

South African

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LABOUR BULLETIN

April 1991 Volume 15 Number 7

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Casual labour
Cronin on two hats
Slovo and Jordan: Dialego responds



Towards a new internationalism?

South African Labour Bulletin

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South African
**LABOUR
 BULLETIN**

Volume 15 Number 7 April 1991

Table of Contents

Editorial	Editorial notes	1
Letters	Letters to the Bulletin	3
RedEye	Broadly speaking <i>Red Eye</i>	4
Labour Action	★ Public service ★ Security workers ★ Metropolitan Life strike ★ Worker drowned ★ Ciskei strike ★ <i>Lael Bethlehem and Labour Bulletin correspondent</i>	6
Special focus	Towards a new worker internationalism? Introduction <i>Celia Mather</i>	12
	Interview with COSATU <i>Celia Mather and Karl von Holdt</i>	16
	Interview with NACTU <i>Celia Mather and Karl von Holdt</i>	22
	The ICFTU in South Africa <i>Devan Pillay</i>	27
	What's new with WFTU? <i>Celia Mather</i>	31
	Towards worker-controlled internationalism! <i>Labour Bulletin correspondent</i>	32
	SACTWU/ACTWU: the practise of solidarity <i>John Hudson</i>	40

Shopfloor	Casualisation and sub-contracting <i>Gilton Klerck, Imraan Volodia and TURP</i>	44
Debates	Preparing ourselves for permanent opposition? <i>Jeremy Cronin</i>	51
	The Slovo critique: socialism utopian and scientific <i>John Hoffman (Dialego)</i>	57
	Has socialism failed? the debate continues..... <i>Mike Neocosmos</i>	
	Responses to Neocosmos <i>WOSA, Pallo Jordan and Karl von Holdt</i>	71
Review	Rethinking socialism <i>Eddie Webster</i>	79
Legal Notes	The Labour Relations Amendment Act 1991 <i>Centre for Applied Legal Studies</i>	84
Economic Notes	★ New economic plan ★ Company profile: IDC ★ Profits, dividends and employment ★ Inflation ★ <i>Labour Research Service</i>	87
Profile	Elizabeth Thabethe - CWIU shopsteward <i>Interview by Morice Smithers</i>	91

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For in-depth analysis of current developments in the South African labour movement, you need the *South African Labour Bulletin*. Started in 1974 with the re-emergence of independent black trade unions, the *Bulletin* attempts to reflect the constantly changing face of industrial relations in South Africa. Workplace issues, the political interface with unions, and international unionism - it's all in the *Bulletin*. Subscribe now!

South African Labour Bulletin Publication Guidelines

The *South African Labour Bulletin* is a journal which supports the democratic labour movement in South Africa. It is a forum for analysing, debating and recording the aims and activities of this movement. To this end, it requires contributors to the Bulletin to conform to the following publication guidelines:

1 Constructive criticism of unions or federations is welcome. However, articles with unwarranted attacks or of a sectarian nature which have a divisive effect on the labour movement will not be published.

2 Contributions to the *Bulletin* must not exceed the following lengths:

- ◇ *analytical articles and debates* 10 000 words
- ◇ *reviews, documents, reports* 5 000 words
- ◇ *briefs* 500 words
- ◇ *letters* 500 words

3 *Articles* should be submitted in a final and correct form and in duplicate. Some articles may be refereed where necessary; all articles may be edited by the *Bulletin*. In the event of the editors deciding that other than minor editing changes are required, the article

will be referred back to the author.

4 *Briefs* cover topical events and developments of concern to the democratic labour movement. They would usually appear under *Labour Action* or *Broadly Speaking*

5 *Reviews, reports and documents* are intended:

- ◇ to make important statements and information from the labour movement more widely available;
- ◇ for reviewing new literature or other material of relevance to labour;
- ◇ to make more in-depth reports and research available to readers.

6 Contributions should be written in clear, understandable language.

7 Contributions to the *Bulletin* must be typed and, where applicable, include proper footnoting and references.

8 Except in the case of public documents, all material submitted will be treated in confidence.

9 The editors reserve the right to recommend to the author of any material that it be placed under another category to that under which it was submitted.

For more details, please contact the editor.

In this age of computers, we request that, where possible, a copy on floppy or stiffy disk accompanies all contributions. We will make every effort to return such disks to their owners.

Advertise in the SA Labour Bulletin!

The South African Labour Bulletin is widely read, both in South Africa and in other countries. Advertisers will be reaching large numbers of workers, trade unionists, academics, students & political figures, as well as business people, industrial relations personnel, and the general public. Only advertisements conforming to our set of basic principles will be accepted. Details of these principles, as well as advertising costs and copy sizes are available on request.

Remember that the South African Labour Bulletin is now in its 17th year of publication. It is a highly respected journal and is quoted extensively. It will pay you to advertise in the Bulletin.

Editorial Notes

Towards a new internationalism?

The collapse of communism, and the defeat of socialist projects such as that of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, has plunged the Left into crisis. Many are giving way to a 'new realism', which regards radical attempts to change the world as naive. 'New realism' regards the current world order as pretty much unchallengeable; all that remains is to protect ones immediate self-interest.

But new opportunities do exist for those who wish to challenge oppression and exploitation. On the trade union front, there is potential for militant, democratic trade union movements to emerge as a powerful force on the international stage with the capacity to reinvigorate and give new meaning to international solidarity.

But in order to challenge and start trying to reshape traditional union internationals, the militant democratic organisations will have to start sharing experiences and strategising collectively. This could be one step forward in a struggle - together with other progressive organisations - for a new world order dominated, not by the interests of imperialism, the multinationals and finance capital, but by the interests of the ordinary citizens of our planet.

In this issue we publish a number of articles and interviews on international unionism, guest-edited by Celia Mather of *International Labour Reports*. We hope they contribute to debating the urgent issues of forging a new internationalism.

We also publish an announcement of an international conference on the future of socialism, to be convened by *Labour*



Editor Karl von Holdt

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

Bulletin in February next year. One of our main aims is to rethink and reinvigorate the socialist project, thus challenging the 'new realism'.

Apology

The cover of our last issue advertised a story on CAWU, which readers would have struggled vainly to find inside. We must apologise to CAWU and to our readers for this error. The story disappeared in the electronic guts of our computers, and in the heat of production no-one noticed the name still on the cover.

New members of editorial board

We are happy to welcome three new members to our editorial board in Johannesburg. Moss Ngoasheng works for the ANC Department of Economic Policy and is active in the COSATU-associated Economic Trends group of economists; Avril Joffie is also active in ET, and works in the Wits University Sociology Department; and Monty Narsoo, who has worked as a researcher for a number of years, is now general secretary of the Association of Democratic Journalists. ☆



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Has socialism a future?

Announcing!! the *Labour Bulletin* international 'Conference on Labour, Democracy and Socialism' on 6-9 February 1992

The collapse of communism, the difficulties of social-democracy and the crisis of the left make it an urgent necessity to analyse and debate the future of socialism. The conference will focus on the experiences of the relatively industrialised developing countries - such as Brazil, South Africa, South Korea - which are undergoing a transition from dictatorship to democracy.

Watch the *Labour Bulletin* for more details!

Letters to the Bulletin

Robyn Rafel

Dear Sir

I share your mourning in the recent death of Robyn Rafel whom I admired greatly as a labour writer and as a member of *Finance Week's* staff.

I must, however, take issue with you over your remark in her obituary that *Finance Week* was "not prepared to cover labour in any depth". For the record, and in tribute to Robyn's memory, I would point out that during her stay with us we used every article which she wrote for us. Shortly before her death, we were even discussing the possibility of her returning to us. As a matter of policy, though necessarily dependent on the skills of the journalists available to us, we cover labour in the greatest possible depth.

Allan Greenblo
Editor *Finance Week*

Autoflug campaign

Dear Editor

1. On behalf of Autoflug SA workers, I would like to congratulate you for publishing our article on Autoflug SA and its tactics of union bashing. [*Labour Bulletin* Vol 15 No 6]

2. I hope and believe the article would not only entice Autoflug SA workers, but all workers employed in various sectors of the industry by German multinationals in SA.

3. International Metal Federation (IMF) office in SA has already initiated the national German shopstewards council by bringing both COSATU & NACTU metal unions together (NUMSA and MEWUSA) for workers from these affiliates to discuss, formulate strategies and to implement the IG Metall Code of Conduct Agreement

signed between the IMF and SA and German unions in 1988.

4. Our demands are as follows:

- Re-instatement of Stephen Nhlapo, dismissed shopsteward chairperson
- Back-payment for 97 workers for time in jail and court
- Recognition of NUMSA as representative union
- Access for union officials to company premises
- The right for NUMSA to negotiate wages on behalf of its members
- The company to agree to negotiate IG Metall Code of Conduct Agreement
- The company must stop using the services of the racist labour consultant, Mr S K Bunce

5. Hereunder is our proposed campaign against Autoflug SA to be discussed within NUMSA structures, locally, regionally and nationally:

- a. Workers will take action at company level with picketing, go-slows, boycotting the canteen, and demonstrating at the German Embassy
- b. Workers in companies supplying or buying from Autoflug will be encouraged to refuse to handle Autoflug products, to ask their managements to pressurise Autoflug, and to demonstrate; the German shopstewards council is to issue press release highlighting difficulties in SA German companies, especially Autoflug.
- c. Community organisations in the area, the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance, and some NACTU unions, will be asked to send letters of protest to the company.
- d. German workers will be encouraged to take action on our behalf; the German Anti-Apartheid movement will also be contacted.

Abissai Nkoe
Organiser, NUMSA W Rand local

Red Eye

Progress Books progress at Phambili

The newspapers often carry stories about trade delegations from Eastern Europe making contact with SA businessmen. There are, it seems, prospects for great trade and business links between newly capitalist Eastern Europe and a newly-democratic South Africa...

The left need not feel left out of these developments. RED EYE hears that Jo'burg's Phambili Books has trouble selling expensive 'new left' literature, but does a roaring trade in a range of Marxist-Leninist texts from Moscow's Progress Publishers, which are very popular among the workers and the youth. While this may add a rouble or two to Moscow's balance of payments, it is hardly good news for our struggle.

A foreign visitor commented that Phambili must be the last bookshop in the world still selling Progress Publishers pre-glasnost stock. But a local 'intellectual' was heard to say that at least it's better for workers to read Soviet-style 'Marxism-Leninism' than bourgeois literature! It seems the burden of our past still weighs heavily on our minds. ❖

Marxists lying down at the Bank

Two of the world's most powerful and ruthless organisations are making regular trips to SA and are trying to find friends and influence people... No, it's not the CIA or the Pentagon, it's their Washington neighbours, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

They've brought strong artillery. IMF boss Michael Camdessus himself paid a visit recently and had a chat with an ANC delegation, but ended up allowing his institution to determine how the government's regressive Value Added Tax scheme will work.

And not only does the World Bank team include urban specialist Geoff Reckie (scion of a wealthy Cape Town liberal family who relocated to a stunning southern Californian home via Harvard) and former SACP fellow-traveller (and detainee) Geoff Lamb - but the Bank has also learned the language of liberation. The team promises support for co-operatives, attention to the "poorest of the poor" and even the "dismemberment of conglomerates". And there is a commitment that no loans will be granted until apartheid is gone.

