report summing up developments in the union movement in general and CCAWUSA in particular over the past ten months. The General-Secretary noted that "the government is using the state of emergency to undermine and attack the serious challenges to its power from union, community, the youth sector, women and political movements,...thousands of activists have been detained - many of them members or affiliates of COSATU, hundreds of people killed in the townships, right-wing vigilante forces established to attack workers". The events at COSATU house "are part of an overall strategy to disrupt and undermine the labour movement".

In the wake of these attacks he called on CCAWUSA to "consolidate all its positions, to build and strengthen all its structures,

starting from shop-floor or grass-roots level, to organise and build strong shop-stewards councils, to educate and inform members and shop-stewards, to carefully plan and strengthen campaigns, especially the Living Wage Campaign".

Following his report branches then reported progress in the planning of the Living Wage Campaign. The relative peace which accompanied proceedings until then was suddenly shattered when the issue of election of a National Education Co-ordinator arose. The National Executive Committee (NEC), which normally appoints someone to this position, had been unable to reach consensus on the two nominees due to regional differences around the issue. At Congress clear divisions between the Orange-Vaal, Natal, Pretoria and E. Province branches and the Cape Town and Johannesburg branches emerged. Eventually an official from Cape Town was elected. Tensions heightened when proposals for the election of an assistant to the Educator were made. Heated discussion ensued resulting ultimately in a walk-out by the four minority branches. After a while they returned and it was eventually decided to drop the idea of voting for this position.

RESOLUTIONS

The discussion on resolutions followed. Congress debated for some time about procedure on resolutions, particularly as objections about domination by Cape Town and Johannesburg branches were repeatedly raised. The Johannesburg Branch had tabled a comprehensive range of resolutions addressing both political and shop-floor issues. Cape Town tabled one resolution on shop-floor matters. Pretoria which tried to table resolutions at Congress was turned down on the basis that they failed to meet the deadline for tabling of resolutions. A number of points were made by the minority branches before their decision to abstain from participation, notably:

- * Domination by two branches
- * The Johannesburg Branch resolutions had not been ratified at their branch congress. Johannesburg responded by saying that a great deal of time and resources were spent on presenting the resolutions at every shop-steward seminar in the region and that the resolutions had been ratified at their branch congress
- * Not enough time was given to discuss the resolutions at branch level as these were distributed very shortly before the congress.

Johannesburg remained firm however, deciding only to drop two

resolutions because of the time factor. In a subsequent interview Johannesburg explained their approach as follows. The Witwatersrand is the centre of activity in the retail sector, that therefore it is not surprising that the majority of delegates should come from this region. Given the amount of workers they represent, this is democratically correct. The Johannesburg branch also pointed out that the issue of domination from one branch inside of CCAWUSA has historically been solved by allowing equal representation for all branches at the NEC, a very important decision making body within the union. They also argued that no other branches had tabled their own resolutions so no debate ensued on issues delegates may have felt unhappy about. They also acknowledged that Congress had been moved forward at short notice so as not to clash with Cosatu's July Congress and that this meant lateness in tabling resolutions and credentials on the part of most branches. The result was that all Johannesburg branch resolutions were adopted, that there was very little compromise as there was nothing presented in the alternative, and four branches abstained from voting.

MERGERS

Delegates subsequently discussed the proposed merger with HARWU and RAWU on the weekend of the 27 and 28 June. According to the Johannesburg branch all the delegates participated in this discussion. A decision was eventually taken that CCAWUSA go to the merger as one union with one mandate, meaning that the union constitution, logo, name, and all office bearers remain intact. Individual branches were bound by the national mandate, according to the Johannesburg branch. There were reportedly no abstentions or objections as this decision was made.

Congress ended with a number of branches obviously unhappy with proceedings and the decisions taken. These tensions were to be carried forward to the merger talks opening up greater division.

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED AT CONGRESS

On the Freedom Charter and Azanian Manifesto

Noting that:

The Freedom Charter is an historic document

Some members of CCAWUSA support this document and others the Azanian Manifesto.

A large number of workers have not had the opportunity to

thoroughly discuss these documents.

Believing that:

The demands of the Freedom Charter though important are limited
Endorsing either of these two documents lays the union open to
serious divisions

Therefore resolves:

To discuss at all levels of the union and our Federation the im-
portance of a Socialist programme of action which will bind
together all workers regardless of political affiliation.

On Socialism

Noting that:

We are committed to building socialism

We are committed to the leadership of the working class in the
liberation struggle

We believe in non-sectarianism

Believing that:

True socialism is fully democratic. To make correct socialist
policies, the working class must have open and free debate on all
issues, ideas and policies.

We must build a tradition of democracy and free debate for the fu-
ture.

Sectarianism can suppress free debate and can be a stumbling block
in our efforts to build democratic socialism.

The organised working class can only take the lead in the struggle
if it has a clear programme and aims, which would clarify what is
wanted by the working class and what is meant by their demands.

The organised working class can only make correct alliances if it
has a clear political programme and aims.

Therefore resolves that:

CCAWUSA discuss the aims and programme of the working class at all
levels starting from the shop-floor upwards.

We demand the unbanning of all banned organisations, the release
from jail of all comrades including Nelson Mandela, Zeth
Mothopeng, and Moses Mayekiso, and the uplifting of all restric-
tions on our comrades.

On State Harassment

Noting that:

The state has embarked on a vicious and offensive attack against

the black working class in general and COSATU in particular
This offensive has included slander, harassment and detention of
union officials as well as physical damage to property.

Believing that:

At this critical juncture the working class needs to embark on a
united front.

Hereby resolves that:

It is essential that all unions that are not reactionary or
sweetheart unions join forces and plan campaigns together regard-
less of affiliation to Union Federation.

This unity must be extended to include all organisations that are
anti-capitalist and who take the independence of the working class
seriously.

On Physical Violence

Physical violence between individuals and organisations in the
broad liberation movement is harmful and impedes the struggle of
the working class.

This violence gives the state and its agents the opportunity to
step in.

Believing that:

The liberation movement is made up of many organisations.

Differences and the allowing of debate must be handled correctly
and can only strengthen our organisations.

Democracy means allowing different viewpoints and organisations,
however small, to exist and to propagate their perspectives on the
road forward.

Therefore resolves that:

To condemn any violence between organisations involved in the
liberation struggle.

To encourage democracy both on the shop-floor and in the com-
munity.