

Although the issue of deregistration has been raised, it is an unlikely option in the near future as unions are increasingly moving towards industrial councils. If unions deregister they stand to lose the opportunity of using industrial councils as a bargaining forum, as well as losing stop order facilities. However, the gains and losses of this option are being debated in the labour movement.

One tactic which already has popular appeal in most unions is the idea of scrapping or amending old recognition agreements and re-negotiating new ones. Structures like the South African Breweries shop-stewards council, incorporating several unions organising at different companies in the SAB conglomerate, allow for unified demands being made in all SAB companies - *Shareen Singh*.

Parley with the Party

The first formal meeting between the African National Congress, Soviet academics and Afrikaner politicians, scheduled to be held in West Germany at the end of October, could provide some interesting ideological debates.

Two members of the Soviet delegation have adopted positions which differ sharply from those expressed by the South African Communist Party, 'historic ally' of the ANC.

Earlier this year, soon after the Soviet academics' views were published in South African publications, the SACP distributed a booklet outlining its own position on several key debates. The booklet contains rebuttals of positions put forward by the Soviet academics, Professors Gleb Starushenko and Viktor Goncharov, both of the Africa Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The first issue which is contested is the Soviet academics' interpretation of the socialist nature of the South African struggle.

Goncharov's position was published in an interview in *WIP 48*. He argued that there was an attempt by some ANC members 'to put before the national liberation movement now the tasks of socialist revolution', and that this could lead to the liberation movement losing allies in the population.

He suggested that it could take 100 years to achieve socialism in South Africa - implying that this might be a desirable timescale.

The position put forward in the SACP booklet is that socialism has never been put forward as the immediate objective of the national democratic revolution. However, it concedes that far-reaching economic clauses of the Freedom Charter, which call for the nationalisation of the mines, monopoly industry and banks, and re-distribution of the land to those who work it, could be confused with socialist measures.



Soviet President Gorbachov

If one views the South African revolution as bourgeois-democratic, the Party argues, then one could confuse these economic measures with socialist transformation.

While conceding that these measures lay the basis for an advance to socialism, the SACP argues that they are intrinsic to the national democratic revolution.

According to this argument, the economic measures outlined in the Charter are essential because of the massive disparity between white and

black living standards. So although the democratic revolution should try to attract the widest possible unity, the economic content cannot be jettisoned - even if this means losing some potential allies.

After a revolution in South Africa, the Party argues, the new democratic state will be required to implement economic measures which will go far beyond bourgeois democracy. These will create a favourable framework for socialist transformation, but will not in themselves create, or necessarily even lead to, socialism: the achievement of socialism depends primarily on the place the working class has won for itself as a leader of society.

The second issue on which there are differences is the question of group rights, which was recently addressed by Starushenko. He argued that a parliament which accommodated 'group rights' should be considered for the post-apartheid period, and that this parliament should consist of two chambers: one chosen on the basis of proportional representation, the other 'possessing the right of minority veto'.

Starushenko also urged the ANC to work out 'comprehensive guarantees for the white population', and undertake that there would be no broad nationalisation of capitalist property.

The SACP stresses Starushenko's pro-liberation intentions are not in dispute. However, it argues that while this approach was suitable in the Soviet Union, it is not valid for a new South Africa.

In the Soviet Union, a recognition of multi-nationalism was the foundation of national liberation and self-determination - as realised in the many republics which make up the Soviet Union. But because of South Africa's single economy, arguments for maintaining group rights are inevitably linked to maintaining white control over the means of production.

The Party also stresses its commitment to one united, democratic South Africa, while pointing out that this does not contradict the need to ensure that the cultural heritage of different groups flourishes in a unitary South Africa.

With the new degree of international flexibility presently

flowing out of the Soviet Union, it will be interesting to see how debate develops around these issues - not only at the West German meeting, but also in subsequent contacts between the Soviet Union and members of the Congress alliance.