Pity they didn't think of that from 1976 to 1982, when the IMF lent the apartheid regime \$1,5 billion to extend its lease on life in the face of pressure from township rebellion, multinational corporate anxiety, and the gold price collapse! But there's nothing like an imminent 'transfer of power' to make a banker think carefully.

As for the Bank team, Reckie had much to do with letting Zimbabwe's 'successful' apartheid cities remain unchanged, despite popular calls for their fundamental transformation to overcome the effects of colonialism and segregation.

Team-leader Geoff Lamb also has interesting credentials. In the late 1960s, he fled SA to conduct research in rural Kenya. Lamb also taught the most energetic South African Marxist intellectuals of the period - Dave Kaplan, Mike Morris, Rob Davies, Duncan Innes -

when Sussex was the place to get a truly radical education.

That was long ago, of course. Meantime, Lamb has travelled widely, accumulated some personal capital (his white Cadillac and Washington residence are impressive even by Bank standards), but published very little. One late 1980s paper by Lamb spells out how Bank policy-makers can make structural adjustment programmes permanent in the Third World through sophisticated local political institutions. He is said to be a close advisor to the outgoing president of the Bank, Barber Conable.

It is unlikely that Lamb has gone into the Bank to win it over to Marxism. His presence will make it an even more dangerous and ruthless enemy of the poor, oppressed and exploited.

Beware, O progressive movement, beware! Is this a case of the Bank lying down with the Lamb? Or is it the Bank in Lamb's clothing? Do not be fooled by honeyed words when the Bank comes knocking at the door: remember the numberless workers and peasants whose lives have been ruined by its policies. ❖

Slovo jokes

Cde Joe Slovo has a great fund of anti-Stalinist jokes. Have you heard the one about the good communist, the bad communist and Batman?

Well, the three gents were sitting down to a meal in a Ma-

puto restaurant. The plate arrived piled high with good things to eat, which does not happen often in Mozambique. As they lifted their knives and forks, a power failure plunged them into darkness - which does happen often in Mozambique. After a delay of a few minutes the lights were switched on again. To the amazement of our three comrades (actually only two of them could have been amazed) all three plates were empty! The question is - which of them ate the food?

Slovo's answer is, "It was the bad communist - the other two are fictional characters!" ❖

Hidden agenda?

Mind you, like any communist leader, Slovo too has jokes made against him. Being a great party man, he found himself one night in the kitchen at a Yeoville jol. A young joller came in and discovered the general secretary hunting in the fridge for some ice. Our young joller has a quick wit, and remarked, "Oh, Joe, you must be looking for the hidden agenda!" ❖

On social contracts

A worker, heard at a recent discussion about 'social contracts': "In negotiations the bosses always ask for trade-offs - but we always say, 'You've had everything for all these years, and we've got nothing to give as a trade-off'.

All we've got is our collective strength - and now with a social contract they want to take our collective strength too!" ❖

A generous nation indeed!

The Star recently reported US President Bush stating that American anger was aimed only at Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "We are a generous nation and we've got a lot to do now... to heal the wounds," Mr Bush said. "Our argument has never been with the people of Iraq." He said Americans felt no bitterness with "those hapless Iraqi soldiers... sent to a fate they didn't even know was in store for them."

This is a statement that must leave one speechless. By generous does Bush mean 'donating' billions of dollars worth of laser-guided bombs and cruise missiles to "hapless" Iraqi soldiers and citizens? One has no doubt the Americans feel no bitterness - they have no reason to. But what do the Iraqis feel? And the Palestinians? And the Nicaraguans? And all peace-loving people on our planet?

American presidents tend to be a nasty bunch: mouthing homilies about decency and democracy, but ready to deceive, kill, prop up barbarous dictators, go to war and overthrow governments when it suits them. After the swash-buckling Reagan, Bush looked like a president who would quickly be forgotten. But now he has earned his place in hell with the worst of them. ☆

Labour Action

Dramatic breakthrough in public service

Progressive unions have won a dramatic breakthrough in the public service. The government has conceded that public service workers should have the same trade union rights as all other workers. And for non-essential workers this includes the right to strike.

Three tough negotiating sessions have won more trade union rights for public service workers than ever before. But it will be at least a year before trade union rights are embodied in legislation. Meanwhile, progressive unions will be able to sign interim recognition agreements which provide for stop order facilities, shop steward rights and access rights.

The breakthrough comes just a year after the epic Groote Schuur Hospital strike led by the unaffiliated Health Workers' Union.

Other strikes in the state hospitals followed and must have persuaded government that full trade union and negotiating rights were the only answer. Trade unions have never had the right to bargain with the government as employer, only to be consulted. Representatives of the Commission for Administration privately acknowledge that the change in attitude had a lot to do with the retirement of former President Botha and the new wind of President de Klerk and his supporters.

The first public service recognition agreement was signed with the Cape Town-based Health Workers' Union in mid-1990. Now the Health Workers' Union and NEHAWU, the small COSATU



HWU workers on strike in 1990

Photo: HWU

affiliate, are representing the public service workforce together with nine staff associations, many of them racially based. Thus there is a different body for white, coloured, African and Indian civil servants - coyly named "association", "league", "institute" and, daringly "union". The employer is represented by the Commission for Administration.

There are over 600 000 workers employed in the public service, mostly in hospitals and state departments. HWU and NEHAWU organise in the hospitals, but COSATU does not have an affiliate which caters for the vast majority of civil servants.

Surprisingly cordial relations have been established between the conservative staff associations and the public service unions, after the first difficult and tense encounter. Now the union side caucuses well together and presents a united front to the Commission.

This must have come as a surprise to the Commission. Demands by the Health Workers' Union for a commitment to racial equality and positive action to rec-



tify past injustices were accepted without a murmur by the staff associations.

The acceptance by the Commission for Administration that public service workers should enjoy the same rights as other workers has cleared the way for serious bargaining over the details. Many months of tough negotiating lie ahead. There are still some hard issues to resolve:

- who is an essential worker and who is not?
- what dispute-settling mechanism will be offered to workers who are denied the right to strike?
- will the unions accept that the government will have the right to lock out?
- will public service workers have their own legislation, or fall under the Labour Relations Act, a key COSATU demand?
- how will levels of bargaining be organised, given the huge size of the public service?

Other issues are beginning to loom up in the background. The public service pension fund is R30 billion in deficit. A failure to liquidate the deficit will hurt black workers most.

How much is the present government prepared to do to

upgrade black workers in the public service? The number of senior black civil servants is tiny. And what level of taxes will a new, democratic government be prepared to levy in order to ensure a Living Wage for public servants?

These questions can wait. The progressive unions have other urgent problems to solve. They have done well to take the lead in the negotiations, despite their tiny memberships. But they cannot continue indefinitely to rely on the prestige of COSATU and secondments such as Marcel Golding of the NUM (who is leading the NEHAWU delegation).

Poor or non-existent planning, weak negotiating tactics and a failure to caucus effectively have already damaged the credibility of the progressive unions. An urgent necessity is the strengthening of both the membership and the leadership of the progressive u

As for the post office workers, they have just won the first worker-director in South Africa! Management have agreed that the seven post office unions, including POTWA, will be able to nominate a director to each of the boards of the two new companies soon to be set up, one for the post office and one for telecommunications.

And temporary workers are all to be given permanent status, thus ending a long-standing grievance. But so far there is no suggestion that the post office will compensate these workers for the

many years during which they were prevented from contributing to the pension fund. ♦

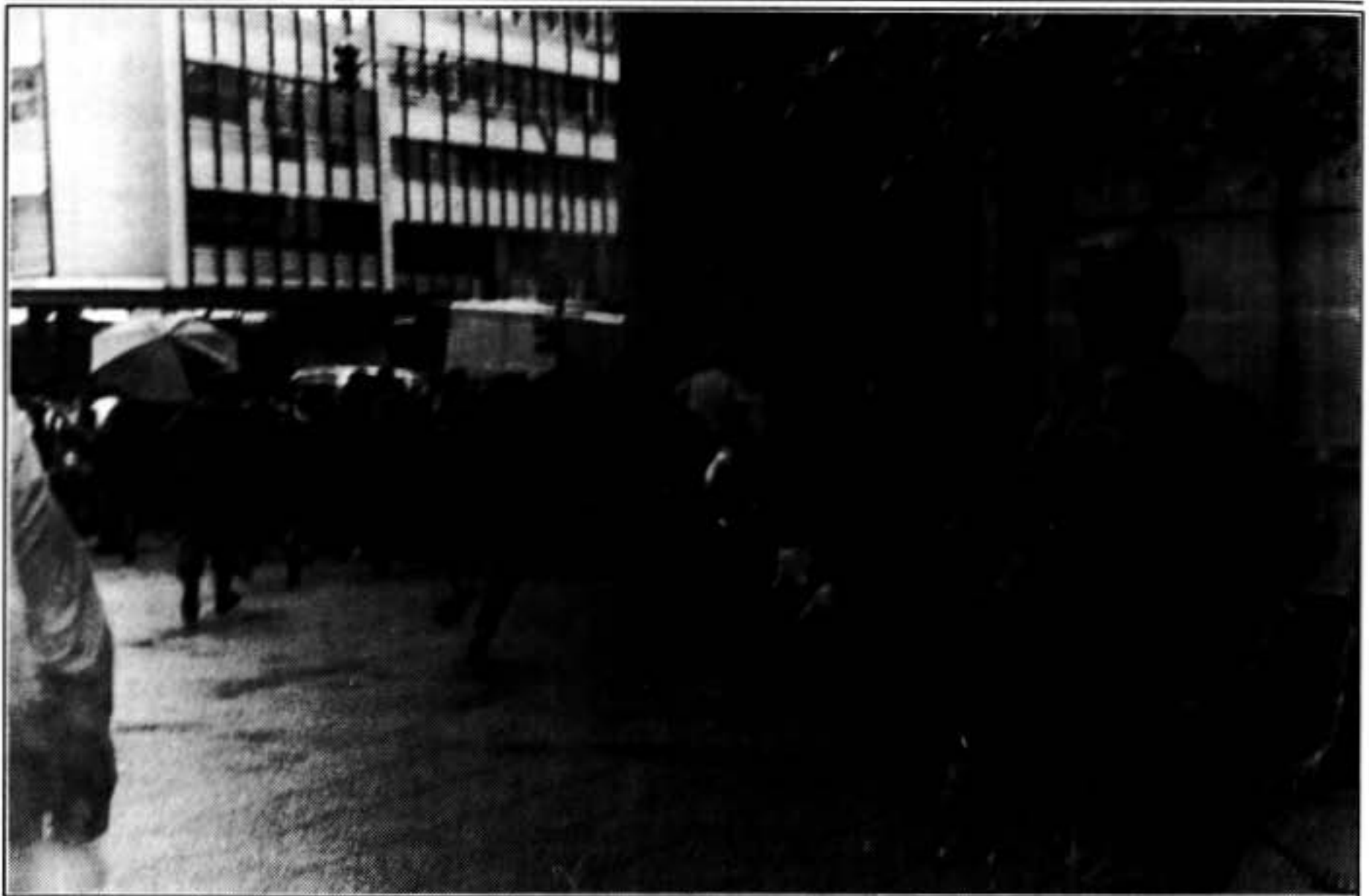
(Labour Bulletin correspondent)

Security Workers halt Vlok's new law

Security workers around the country took to the streets in March in a wave of protest against the Security Officers Act. Workers marched in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Ladysmith to demand the scrapping of this new law.

