



A HISTORIC workers summit against the repressive Labour Relations Act was attended by more than 700 delegates from COSATU, NACTU and independent unions on 4 and 5 March at Witwatersrand University.

Delegates - who were all workers - represented 43 unions and had the backing of more than a million workers. Thirty delegates from NUM attended.

COSATU President Comrade Elijah Barayi said the summit was an important breakthrough for the workers of South Africa.

"It brings together unions from NACTU, independent unions and COSATU around the table for the first time."

He appealed to other trade unions "to also join forces with our struggle against the LRA and the repression of the apartheid state".

Worker delegates decided to formulate their own Labour Relations Act and threatened to call a national dispute with all bosses.

Summit delegates said the aim of the Labour Relations Act was to take away the rights of workers, and undermine gains of workers in the past few years. It was intended to divide workers at the shop floor level and also to destroy the labour movement in general.

It did not serve the interests of the working class but those of the capitalists and the racist regime.

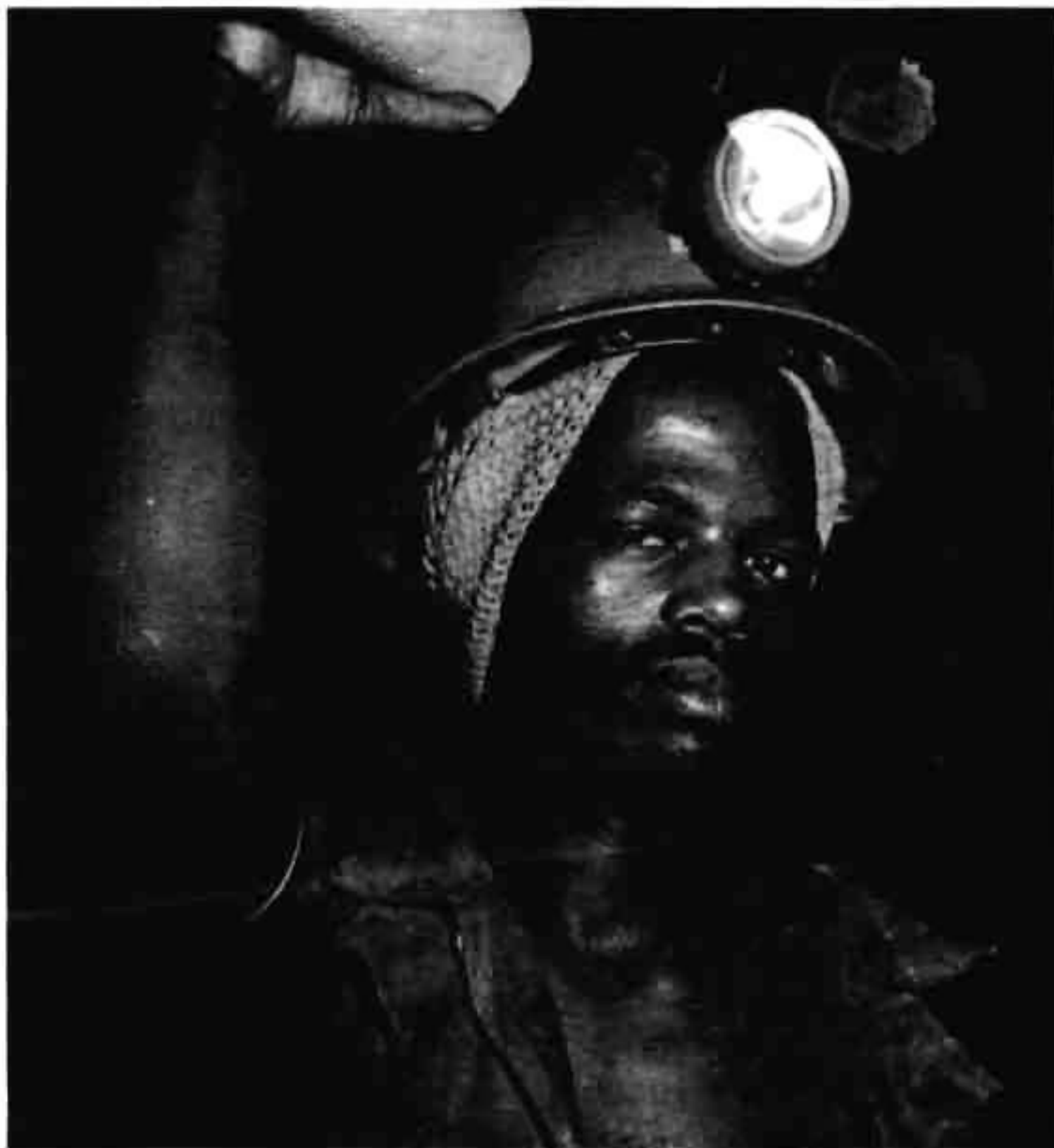
"Despite our protest action on 6, 7 and 8 June 1988, employers trapped us shrewdly into fruitless negotiations and supported the bill".