WIP correspondent.

Sewage in Soweto's streets

Health hazards are developing in Soweto, South Africa's largest black township, while a dispute rages between the Soweto Council and 4 000 municipal workers.

The strike has been on for more than three months, a period which has seen the development of numerous decomposing garbage dumps in the crowded township. In some areas, streams of sewage flow through the streets.

A wage dispute sparked off the strike, which resulted in dismissal of 4 000 council employees. Currently the main issue in the dispute involves reinstatement of the strikers - with the council prepared to re-employ only 70 percent of them, with slight salary adjustments.

The wage dispute dates back to November 1987, when the Soweto Council was upgraded in terms of the Act on the Remuneration of Town Clerks. In terms of this Act, Soweto was classified a Grade 12 municipality. This prescribed wage increases for council employees.

The council agreed to the increases in principle, but said they would only be implemented when there was money available. Almost a year later, council workers - organised by the South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) - are still waiting for the salary adjustments.

The council claims it cannot afford the increases because of the two-and-a-half year rent boycott, which has left it with a R150-million debt. But strikers say this is 'just an attempt to use us to break the boycott'.

According to one worker, 'The

council wants us to do its dirty work by demanding that we help municipal police evict rent defaulters and seal their windows and doors'.

Current minimum wages at the council range from about R370 a month for labourers to R609 for clerks.

The council embarked on a privatisation programme in January this year, and privatised certain departments during the strike. This is the reason it has given for offering to reinstate only 70 percent of the workforce - the other 30 percent, it says, have become obsolete in the privatisation process.

Despite the privatisation, garbage continues to pile up in the streets of Soweto.

Missing among the strikers this year are municipal police, who embarked on a huge strike over wages during 1986. Soon after this, the state gave municipal and railway police equal status to members of the SAP - and curtailed their membership of unions and involvement in industrial action.

Local municipal police still support the strikers, according to Samwu, and told a recent union meeting they would not evict rent defaulters in the township.

Strikers have been trying to hold a union meeting in the township since mid-September but police interference makes this almost impossible. One meeting was banned and at least three disrupted by police.

Police also disrupted a march by about 2 000 strikers, and sjambokked and teargassed workers after giving them 20 minutes to disperse. The union claims 12 members of its negotiating team have been detained under emergency regulations.

The union is finding it increasingly difficult to operate. So far the strikers have received some financial support from the National Association of Local Government Officers (Nalگو) in Britain, which also sent a telex to Soweto Town Clerk Nico Malan and Constitutional Planning Minister Chris Heunis urging them to resolve the dispute.

Cosatu's Wits region held a rally on September 18 in support of the strikers.

The question of staff association membership has also arisen during

the strike. When the Soweto Council took over township affairs from the West Rand Administration Board in 1984, workers were compelled to join the staff association and pay R5 a month in membership fees. Since then, says Samwu, workers have seen no financial statements or any increase in benefits.

Samwu says that although workers clearly want the staff association dissolved, the council insists it is a democratic body and that a general meeting must be called to determine whether this is the case. Workers have agreed to this procedure.

Shareen Singh.

Saved by the Soviets

After stringing out the Namibian peace process for more than a decade, Pretoria has adopted the same tactics to avoid suspension from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

At the same time some nifty footwork from Foreign Minister Pik Botha has won the South African government a year's reprieve from signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which would force it to open its nuclear facilities to international inspection.

In September, Soviet delegates to the annual conference of the IAEA - a world body created to limit the spread of nuclear arms - combined with their US and British counterparts to head off a move to suspend South African membership.

This was the second year running that the Soviets refused to back the suspension of South Africa from one of the few international forums where it is still represented. The move reflects the importance placed by the Soviets on ending the arms race - overriding almost every other foreign policy objective - since Mikhail Gorbachev's appointment as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

In a flurry of negotiations before the September conference, Botha used this Soviet concern to talk his way out of both signing the NPT