The Security Officers Act gives Minister of Law and Order Vlok wide ranging controls over the security industry. If the law is put into effect, these new powers will mean that:

- All security workers will have to register with the Ministry of Law and Order, will have to pay a R35 registration fee, and a further annual fee of R70. It is unclear how this money will be spent. Workers' fingerprints will be recorded by the South African Police at registration.
- The Ministry of Law and Order will have the right to decide who can be employed as a security worker. Anyone with a criminal record will be barred from working in the industry.
- Police will have the right to stop a security worker at any time and demand to



Security workers scatter after police opened fire on them during the Johannesburg march in March this year

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

see the certificate of registration. Workers have compared this to the pass law system.

- Vlok will have the power to determine conditions of employment in the industry.

The idea of this law was first introduced during the State of Emergency and was widely seen as an attempt to extend the arm of the state by harnessing private security workers to the state security machinery. Transport and General Workers Union spokesperson, Kally Forrest, says that this has "made workers feel furious. Workers are even more concerned about the state attempt to use them as an extension of the Police Force than they are about the money which they

are expected to pay for registration."

The law was first passed in early 1990 at the recommendation of a working group made up of representatives of the Ministry of Law and Order, the Security Police, and the contract security industry. However, after protests and representation from TGWU, the government agreed to put off the implementation of the act until 1 April this year.

But contrary to the agreement, workers in the industry have been experiencing pressure to register, pay their fees and record their fingerprints. Some workers who have been reluctant to do so have been intimidated and told that they will lose their jobs unless they comply

with the new regulations.

Security workers in TGWU demanded that the law be scrapped, and that an industrial council be set up for the industry. According to Forrest, "Security workers wish to be treated as ordinary workers who negotiate their conditions of employment with employers in an industrial council under the Department of Manpower without police interference."

The union is not opposed to some form of regulation for the industry. It is estimated that up to eleven new private security firms are set up every week in South Africa. Regulation may help to ensure that proper training is provided and that 'Fly-by-Night' operations are not encouraged. The Security

Officers Act is not, however, accepted as a useful regulation.

The Employers Association, SANSEA, (South African National Security Employers Association), has not been prepared to oppose the Act. They have maintained that they cannot defy the law. The union believes that this points to "a close relationship between the bosses and the cops."

Shortly before the April the first deadline, conflict seemed inevitable as workers vowed to defy the law and refuse to register, and employers and police resolved to enforce the Act. A last minute meeting between the employers, the Deputy Minister of Law and Order and the union averted a crisis by reaching a negotiated compromise.

All parties at the meeting agreed to set up a joint working group in which representatives of the union, the employers and the state will look into the future of the industry. TGWU representatives made the agreement subject to discussions with union members. Issues to be discussed would include registration, fees and the possibility of setting up an industrial council for the industry.

At TGWU's insistence the Department of Manpower will also be invited to join the working group so that the question of an industrial council is placed firmly on the agenda. The working group would have to report



by August.

In the meantime workers have effectively won a three month reprieve on registration, and will not have to pay the R70 registration fee until at least October. The South African Police agreed not involve itself in the fingerprinting of workers or in the registration process. Workers also won representation on key committees in the industry including the Guarding Advisory Board, which deals with training, and the Security Officers Board.

As a result of worker action against the Security Officers Act, the industry may be moving in the direction that workers have been demanding for a number of years. ♦

(Lael Bethlehem)

Metropolitan Life workers down their pens

Workers who wear jackets and ties to work are not always recognised as the labour movement's constituency. But workers at insurance giant Metropolitan Life have proved the strength

and militancy of organised 'white-collar' or non-manual, workers. Metropolitan Life workers, organised by SACCAWU, won their demands after a nine-week national strike.

The strike was the culmination of increased organisation and union activity amongst workers in banks and insurance companies, and other areas in the financial services sector. After organising to the point where SACCAWU became "significantly representative," it was decided to demand that a bargaining unit be set up, to regulate negotiations between the union and management.

However, workers found that it was necessary to embark on strike action when management refused to bargain with all workers on an equal basis.

Management proposed separate bargaining units for "indoor workers" such as administrative workers, computer operators and clerks, and "outdoor workers" such as consultants and field representatives. Workers maintained that this was an attempt to divide workers and weaken organisation in this sector just as it was beginning. On 6 February, workers voted for strike action in support of a single bargaining unit.

Nine weeks later, Metropolitan Life management agreed to full recognition of SACCAWU and to a single national bargaining forum. Negotiations over wages and



A polite placard - SACCAWU workers during the 9-week strike

Photo: William Matlala/COSATU

working conditions will begin towards the end of April.

According to SACCAWU's national negotiations co-ordinator Important Mkhize, this strike is a landmark in the organisation of white collar workers:

"Some non-manual workers have regarded themselves as better off than other workers, and have not seen the need for organisation and militant action.

"The Metropolitan Life workers have shown that this is not the case. We view this as highly significant in forging working class unity and forwarding workers' struggle in each and every sector."

The financial services sector occupies an important strategic position in South Africa's economy. SACCAWU believes that the organisation of workers in this area will become a more and more important area of its work. ♦

(Lael Bethlehem)

SACCAWU worker drowned on boss's fishing trip

A SACCAWU member in the Transvaal town of Grobelaersdal died on the 19 March when his manager allegedly pushed him into the Olifants River, after inviting him on a fishing trip.

Petrus Njomo and a fellow worker were approached by their manager, a man named Botha, of Wanda Furnishers, to join him on a fishing expedition during working hours.

The workers agreed but expressed their concern that they were both unable to swim. Botha assured them that they would not need to swim, and they agreed to accompany him.

After a number of hours of fishing without success, Botha found his fishing line caught in debris in the middle of the river. He was

unwilling to cut the line, says the surviving worker, and asked Njomo to go and free the line in the river.

Njomo refused and said that since the manager knew that he was unable to swim, he should not ask him to venture into the water.

According to the other worker, Botha continued to put pressure on Njomo and he finally agreed to lean over the river bank to assist with the freeing of the line.

While Njomo was leaning over the water, Botha allegedly approached him from behind and pushed him into the river. Botha then jumped into the river, telling the second worker that he was going to rescue Njomo.

However when the manager appeared to the second worker to be in fact hampering Njomo's efforts to swim, he decided to run to the nearby tar road to seek help. When the worker returned with the local police, Botha was seated on his truck drinking liquor. Njomo's body was nowhere to be found.

The police took statements but decided that no charge could be laid against Botha since no body had been found. At this stage the police made no efforts to conduct a search for the worker's body.

SACCAWU decided to call a stayaway and conduct its own search. The police then joined the search in and around the river, using three police officers and a small boat.

However, after searching for just over three hours without the use of divers or underwater equipment, according to SACCAWU, the police called off the search claiming that they had exhausted all efforts to find the body. They reiterated their position that no charge could be laid against the manager, since no body had been found.

Workers have had difficulty in continuing their own search, because of a lack of trained swimmers and underwater equipment.

Botha subsequently resigned from Wanda Furnishers with the usual pension and benefits.

According to Mathabate Seema, SACCAWU's regional organiser for the North Eastern Transvaal, the union has referred the case to its lawyers, and expects legal action soon.

"We as workers believe that the company is responsible for this death. Botha was acting during working hours in his official capacity on behalf of the company. We will not allow the death of our comrade to go unnoticed." ❖

(Lael Bethlehem)

Ciskei civil servants strike: Round No Two

NEHAWU's struggle for trade union rights in Ciskei continues (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 15 No 5). Ciskei's public servants came out on

strike in early April for the second time in a month. The first strike lasted three weeks. It ended in a Ciskei government agreement to introduce pay parity with South African public servants, and to recognise COSATU's NEHAWU. However, according to NEHAWU's Godfrey Goba, Ciskei military ruler Oupa Gqozo has turned his back

Ciskei government/Ne-hawu/ANC/SACP working group to look at the issue. While this is certainly a new type of concession it does not satisfy workers' basic demands. It raises burning questions about the credibility of the military ruler who replaced Ciskei dictator Lennox Sebe in February 1990.

The Ciskei workers de-



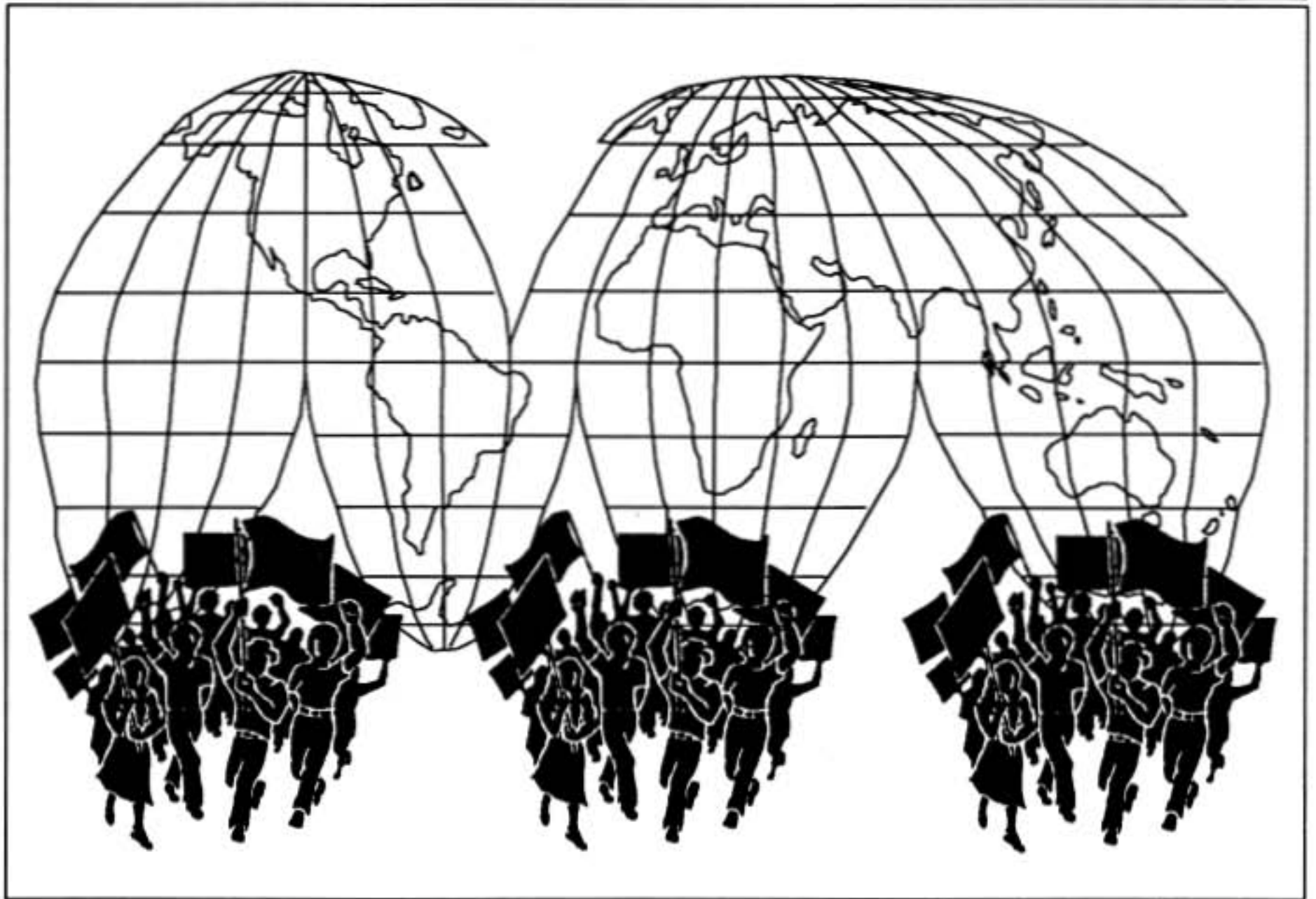
September 1990: Gqozo meets with COSATU to discuss various issues, including the role of NEHAWU

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

on the agreement which he signed with the union. Pay parity has not been introduced and a number of strikers and union organisers have been detained. In recent negotiations Gqozo refused to release the detainees and declared the current strike illegal. He told union representatives that disciplinary action would be taken against workers involved in this strike.

