

**ADDRESS BY CDE JAY NAIDOO, GENERAL SECRETARY OF COSATU TO
THE 8TH NATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST
PARTY**

Cde Chairperson Dan Tloome
Cde General Secretary Joe Slovo
Cde Deputy President of the ANC Walter Sisulu
Delegates and fraternal observers from South Africa and internationally

Cosatu salutes the SACP on the occasion of your 8th National Congress. It is a tribute to thousands of working class patriots that the SACP is able to meet in this historic phase of struggle within the country which pulsates with the hope of the birth of a new nation.

Many challenges lie ahead, some of them seemingly insurmountable but many offering the escape from this racist nightmare of this apartheid hellhole.

It is on occasions such as this that we must remember the tireless determination of millions of ordinary people who have sacrificed everything, even the precious drops of life, to fight for a just, democratic South Africa freed from economic domination and institutionalised racism.

But let us look to the future. Does the future promise to heal the horrific divisions of the past, to remove the ruthless scourge of poverty that has been so much part of our lives?

Comrades, we need no fortunetellers, no crystal balls. Our destiny is in our hands and our future will be shaped in the cauldron of mass struggles.

Negotiations is a course we have deliberately chosen because the life of every human being is precious to us. In spite of its brutal record of human atrocities we still are prepared to negotiate with the National Party.

But let the National Party understand: the workers of South Africa are saying across this country, in every town, dorp, village, shop, factory and mine..

"OUR FREEDOM IN 18 MONTHS".

Let the National Party step down, suspend this racist constitution, accept an interim government and prepare for a democratic, nonracial election of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of one person one vote.

Nothing less will satisfy our people. The constitution of a future South Africa is the product of the struggles of ordinary women and men, students and unemployed, not the responsibility of experts who may sit in ivory towers.

Nevertheless, the major task of the organised working class is to lead the struggle for economic transformation.

The spectre of apartheid capitalism haunts generations of our working people. The stark ghettos, row upon row of matchbox houses, the helplessness of the ravages wrought by mass unemployment, the kwashiorkov and malnutrition that eats away the fabric of youth, the crime and violence are witness to our cause.

We are in transition. The mighty heaves of our peoples resistance has compelled the ruling class to accept that there is no solution without us.

It would be naive of us if we went back to our people and said we have won because we have won the vote. The poor, the vast majority of our people want more than the vote.

The workers, the peasants, the students, unemployed, women, youth, children want:

- decent housing
- a job at a living wage
- proper education and training
- proper health care
- rights for the disabled and the handicapped
- democratic decisionmaking within the economy
- rights for the unemployed, children, women

Our task, particularly the one facing this congress, is to fashion a programme that can effectively meet the needs of the working class of South Africa.

Negotiations are a site of struggle. The democratic trade unions have demonstrated our capacity to wage struggle through negotiations in a way which involves millions of people. If we make mistakes, and these have happened often, it is not the mistake of individual leaders but of us all.

The traditions of democracy, of mandatory reports backs are our lifeblood. It has allowed us to survive the most brutal repression. The thousands of shopstewards across industry are the fingers of the organisation on the pulse of our members.

Democracy on these terms is not a slogan. These advanced workers leaders are not an elite, leading masses by the nose. They are part and parcel of the people, armed with a programme and a vision of a new democratic South Africa.

In this context, the working class faces many challenges. The government with its allies are committed to unilaterally restructuring the economy to preserve the present

monopolistic control. They also seek to pre-empt a democratic government meeting the needs of our people by selling off the "crown jewels".

The privatization of major parastatals such as Eskom and Iscor are glaring examples. The introduction of VAT which shifts decisively the tax burden from the corporate sector to individual taxpayers and as De Klerk said "is part of the government overall programme of economic restructuring" leading to greater poverty amongst the people. Restructuring that is causing tens of thousands of workers to lose their jobs, resulting in massive price increases as inflation eats into our real wages and is deepening the structural unemployment in South Africa.

This cannot be allowed. It is critical that we counter the major onslaught on ordinary people. This requires the unity of the left to defend our gains and to advance towards fundamental transformation.

Cosatu believes that rapid intervention is required in the economy. This necessitates the creation of an economic negotiations forum which is separate but equal in status to the political negotiations process.

We completely reject the notion of government that economic issues will be treated as a subcommittee of Codesa.

The forum must focus on the concrete problems facing our people.

* How can the 60 000 job loss threatened in the textile industry by government arbitrarily lifting tariffs be saved?

* How to develop an economic strategy geared towards creating jobs, countering the mass poverty, that protects the environment and allows us to compete internationally in the world market?

These are not theoretical challenges. They require a coherent, negotiated programme that involved the major employer organisations, trade unions, political organisations and government.

Cosatu is determined to oppose all unilateral restructuring. We are prepared to negotiate in good faith but let the government understand that we are not their lapdogs. We are sick and tired of being fed on a diet of offal and apartheid.

In conclusion, Cosatu salutes the tireless contribution of so many communists to the building of a democratic trade union movement and our overall resistance to apartheid.

Many tasks face the tripartite alliance. It is in so many ways the engine of our struggle for a free and democratic South Africa. Although we are independent organisations deriving our mandates from our own constituencies, there are major areas we need to strengthen co-ordination and co-operation. We are all committed to deepening the role

of mass organisations in civil society in this transition period and in the post apartheid society.

The dramatic action on the 4th and 5th of November where over 3½ million workers went on strike was an endorsement of our programme and a vote of no-confidence in the National Party.

We must bring that strength into our negotiations strategy. There may be differences in our approach and emphasis within the alliance. Let us be frank and open in overcoming these weaknesses.

In spite of the launch of a Patriotic Front we have seen continuing infighting in the peoples camp. This is a weakness.. We need to organise our unity around concrete struggles, around a programme of action for democracy. The left is under attack and we need to unite in defence of struggle for fundamental transformation.

The struggle for democratic socialism requires decisive leadership, a coherent programme around concrete issues facing our people and the unity of our people.

This SACP Congress is called up to define a clear role for itself in this regard. We are convinced that this Congress will stand up to this challenge.

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