Unity and action

Recommendations passed against the Act said the basis for ultimate unity of the working class could be achieved through unity in action.

The summit recommendation called on workers to:

- Formulate their own "Labour Relations Act" that will cover farmworkers, domestic workers, forestry workers and public sector workers as a long term strategy
- Find ways of not using the Industrial Courts
- Revise recognition agreements to bypass offending clause of the Act
- Submit our demands around the LRA to employer organisations and individual employers: This would include the right to strike and the right to picket; no dis-



Summit unites against labour act

missals without proper hearings; retrenchments be negotiated with unions and based on Last In, First Out system; recognition of majority unions, the right to sympathy strikes and all previous demands.

- Isolate employers who use the provisions of the LRA against unions
- Give employers 30 days to respond to our demands and to declare a national dispute with employers if they refuse to make positive progress towards meeting our demands
- Link the LRA campaign to the Living Wage campaign and the campaign for a living UIF benefit for all workers
- Use May Day rallies to mobilise the working class around the LRA nationally and internationally
- Conduct national ballots around all these demands in all industries

The summit further recommended future summits that would involve all forces fighting for the liberation of South Africa.

Reject LRA

Delegates vowed to intensify rejection of the LRA through protest actions and continue discussions on the LRA amongst COSATU and NACTU and independent unions.

The unions attending the summit included 15 COSATU unions, 9 NACTU affiliates as well as representatives from 6 others in their capacity as workers and 18 independent unions.

Comrade Elijah Barayi said the summit was a historic day for the working class of our country.

"Never before have there been so many different unions from so many different walks of life and coming from so many different traditions and practises meeting to chart the way forward for the workers in this country."

Delegates to the historic summit against the labour act represented 43 unions and had the backing of more than a million workers

There were many things which had kept us apart, he said, "but our very coming together is a powerful statement that our differences are nothing compared to our commitment to the principle of working class unity."

Today the demand from workers for joint responses and joint action is getting stronger all the time.

Joint action

"Issues facing all sectors demonstrate clearly the need for workers to act jointly to defend and advance our interests: the public sector wage freeze, the retrenchments at Eskom, the privatisation of Sats; the anti-living wage policies of SEIFSA, SAB etc. and the vicious LRA."

Barayi said the labour movement was a giant. It had won many important shopfloor gains and demanded an end to repression and apartheid.

But there was still a long way to go. Some of the challenges the labour movement had to face were:

- We need to fight against divisions in the ranks of workers
- There are vast areas which are not well organised - such as farmworkers, domestic workers and public sector workers

- Millions of workers in bantustans are badly exploited and have no protection because trade unions are banned
- The LRA is being used by employers to threaten unions with civil claims, lock-out workers and undermine solidarity action
- There is a vicious attack on the living standards of workers who face wage freezes and high prices caused by inflation and apartheid
- There is massive unemployment and a great lack of social security
- The State of Emergency and general restrictions are restricting the trade unions

Comrade Barayi said to address these problems the labour movement needed strategies which built on our strengths and defended our gains.

COSATU and NACTU united around the June 6, 7 and 8 protest action last year and in negotiations with the employer association, Saccola.

NACTU motivated the idea of a workers summit against the LRA. This was fully accepted by COSATU because "only a united working class could defend our interests and advance our struggle to liberation".

COSATU and NACTU agreed that a workers summit would be held on the 4 and 5 March and that each federation would have 250 worker delegates.

However, NACTU then decided that it wanted the summit to be postponed "indefinitely" because they required more time to formulate their position on unity.

COSATU decided to go ahead with the summit because it believed that the apartheid state and its allies in big business would not wait around for us to prepare our blueprints (plans) before attacking us.

Worker control

COSATU called on all workers and democrats in affiliates of all federations to "obey the instincts of our class and preserve and consolidate our unity in spite of the obstacles."

Eleven NACTU affiliates then announced that they would attend the summit, despite NACTU's decision.

Explaining their decision, the 11 NACTU unions said: "The growing repressiveness of the State and the arrogant attitude of capital can only be effectively challenged by the black working class if it is united".