Gqozo has effectively reneged on an agreement to introduce pay parity, but has now agreed to set up a joint

mands are underscored by the desire to be reincorporated into South Africa. "It is the homeland system which allows Gqozo to exploit us like this," says Goba. "We do not have an industrial court here, and even when we have a written agreement from him we are unable to enforce it through the law. Ciskei workers are really demanding our basic human and worker rights. The strike must continue until our demands are honestly met." ☆
(Lael Bethlehem)



Towards a new worker internationalism?

Guest editor: Celia Mather

Introduction	Celia Mather	12
COSATU interview	Labour Bulletin	16
NACTU interview	Labour Bulletin	22
ICFTU	Devan Pillay	27
WFTU	Celia Mather	31
Internationalism	Correspondent	32
SACTWU	John Hudson	40

Solidarity in a changing world

by CELIA MATHER*

The profound political and economic changes worldwide are having their effect on international trade union alignments. Unions in South Africa, as across the globe, are reassessing what they mean by international solidarity, and with whom they want to collaborate.

In the following pages we bring together articles looking at different aspects of international union solidarity with South Africa.

Both COSATU and NACTU are evaluating their relationship to the rival world confederations, the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Prague-based World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). Both SA federations have a pol-

icy of non-alignment but, under pressure to seek out material and political assistance, are increasingly accepting an ICFTU role.

In an interview, an ICFTU deputy general sec-



Celia Mather, ILR staffer
Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

retary speaks of his organisation's desire to increase support for the SA trade unions and the fight against apartheid. He also talks about ICFTU 'philosophy' that a combination of the market economy with strong workers' movements for a fair income distribution is what develops countries. In the ICFTU "we don't believe in trade unions that are organically connected with a political party." However, Jay Naidoo points out that many ICFTU affiliates are much more "incestuous" with political parties than the SA unions.

In a provocative debate piece, an anonymous correspondent criticises both internationals for being secretive and undemocratic. But rather than "entering to democratise from within", she

* CELIA MATHER is a member of the Editorial Board, and former staffer, of *International Labour Reports*, based in Sheffield in the United Kingdom

makes the radical suggestion of a new international union alliance to campaign for a "a single unified, democratic and accountable world federation". Who might gather together such an alliance is left unclear, but there are many workers organisations - particularly in the South, but not only there - which could consider joining such an alliance.

Certainly both COSATU and NACTU general secretaries perceive possibilities of a new unity to replace the old Cold War divisions and recognise, as Jay Naidoo says, that there is more that unites workers across the globe than divides them.

Meanwhile, individual SA unions have also been assessing the impact of their relationships to the industry/sector based International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) associated with the ICFTU. Several (though not all) COSATU unions told the *Bulletin* they have successfully kept external agendas at bay and have benefitted from affiliation.

On the plus side, amongst other things, there is contact with unions fighting the same corporations, information on health and safety, and

support for education programmes. Negative trends which have to be combated are external political agendas, and unwarranted siding in internal disputes.

It appears, however, that the ITSs are concentrating on COSATU affiliates and marginalising NACTU unions. A defiant Cunningham Ngcukana says NACTU unions are going for self-reliance as the answer.

Meanwhile, by contrast, COSATU has been 'normalising', as Jay Naidoo puts it, its relationship with western union centres it previously held in suspicion, particularly the US AFL-CIO. The overseas activities of the AFL-CIO have long been criticised by COSATU and many others for their support of US government foreign policy aims. Many eyes, particularly in other unions of the South, will be upon COSATU to see how it handles the AFL-CIO.

Many the *Bulletin* has spoken to believe that the relationship between unions of the South and the Northern-based internationals and their affiliates is one of patronage, but have yet to find how to break the North out of its paternalism.

One way will be for unions of the South to be more active in contributing to, as well as taking from, international solidarity. It is not just a question of 'what we can get' but 'what we can give'. Such a perspective is, however, absent from the COSATU policy discussion paper published in the last *Bulletin*.

Union-to-union links seem to have proved particularly fruitful. In an article from the USA, John Hudson of the US garment and textile workers' ACTWU speaks highly of the mutual relationship which has developed with SACTWU here. He points to the lessons ACTWU has been able to learn from SACTWU's mobilising methods and worker control. There are many others in the North fighting bureaucratic unionism, and racism among unionists, who might value learning from their SA comrades.

Both COSATU and NACTU recognise that stronger alliances among unions of the South are important for the future. But in spite of a commitment to 'natural allies' in the fight against imperialism and capitalism, little concrete progress has been made. Available resources

flow North-South, not South-South.

COSATU is now joining NACTU in putting more emphasis on regional activities, and will be debating affiliation to the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity at its Congress in July.

Closer collaboration particularly with other Southern African unions on a common social charter is already under way.

There is much more yet to international labour solidarity not covered in these pages. The majority of workers worldwide are unable to form or join genuine trade unions, or have their issues included on union agendas, for numerous reasons.

Some are nevertheless organised in other ways. Among these are migrant workers, women workers, part-timers and subcontracted labour. They too should be included in discussions of why and how workers organise internationally to protect their interests.

The international union world has changed, and will change further in the next few years. We hope these articles contribute to the debate about how the SA trade union movement can contribute towards a new internationalism. ☆

International solidarity: ILR's Filipina Friends

Remarkable solidarity was shown last year by women garment workers in the Philippines towards the British-based magazine *International Labour Reports (ILR)*. *ILR* is known to many of our readers for its excellent coverage of international trade union issues. The *Bulletin* has for several years distributed *ILR* and reprinted *ILR* articles.

In early 1990 *ILR* was sued for libel by the British garment multinational William Baird PLC, for what it published about the company's activities in Britain and the Philippines. At its IGMC factory in the Philippines, Bairds made clothing for the European market.

The IGMC women workers had been out on the picket-line, harassed by the military, for over year, first for implementation of a government agreed minimum wage increase and then for proper redundancy pay as Bairds closed the factory down. In their final settlement, the IGMC workers got Bairds to unconditionally drop the case against *ILR*. "We told Bairds", union President Lucy Salao later said, "that the Filipina concept of friendship is that you never let a friend down. *ILR* has been a good friend to us."

Former *ILR* Editor Celia Mather told the *Bulletin*, "You can imagine what it meant to us that the IGMC brought this damaging case against us to an end". However, Bairds is showing no sign of respecting the agreement. *ILR* has had to launch an appeal to meet its legal costs.

Facing the libel case and financial crisis, *ILR* had to suspend publication in mid-1990. Celia says, however, that they are working hard to relaunch later this year. Letters of support are very useful for helping to raise funds. Please send letters and donations to: *International Labour Reports*, P.O. Box 45, Stainborough, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S75 3EA, England. ★

"More that unites than divides"

In an interview with Celia Mather and Karl von Holdt, COSATU general secretary JAY NAIDOO explains the federation's international policy.

Labour Bulletin: *COSATU's policy has been one of active non-alignment between the international union federations, but nevertheless you have been developing a relationship with the ICFTU. How do you see COSATU's international policy developing?*

Naidoo: International policy has never been high on COSATU's agenda. We did not feel that it was a priority compared with building a strong internal labour movement. Also, we wanted to avoid the situation where conflicts in the international trade union movement, which were really not relevant to our struggle against apartheid and exploitation here, could divide us.

So, when we dealt with international policy at our various congresses, there was never really a discussion; it was just proposed and moved.

I think generally all sides of COSATU felt it should not become a bone of contention. So we developed a policy of 'active non-alignment', which in essence meant we didn't do much internationally.

But we recognised that South Africa is an integral part of the western economy. Needing solidarity for industrial action against multinationals from the western countries, and having much easier access to the West, our first contacts obviously developed with western unions, in particular, the Scandinavians, Dutch,



and Canadians, and to a lesser extent the Australians and the British. All these are ICFTU affiliates.

Now, we had certain problems with the ICFTU, particularly in its relationship with us historically and certain of its functionaries. Though a section of COSATU equated the ICFTU with some sort of imperialist function, that was never the formal position of COSATU, and it was crudified by people who really didn't understand the situation.

I do think some hostility inside COSATU was due to hysterical anti-communist rhetoric from some quarters in the ICFTU. Many communists had made a sterling contribution to building the democratic trade union movement in South Africa. The criticism of COSATU was coming from anti-communists and not just non-communists.

non-communists.

So we decided not to participate in the ICFTU Co-ordinating Committee or to receive assistance via it. We would instead have bilateral relations with those national centres we believed shared something in common with us, which were, as I have said, largely ICFTU affiliates. Also, many of our affiliates belong to the ITSSs, which are linked to the ICFTU.

We never intended to split the ICFTU as some have alleged internationally. And we had no problem with those ICFTU affiliates or national centres we had bilateral relations with reporting to the ICFTU what they were doing with us.

Our decision to not affiliate was seen as a political attempt to undermine the ICFTU. Some of it got pretty difficult, particularly in the way the West German DGB and the American AFL-CIO saw us. But we did have a number of meetings with the ICFTU to exchange views. Like any trade union movement faced with repression, we sought support from any agency that could offer us support, and included among them was the ICFTU.

Today, we have strong links with some of the biggest unions in the AFL-CIO, eg the garment workers' ACTWU, the automobile workers' UAW, the miners' UMWA, and the public employees' AF-SCME. As with the German DGB, we encourage direct worker-to-worker and union-to-union contact. Even though

we had differences with the national centre, this didn't mean we had nothing to do with American workers. In fact, we respect the role that American workers, and in more recent times the AFL-CIO, have played in isolating apartheid.

It was as the political cohesion of COSATU emerged, that the issue emerged of what concretely should be our relationships internationally. One of the biggest problems in South Africa has been the way in which we have become so self-centred about our struggle that we really don't understand very much about struggles in the rest of the world. There is an expectation that, given that apartheid is seen as a crime against humanity, everyone should identify with us and that this is the centre of struggle in the world. There is very little understanding of international problems, even in Southern Africa.

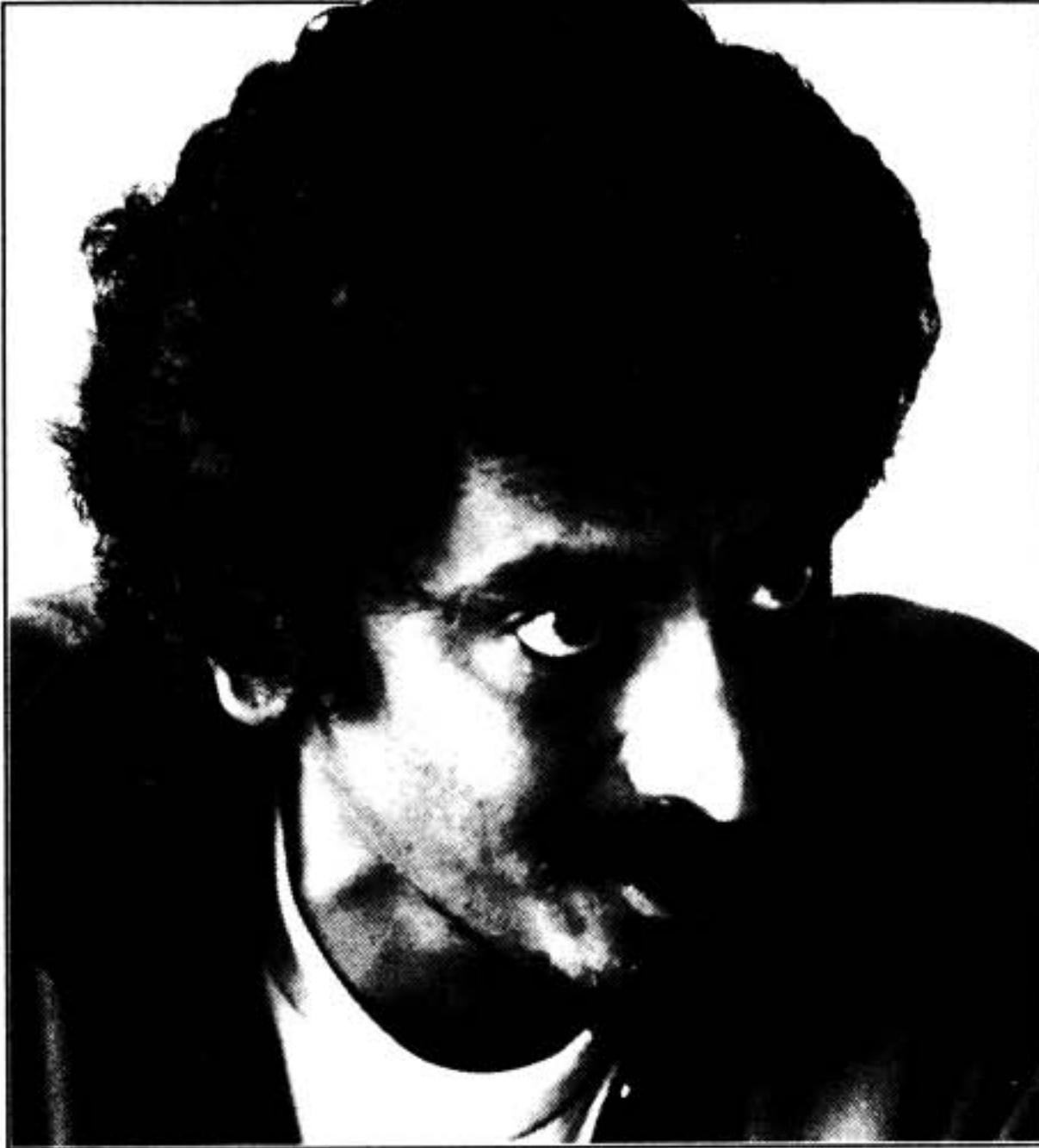
In 1987, the first real debate took place, over the question of affiliation to OATUU. None of us really knew what OATUU stood for, but it was a symbolic thing of wanting to identify with Africa. The consensus at the end was that we should develop a working relationship and get to know what OATUU did, the value it could be both to us building internally and also to establishing relations across the region. Again our policy of non-alignment was reiterated but there was a view that we should begin developing contacts with militant trade union centres in the Third World.

As we saw it, the most militant struggles were being fought out in the developing world, and yet the centre of unionism was either the WFTU or the ICFTU. Those are definitely not the places where the most militant struggles are being fought out. So we looked to the South, to the Philippines, the Pacific Rim, South Korea, Malaysia, and to India and Brazil, and in the Southern African context, to Namibia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

The fact is that we never really established links with unions in the Pacific Rim or South America. What intervened was a wave of even more intensified repression against our democratic formations, which meant that by 1988-89 our trade union movement had to become absorbed with the political struggle against the apartheid regime.

I think up to now international solidarity has just been a slogan, or has meant money and material assistance. There are very few examples in South Africa of us taking solidarity with international struggles. The NUM made a donation to the miners' strike in Britain and workers in 3M went on strike for their American counterparts, just as there has been solidarity with us, including industrial action, and obviously also pressure in relation to sanctions, disinvestment, and the release of detained or charged trade unionists such as Moses Mayekiso.

So, late last year we seriously, or rather semi-seriously, started to discuss what our in-



Jay Naidoo

Photo: Anna Zieminski/Afrapix

ternational relationships should be. I think it was put on the agenda for very concrete reasons, particularly the world restructuring of the economy, and the loosening of the political climate internationally with the formal ending of the Cold War and the collapse of East European regimes.

We also saw that there were possibilities of a more unified response by workers internationally to political developments eroding their interests, whether they are in the Soviet Union or USA. At the end of the day, workers are going to begin sharing common problems, particularly where there is an unbridled move to free market systems, where the lives and jobs of

workers, the benefits they have gained, are being jeopardised.

So we started to re-discuss our role. Obviously, we had to begin normalising relations. There was a trip to the Soviet Union by the first formal political delegation of COSATU in October last year. In late 1988 we visited the DGB in Germany, and at a political level normalised relations with them. We had our first meeting with the ICFTU Executive Council in December 1990 in Tokyo. Most recently we visited the AFL-CIO Executive Council in the USA.

By 'normalisation' I mean that we are attempting to say, 'let us set aside our historical perceptions of each other and identify if there are areas of

common interest' because it is our belief, as South African trade unionists, that there is more that unites us than divides us. We should not pretend that there are no differences - there will always be differences - but we should cooperate around the issues common to us. Whether you are an American worker, or a worker in the Soviet Union, Europe, Asia or Africa, the world restructuring of the economy is going to undermine your rights in the interests of increased profits for the capitalists.

So, it is in that context that we are normalising our relations, not just with the ICFTU but with all federations. There are new initiatives afoot to bring us into contact in the next few months with unions in the Pacific Rim and in South America too.

In Africa, we have taken a more active role. We attended the OATUU Congress last year and have become centrally involved in its Southern Africa Trade Union Coordinating Committee. We are helping to develop a social charter for workers' rights across Southern Africa. Our common interests with Southern African workers will be shared, particularly as borders open up, with industry relocating, or manufacturing industry in the Frontline States being wiped out by South Africa. The question of affiliation to OATUU will come up at our next Congress.

That is the only question of affiliation that will come up. There may be the question of

the role we are playing in relation to the ICFTU, either concretising it more with regard to material assistance, or playing a role in whatever possibilities exist to unify the international trade union movement.

Labour Bulletin: *You talk about 'normalising' relationships. The International Affairs Department of the AFL-CIO has been severely criticised for the activities of its Institutes in Latin America, Asia and Africa in collaborating in the repression of genuine trade unions. How do you see your contribution to the struggle of those other trade unionists of the South, with whom you have said you also want to build stronger relationships?*

Naidoo: I think we would prefer not to polarise the debate because for once there are real possibilities of unifying workers. Clearly the basis has to be very principled, for example, respect for the integrity and self-determination of workers in each country; that we should deal with genuine trade unions not conveyor belts of political parties, either of the left or the right, or structures set up by employers; that we should deal with trade unions based on principles which we espouse, like workers' control over the organisation, non-racialism, and shopfloor solidarity and democracy.

We have been very strong on the issue that we do not see any need for either ourselves

or any other national centres to set up institutions in other countries. We have always been very critical of the AFL-CIO's AALC because of that. Cooperation should be on a bilateral basis between national centres, or through an agreed international centre, on clearly defined programmes.

Obviously, our natural interest would be with workers in similar struggles to our own, against colonialism, all forms of imperialist domination and capitalist exploitation.

Trade unionists in Central America or Asia or Africa are our natural allies and we will attempt through our relationship with trade unions of more developed countries to influence policy as to how solidarity is carried out. That too must be on a principled basis. You can have solidarity carried out by some very well intentioned people that creates a dependency, as well as solidarity by people who don't have good intentions. We need more debate in the international trade union movement to establish the best vehicle to build solidarity.

What one is trying to define, and I think we have achieved it with the Scandinavians and Dutch is a level of solidarity based on a respect for each other's programmes. It is not that we agree with them over everything, but we have developed a relationship which provides virtually a model for solidarity in the rest of the world. It is not just a transfer of material resources, but a respect for the integrity

of the struggles that we fight, and an involvement in our struggles. Now, given the loosening of the political process here, we are beginning to discuss areas more orientated towards reconstruction. So the level of cooperation is moving to development issues. That is the type of basis on which we would like to develop solidarity.

Labour Bulletin: *There are forces which have tried to impose particular perspectives and ways of organising on unions in many countries. Has COSATU experienced that sort of pressure?*

Naidoo: In the international environment there are very different agendas at play. One needs to arrive at a situation where those agendas do not become hostile to each other and there is some unity of process that begins to develop a common agenda, though it is a difficult task.

As for COSATU, I don't think we have suffered in any way from the kind of intervention which other countries have. Solidarity with us has usually been on the basis of what we have put forward as our needs and that ultimately is because we have a strong base. Where you have a weak base you can have yourself dictated to, whether it is in a factory negotiation or on a national or international scale.

In terms of intervention, we would fight it wherever we saw it. That is why in our relationship to Namibia we were very cautious about how we

should proceed. Some workers there in the initial stages said they wanted to join COSATU unions, but this would be promoting some sort of colonial mentality.

We have identified the Namibians, Zimbabweans and Mozambicans as important areas to develop stronger links. But it has to be on a very clear basis of developing jointly, not determining, the content of those organisations.

We have never experienced intervention, even by those people who disagreed with us, because they had respect for us as trade unionists. That has been a critical difference. And obviously, given apartheid, solidarity with us was much more a need and sometimes a necessity in the self-esteem of people outside this country.

Labour Bulletin: *Is there a contribution South African unions can make to the North as well?*

Naidoo: Absolutely. There are many weaknesses in the trade unions of the developed countries. In relation to strengthening shopfloor democracy, involvement of people on the ground in struggles, there are critical contributions we can make.

Also on the independence of the trade union movement. What one sees in the developed world is much more interaction and integration of the labour movement with political parties. The question is always posed to us about 'two hats'. But if you examine the

relationship of trade unions to political parties in the North it is much more incestuous than it is here. Many trade unions in the West affiliate to political parties or sit on each other's constitutional structures, etc.

While in the social democratic model there is a stronger role for organisations in civil society, particularly the trade union movement, to take part in decision-making, certainly we want to see it taken much further. Drawing on the lessons of both developed and underdeveloped countries we hope to graft on our own model, and that could be of use to others.

Labour Bulletin: *You have used the phrase 'a more unified trade union movement'. Could you tell us more about how you see the balance changing between the WFTU and ICFTU federations, now that the Cold War is over. What are the possibilities for unifying the movement, while yet making it more progressive and responsive to workers on the shopfloor?*

Naidoo: It has not been discussed extensively in COSATU, but one can make some generalisations. Obviously, given our principles, we have a vested interest in seeing the international trade union movement unified, particularly given the changes I have talked about internationally.

These changes in turn require a much deeper solidarity from the workers in the western world, particular-

ly in relation to democratic struggles being fought for workers' rights and against the increasingly aggressive transnationals, given that the collapse of the socialist centre in the East has tilted the balance of forces in favour of imperialism.

The trade union internationals, particularly the WFTU and ICFTU, have in the past both been influenced by ideology, and had their priorities determined by ideology, which hasn't been in the interests of the workers of the world, and both have made mistakes. I think it is important that we do not get into a 'winner takes all' situation but confront the reality of what workers on the ground want, wherever and whoever they are.

If we can establish a set of principles around which we can unite workers internationally, which should not be difficult, then we can start developing the programme as to how we implement those principles in a process towards unification of the international trade union movement. It is not going to be an administrative process, that is one thing we have learnt here. It is only through a process of struggle and engagement that we are able to unify the labour movement internationally.

Labour Bulletin: *What are the structures for making COSATU's international policy? How does your new International Officer and the international work you do interlock with COSATU's*

educational programme?

Naldoo: I think one lesson we are going to learn is not to develop an International Department with a bureaucracy which separates itself from the political direction of the federation. The task of our new International Officer is more to do the research, to brief people, and to feed reports back to the structures. International policy-making re-

mains directly in the functions of the elected national leadership.

Also, a significant part of our international study tour programme will be located in the context of economic reconstruction of South Africa, and so our visits will be more to exchange information, expertise and experience on key issues of transferring power to the people.

There will be much more

consistency in monitoring visits, so that they contribute in some way to the debates which are taking place, looking at international invitations and determining why we have been invited, what will interest us in those countries and whether we should accept it or not. We will be developing a core of people who understand international affairs more than just the few we have at the moment. ☆

COSATU'S new international officer

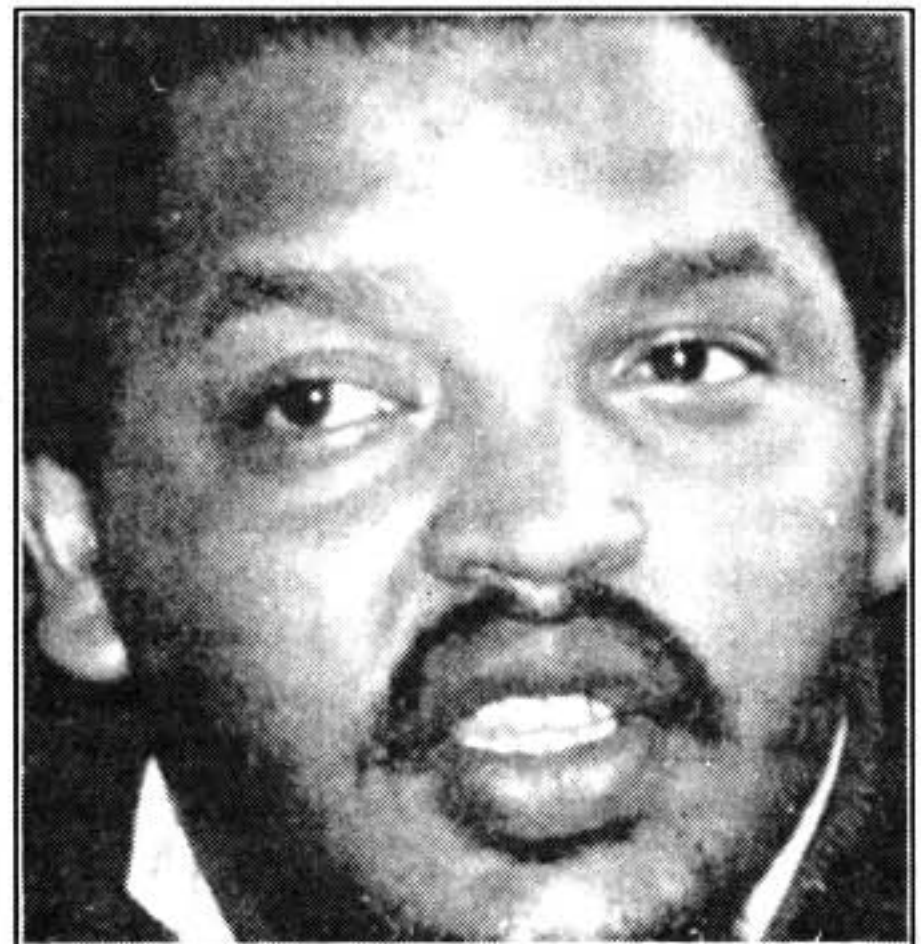
COSATU recently created the post of International Officer. Mcebisi Msizi, with several years' experience in SACTU's international offices abroad, began the job on 15 March this year.

Msizi told the Labour Bulletin that his role is not to always be abroad, but to regularise COSATU's international work from the office. He believes that COSATU's principle of workers' control and structures of decision-making will prevent international work becoming isolated in head office. "The International Department belongs to the workers, and I have to see to it that I serve their interests", he says.

Msizi first got involved in trade union activities organising for MACWUSA/GWUSA at his workplace in Port Elizabeth in 1980. He began organising full-time for the union. At the same time he joined ANC underground structures. He was also a founder member and first general secretary of the Port Elizabeth Youth Congress.

It was on a visit to Lesotho in 1981 that Patrick first came across the exiled union federation SACTU. The next year he left South Africa and was employed in SACTU's International Department. In 1985 he joined the SACTU office in London, and five months later was given the task of opening up a SACTU Information Office in Denmark.

"My job was to disseminate information to the Nordic countries, but it was one of the most difficult tasks, because SACTU was affiliated to the WFTU and all the major Scandinavian unions are affiliated to the ICFTU. At that time the conflict between the ICFTU and WFTU was very strong. I was told by labour representatives in those countries that I would not succeed."



But Msizi set off on a round of visiting factories, local and regional structures and the SACTU Nordic office opened in 1987. There he stayed until he returned to South Africa in 1990.

"I told the Scandinavians, 'You cannot place on us all the ideological struggles that you have fought as far back as 1949, because that was a European conflict, not a South African one. Let's face the question of apartheid'."

"I worked very closely with COSATU when I was in Denmark. My policy was that COSATU's relations should take their own course and I should not interfere but provide the logistics. I think it worked out fine. So you can say that I am here to continue what I have been doing." ♦

Rooting out dependency

NACTU General Secretary CUNNINGHAM NGCUKANA, talks to CELIA MATHER and KARL VON HOLDT

Labour Bulletin: *Could you tell us about your international affiliations, and with whom you have closest relationships though you may not be formally affiliated?*

Ngcukana: NACTU is not affiliated to any international organisation except OATUU. We are an independent federation with fraternal relations to all international confederations, the WCL, the ICFTU and the WFTU.

We have had closer relations with the ICFTU because it has been one of the major international confederations operating in South Africa, either directly or through its affiliates like the Scandinavians, Dutch, British, Canadians and Americans.

Over the past two years or so we have been able to establish links with the WCL, and we sent a delegation to the recent WFTU conference in Moscow.

The ICFTU has played a major role in solidarity with SA trade unions, in terms of material and moral support and of course together with the WFTU it has supported various positions in the United Nations and other international bodies.

Labour Bulletin: *CUSA, one of the unions that formed NACTU, was affiliated to the ICFTU. Can you tell us why you now have a policy of non-affiliation?*

Ngcukana: Though we recognise that the ICFTU has

played an important role, it was our feeling that in the interest of international trade union solidarity we should not affiliate to any one for the time being because all of them have supported the struggle against apartheid. By not affiliating we believed it was a small contribution towards international trade union solidarity.

Labour Bulletin: *Do you see that position changing, with the changing realignment of the ICFTU and WFTU?*

Ngcukana: The OATUU policy is that African trade unions do not affiliate to the international confederations. NACTU had that policy even before we went into the OATUU. A shift is something that can only be discussed by our conference because non-affiliation has been a policy decision.



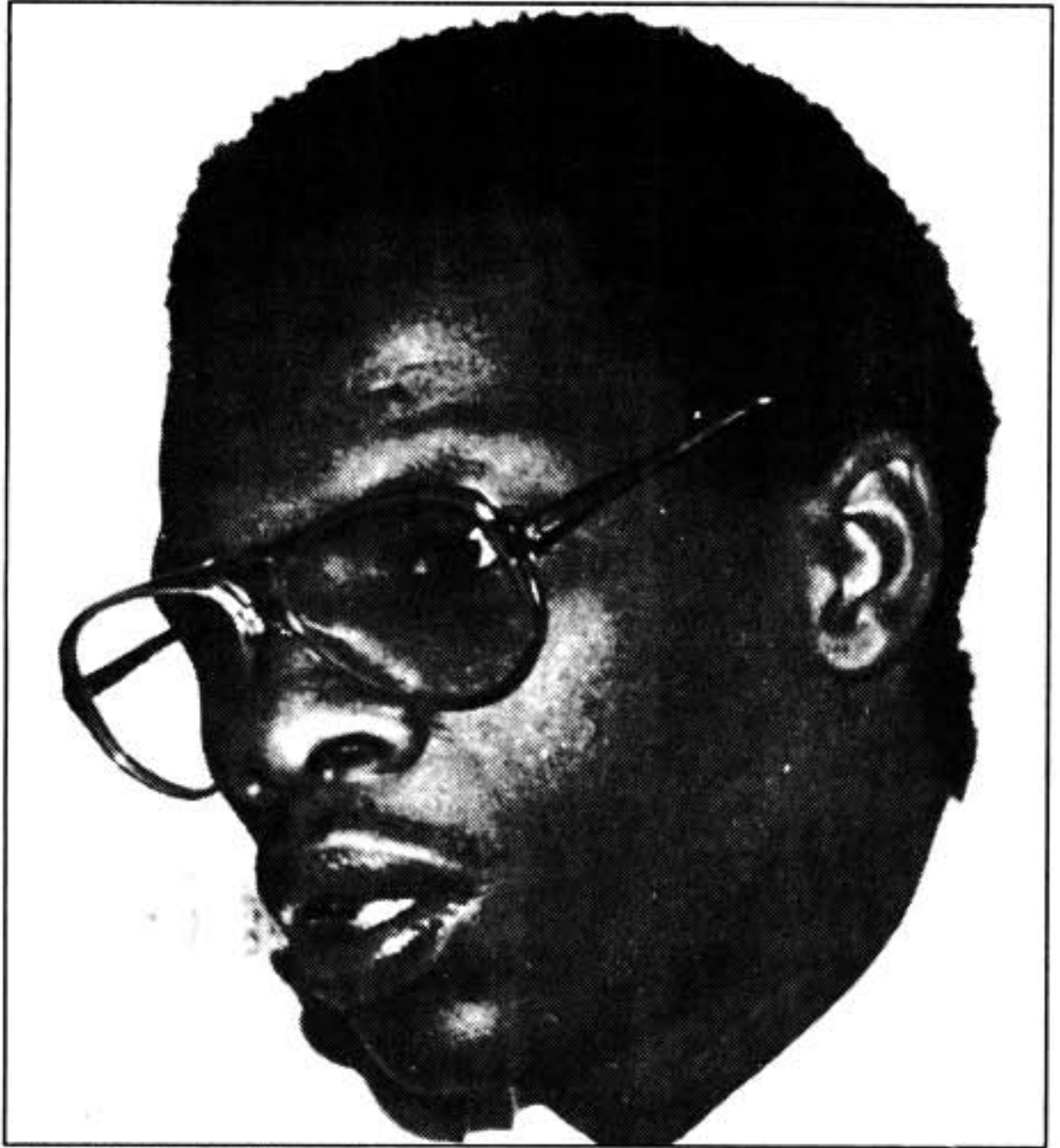
You have got to understand that NACTU has got a very strong socialist and Marxist-Leninist approach, and the organisation is very strict about how we conduct ourselves internationally.

We would like to see the ICFTU, WFTU and WCL come together on a common trade union platform to increase trade union solidarity among the international working class.

There has been bitter antagonism but we believe this is going to change. Eastern Europe is moving towards a market economy; the trade unions in those countries will have to restructure themselves to meet the challenges they face from incoming multinationals. The division between the ICFTU and WFTU will no longer be necessary.

Changes in the international economic and political order, and the movement of western capital to the east, necessitates such an accommodation.

Labour Bulletin: *WFTU has claimed, as have many of the militant Third World federations, that it is anti-capitalist and part of the struggle for socialism. The ICFTU has tended to see itself as improving conditions within a capitalist framework. Many federations would say that the struggle for socialism continues and therefore have a particular perspective on the ICFTU. What is your view?*



Cunningham Ngcukana

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

Ngcukana: The ICFTU looks at the short-term improvement of working conditions within a capitalist system, and we don't hold that view. We believe that, yes, we operate within a capitalist system and we will fight for a living wage and better working conditions. But the long-term objective is obviously to establish a system where the working people are in control of their lives.

The WFTU has had its own problems. The Eastern European trade unions were transmission belts for political parties and they were in control of the WFTU. That didn't make it very much of a rival in challenging capital, improving working condi-

tions and supporting the rights of working people.

International relations are not informed only by long-term objectives, but also short-term objectives and what is possible at any given time. We have to have mutual solidarity with trade unions in countries where multinationals operating in SA come from. To have international relations only informed by long-term objectives would be a very serious blunder.

Some national centres have asked us to affiliate to the ICFTU and we have had to explain our independent position. We certainly do not necessarily share their objectives. We are looking at the short-term objective of the

struggle, and in the longer term our ideas and vision might not coincide.

Labour Bulletin: *Do you participate in the ICFTU Co-ordinating Committee on Southern Africa?*

Ngcukana: Yes, we participate because our funding is multilateral from the ICFTU through the donor organisations which are affiliated to the ICFTU. We sit in the regular SACC meetings.

Labour Bulletin: *What has been most useful from your relationship to the internationals?*

Ngcukana: We have been able to get solidarity for struggles by workers against multinationals through the ICFTU and its associated international trade secretariats.

The ICFTU became much more important to us because largely its affiliates come from western countries which have trading and investment links with South Africa; most of the multinationals come from such countries. In the struggle in Unilever for example, we were able to get the support of the IUF and its British affiliates, and with Coca Cola, before it divested, from the ICFTU-affiliated American unions.

The ICFTU circulates information to its affiliates to get solidarity. Also, there has been material support from the national centres affiliated to the ICFTU - from the

Scandinavians, Canadians, British, American-affiliated unions, Spanish, and Italians - and from the ICFTU itself.

This support has been for education programmes and legal assistance in cases of repression. It has been a very useful and important solidarity. Through it we have built this movement to what it is today. We have generally had a lot of support against apartheid.

Labour Bulletin: *There has been criticism, particularly from Third World trade unions, that the trade union centres of the north interfere in a way that is not warranted. Have you experienced this from the ICFTU or any of its major affiliates?*

Ngcukana: Of course some of the national centres have got their own perceptions. For example, the Scandinavians and the Canadians, believe that you should be affiliated to a particular political organisation. They don't see why we shouldn't be in the ANC.

Of course, they have got their own choices of political parties in South Africa; we are quite conscious of that. But our view is that we are an independent organisation and we should be able to make independent decisions. We have been able to put our policies across to them, and they do not have any influence.

Labour Bulletin: *Could*

you tell us about NACTU unions' relationships to the ITSs?

Ngcukana: NACTU unions are affiliated to ITSs like the public sector PSI, foodworkers' IUF, chemical and energy workers' ICEF, metalworkers' IMF, building and woodworkers' IFBWW and the plantation and farmworkers' IFPAAUW. But only a few NACTU affiliates have such affiliations.

When it comes to ITSs there have been very serious problems. Our building workers' union has not had problems with the IFBWW, and we have had generally good relations with the IMF. However, with the mineworkers' MIF, the PSI, IUF, and the ITF, there have been serious problems. They have tried to play certain tricks on our affiliates and we have made it quite clear that we will not tolerate some of their attitudes.

We might have to disaffiliate from IFPAAUW. It has set up an educational programme for farmworkers, even though NACTU and our affiliate, the only union organising farmworkers in South Africa, have our own education programmes. It has also been discriminating against our affiliate in funding of projects.

The PSI has also been discriminating in funding and projects. It is the same with ICEF, which has been playing tricks with SACWU, which is the biggest chemical union in Africa, to such an

union in Africa, to such an extent that SACWU has been considering disaffiliating. We have also had a problem with the ITF, even though we have the biggest union in the passenger transport industry. We have had problems with the IUF but the affiliate is trying to discuss it and resolve the problem.

There is a problem of democracy and accountability within these internationals, and a problem of certain of their affiliates calling the shots. They are very selective and divisive, and not very helpful in terms of trade union unity in South Africa. We are planning a conference for our affiliates in May or June to discuss these matters.

Labour Bulletin: *Is this discrimination in favour of COSATU affiliates?*

Ngcukana: In most cases, yes. Some of the national centres presume divisions, and encourage them, between COSATU and NACTU. People from the Commonwealth TUC and the Canadian unions have had an awful attitude. I have had to tell the Canadians that if their representative doesn't come here it doesn't matter.

Some would like to see NACTU fall. It is a thread that runs internationally, orchestrated by funding by certain donors and organisations. To us it has become a non-issue, however, because an organisation that has got members is not easy to wish

away.

It is important that our affiliates get to be self-sufficient, and then they will be in a position to say to hell with anyone. The National Union of Wine and Spirits is not affiliated to the IUF, but it is one of the most self-sufficient and democratic trade unions in SA.

This is the tragedy of past international funding, of paternalism by international organisations. It has created a culture of dependency, and we really have to root it out.

Instead of having a negative impact it has been positive, however, in that our unions are able to find means to survive. With the 'anti-apartheid industry' going bankrupt that is an advantage. For those who have become dependent on international funding there will be a negative impact.

South African unions have got to learn much more about self-sufficiency. Within NACTU a rationalisation programme is already under way and we are hopeful that even without international assistance in two years' time we will be able to survive. For instance, we have had to scale down our administration and our overhead expenditure.

Labour Bulletin: *Have you also been in dialogue with the AFL-CIO?*

Ngcukana: We have had discussions with the AFL-CIO. It is a national centre to national centre relationship,

but what we would like to see more is our affiliates building relationships with the industrial unions in America, because we have a lot of American investments in South Africa. We need more grassroots relationships, in the steel industry, the food sector, in mining. We believe that union-to-union relationships are much stronger.

Labour Bulletin: *Have you had any assistance from the AFL-CIO's African institute, the AALC?*

Ngcukana: The AALC has never directly assisted NACTU except through the ICFTU, but it has assisted some of our affiliates, and possibly through training programmes of unions affiliated to the AFL-CIO.

Labour Bulletin: *Suppose the ICFTU is engaged in some kind of undermining action against a militant Third World union. Federations like the South African ones, with more access to the ICFTU, might be faced with a choice of challenging the ICFTU on behalf of those unions or concerning themselves only with their own short-term issues.*

Ngcukana: We are prepared to give unqualified support to such struggles and also condemn any activity undertaken by any organisation, irrespective of our relationship with it, which is

to the detriment of the working class. The problem is that we do not have much information. It is important for trade unions to develop their own resources so that they can take an independent position on such matters.

Labour Bulletin: *Trade unionists of the North only seem to consider what they can give and not what they could receive from you. People from the South seem to consider only what they can receive and not what they can contribute. What do you think?*

Ngcukana: It is true that people view it as us receiving and them giving. The problem has been the type of trade unions we have and the links with political parties in power and governments. We have never had an independent trade union movement in Africa. South Africa has tried but, who knows, we might move in the African direction.

Increased investments from the North in the South necessitate cooperation because of the high labour costs of the North and the low labour costs of the South. With changes in the economic order there will be a change in terms of receiving and giving. It will be a mutual cooperation.

European products will find their market in the South, and of course we can participate in the boycott of such products if they mistreat workers or if unions in Eu-

rope have problems. There is not much done in the area of taking industrial action in support of workers in the North, but there are possibilities, in particular with British firms.

Labour Bulletin: *Turning to regional cooperation, how do you see your role in OATUU developing?*

Ngcukana: We have been participating within OATUU's SATUCC framework for five or six years, attending their workshops and taking part in the Southern Africa Labour Council meetings.

The Southern African region is economically integrated. We have a lot of migrant labour from neighbouring countries and we should develop a social charter to protect their rights. Most South African employers in industries including construction, mining, and forestry, are taking people from outside because they do not have to make social security payments.

Also, once the political question is resolved in South Africa, there are possibilities that South African companies will move into neighbouring states and exploit workers there. Cooperation amongst Southern African trade unions is very important to tackle employers in the whole region.

We also believe that within the framework of the OATUU we may be able to make a contribution to secur-

ing trade union rights in a number of countries. It is important that a future democratic South African government takes up the issue of human rights in all the African countries.

Labour Bulletin: *As well as regional cooperation, have you been able to develop South-South links with other trade unions around the world?*

Ngcukana: We have a number of links, like with the Australian national centre. We have been able to go to India, Malaysia and other parts of Asia through the Commonwealth programme. But the Latin American links have not been very strong.

We see cooperation with Eastern Europe and Latin America as important because of the movement of working people and capital. To fund this, we have to develop our own internal resources.

Labour Bulletin: *How is international policy determined within NACTU? Do you have an international officer or department?*

Ngcukana: We have one member of the Secretariat who is responsible for international affairs. We have a sub-committee, an International Committee, that executes policy and recommends changes to policy-making structures, to National Council and Congress. ☆

the ICFTU in SA: coming on strong

Deputy General-Secretary of the 100 million member International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Mr DENZIL FRASER, was interviewed by DEVAN PILLAY* at NACTU's Third National Biennial Congress on 27 September 1990. Mr Fraser is also a member of the Italian Socialist Party.**

Labour Bulletin: *What is the programme of the ICFTU in South Africa and do you make a distinction between NACTU and COSATU when giving support?*

Denzil Fraser: Our programme is to continue support and solidarity with the black trade union movement in the most effective way.

We do not react differently to the two federations. It is not only in South Africa that the trade union movement is divided. But this is a problem concerning the workers here, and not the international trade union movement. Both of them are fighting to liberate this country from the fascist minority regime, and we will help them as much as we can. Everywhere workers are divided because of political tendencies, but it is not



my duty to elaborate on these differences.

Labour Bulletin: *Within the trade union movement, in particular certain affiliates of COSATU, there has always been a reserved attitude towards the ICFTU. Has there been an improvement in relationships in recent years?*

Denzil Fraser: It is true that in the past we met with some problems. But our commitment is to remain in touch, and we will continue to remain so - helping through our member organisations with which COSATU affiliates have established

contact. Member organisations of the ICFTU have been our 'ambassadors'. We have been able to discuss with them, and take decisions on how South African trade unions could be best helped, taking into account their own wishes and needs.

We hope, of course, that all misunderstandings, if there are any, can be clarified. We meet from time to time, to discuss the problems concerning South Africa. It is very good to know from South Africans what their assessment is of the political and trade union situation, and what are the major obstacles. We listen to them on what the international trade union movement can do to overcome those difficulties.

South Africa has always been a priority for the ICFTU. But we need to give

* At the time of this interview, Devan Pillay was a writer at the Labour Bulletin. He is now the editor of Work in Progress (WIP)

** Both COSATU and NACTU have policies of non-affiliation to the ICFTU, but have been receiving considerable funding from ICFTU affiliates

it special attention these days, because there is some misunderstanding in international public opinion. The fact that Mr Mandela has been released, and that some conversations are taking place between the regime and the liberation movement,

have given the impression that the process has begun to eliminate apartheid, which is not true. We stress the importance of these conversations, but we must convince international public opinion that we must continue to assist our friends.

The member organisations of the ICFTU around the world must implement ICFTU policy. If we give up sanctions and other pressures on the SA government, we will make it harder for the black population to finally recover their dignity.

South Africa and the AFL-CIO



AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland and Nelson Mandela in the US

Photo: Labor Notes

Relationships between COSATU and the US union centre AFL-CIO have been steadily deepening over the past year. A visit by Nelson Mandela and COSATU Vice-President Chris Dlamini in June, was followed by the NUM's Cyril Ramaphosa in October and most recently Jay Naidoo in February this year.

In return, a delegation including AFL-CIO International Affairs Director (and leading light of the anti-communist Social Democrats USA) Tom Kahn, plus representatives of the AFL-CIO's Institute in Africa AALC,

federated and non-federated American unions, visited COSATU while also attending the NACTU Congress as observers in October 1990.

The international activities of the AFL-CIO, and particularly its three institutes in the Third World - the AALC (Africa), AIFLD (Latin America) and AAFLI (Asia) - have received much criticism for supporting US official foreign policy aims, particularly in countries with militant unions and national liberation movements. Many unionists worldwide will be watching to see how COSATU handles the relationship.

Since 1986, COSATU's policy has been one of non-cooperation with the AFL-CIO and its bodies. Consequently, AFL-CIO activity in SA has been with individual COSATU affiliates, including funding study tours to the USA. At the February meeting in Washington, COSATU pressed the AFL-CIO to regularise this by channelling activities only on a centre-to-centre basis.

SA unionists have in the past accused the AFL-CIO of back-peddling on support for economic pressure against apartheid. In an interview with the Labour Bulletin at the NACTU Congress, AFL-CIO representatives blamed "conflicting signals coming from the SA trade union movement until COSATU was formed" for earlier reticence, but claimed the AFL-CIO has always supported sanctions and is now at the forefront in keeping pressure on the Bush administration.

They also said that the AFL-CIO "has no problem" with COSATU's alliance with the SA Communist Party, but will itself have nothing to do with the SACP. They also denied having any relationship with UWUSA. ♦

We will campaign against the lifting of sanctions. Our member organisation in the United States, the AFL-CIO, will campaign against it until there is a real indication that the SA government has given up apartheid, and has accepted the principle of one man one vote.

It has always been the policy of the ICFTU and AFL-CIO to support sanctions and not only in the USA. But, as a democratic organisation, we have met with difficulties amongst member organisations in the ICFTU to implement this decision. Some measures against SA could cost jobs in the industrialised countries, most of which have trade relations with SA. During a period of high unemployment in these countries it was not easy. It was not a question of politics. It was a question of convincing unemployed people in developed countries that we owe solidarity to the black workers in South Africa, because their conditions are much worse than ours, even when we are unemployed.

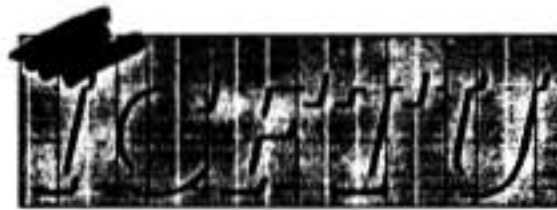
But the policy of the ICFTU concerning sanctions has been constant since 1950, when the ICFTU began. We built our Co-ordinating Committee specifically on the South Africa problem to deal with assistance to black trade unions. This was more than 15 years ago, as soon as the black trade union movement came into being. At the same time, we tried to implement

our sanctions policy.

Labour Bulletin: *Why then has there been such distrust about the ICFTU's intentions in South Africa?*

Denzil Fraser: This is a good question for those who have had doubts about the ICFTU. I don't know why.

When the world was divided into the democratic world on the one side, and the undemocratic world on the other, there was propaganda against us. But we



never spent any time answering that propaganda. We have been busy developing positive action.

Labour Bulletin: *In terms of what has been happening in Eastern Europe over the past year, what do you think will happen to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), and your relationship with it?*

Denzil Fraser We don't have any relations with the WFTU, and I don't see that happening. The majority of trade unions in East and Central Europe have withdrawn from the WFTU. Some, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, have already joined the ICFTU. Others, such as Hungary and Bulgaria, have applied for affiliation. But all of them have already with-

drawn from the WFTU.

Now the WFTU is saying that, since the division was a result of the Cold War, we can now come together. However, it was not because of the Cold War that there was a division, but because the WFTU was dependent on a political party. Now that the workers are recovering their independence, their unions are withdrawing from the WFTU, but it still remains a tool of the Russian trade union movement.

In the Soviet Union itself there are also initiatives now to build free and independent trade unions. For instance, the miners have built their own trade union organisation independent of the one which is still connected to the communist party. For us, it is not only a question in Russia, but everywhere. We don't believe in trade unions that are organically connected with a political party, especially where there is a one party system. It does not serve the interests of the workers.

This has nothing to do with the Cold War. It is a question of philosophy. The populations in those countries have realised that without freedom and democracy you cannot have social and economic progress. They will meet a lot of difficulties, however, because changing their systems will not automatically solve all their problems.

It is not true, as is claimed, that the market economy and free enterprise have developed our countries. It is those things, *plus*

strong workers movements - political and trade union - fighting against employers to make sure that there is fair distribution of the income produced.

Labour Bulletin: *Many leaders in COSATU and NACTU may describe themselves as Marxist socialists (not necessarily of the Soviet type). What influence will this have on the ICFTU's relations with these federations?*

Denzil Fraser: What does it mean to be a Marxist these days? If they believe in it, that is their right. What is important for us is a free and democratic, pluralist society, where everybody has the right to express their views, including Marxist socialists, even though nobody can explain today what it is. I am a socialist, but I am first of all a trade union leader. I believe that my discipline is the discipline of the trade union movement. Although we must be committed at the political level, the trade union organisation must remain autonomous and independent. This is an important principle in a democratic society.

In Italy, members of the CGIL union federation in Italy were mainly members of the Communist Party. That party is now about to give up its communist name. It believes today in a democratic and pluralist society. There are some differences at a political level, but these should not prevent us from being united. We all now be-

lieve that the trade union movement must be independent and autonomous, dependent only on its members, and not on any political party. The debate which is taking place these days in the CGIL is that it should be independent, and apply for membership to the ICFTU. They withdrew from the WFTU years ago.

In France, with the lowest rate of organised workers in Europe, the CGT is a member of the WFTU. The majority of its members are



not French citizens. They are immigrants from North Africa. It is the only organisation in Western Europe that is a member of the WFTU.

There is unlikely to be a similar debate in the CGT as in the CGIL, because the French Communist Party has not changed.

The presence of Christian trade unions in Europe, with no more than two million members, serves to divide the trade union movement. I am a socialist, but I belong to a free and independent trade union movement, not a socialist-aligned trade union. This is because other workers, who are not socialists, would not be able to be with me in a socialist union. A trade union must be for unity, so creating conditions that institutionally hamper unity, does not make sense.

Labour Bulletin *What does this mean in terms of COSATU's declared alliance with the Communist Party in South Africa?*

Denzil Fraser: There are communists in COSATU, but nobody can say that COSATU is a communist organisation. I am democratic, and I believe in the right for those who want to be communists to be communists. They will have a great problem defining what communism is today, but that is their problem, not mine.

I don't think forming an alliance with the Communist Party necessarily contradicts what I've just said about trade union autonomy. The common struggle is against apartheid. It is too early to say what will be the debate on the kind of society that these communist people want to build. We hope that they will be in favour of a democratic country, but this is the second step. For now, let them be together to fight against apartheid.

Labour Bulletin: *Does the ICFTU have any relationship with UWUSA?*

Denzil Fraser: I am the Deputy General Secretary of the ICFTU and I don't know what UWUSA is. That is a good answer, don't you think? [Interjection from Aikumbo, of the ICFTU Africa Desk: "It is non-existent. We have no relationship with it"] I don't know whether it is a football team or what [laughter]. ☆

With the loss of most of its Eastern European affiliates, and the political reorientation of the newly reconstituted General Confederation of Soviet Trade Unions (from October 1990), the Prague based World Federation of Trade Unions is undergoing radical reevaluation and restructuring.

Soviet unions, in the past the most influential in WFTU, have a new ideological orientation. They have accepted their new role of trade unionism in a market economy, and the influence of this on the confederation was revealed in the draft document produced for WFTU's 12th Congress, held in Moscow (November 1990).

The old ideological confrontation with imperialism is gone (not once is the word used in the document). Instead, it argues for the "depoliticisation" of the trade union movement. There should be an "evolution from the existence of two great ideological blocks, promoting animosity and confrontation, to new internationalism with a human face and progressive social content", it says. This shift in the policy of the Soviet unions simply reflects the shifting policies of the Soviet state. This suggests that the unions are still tied to the bureaucracy, rather than expressing an independent line.

WFTU is inviting the ICFTU and WCL into reconciliation, cooperation and "greater unity". That there was not a better coordination between the internationals

What's new at WFTU?

previously is put down largely to "obstacles set by the TNCs". ICFTU General Secretary John Vanderveken has indicated his organisation's hostility to this, however. "Our greatest asset in the eyes of the workers in Eastern Europe", he said, "is we never collaborated in any way with those who sided with their oppressors... When it comes to the WFTU ... I see no reason for us to cooperate with an organisation that glorifies an economically bankrupt system, and that has consistently failed to condemn violations of human and trade union rights."

In the draft Congress document, however, WFTU is now promoting 'free' trade unions, independent of political parties. Finally buried is the call for proletarian dictatorships. The draft speaks of merely "equal participation" by workers in management decision-making, with "the right to information and consultation". Its current analysis of the role of trade unions would be perfectly acceptable to any West European social democrat.

It is not known to what extent the document was accepted. However, a Soviet attempt to have all mention of 'class struggle' removed from the

WFTU Constitution met with heated opposition at the Congress and was defeated.

Organisationally, with the loss of most of Eastern Europe, the Third World has gained greater significance within the WFTU. A decision at the Congress to establish regional structures and offices in Africa (Brazzaville), Asia (New Delhi), Latin America (Havana) and the Middle East (possibly Damascus) is already being implemented. By contrast, the future of the industry/sector based TUIs seems to be uncertain.

There has been a serious drop of income following the loss of Eastern European affiliates. However, expenditure has been cut. Secretariat staffing has been slashed; the organisation has moved into alternative premises in Prague; and previous expenditure on travel for Eastern European officials is no longer necessary. WFTU still has important members like the Soviets and the French CGT. Also, it is not without resources, having assets like buildings which it could realise.

The Czech Government has ordered WFTU to move out of Prague by June 1991. WFTU has appealed. Paris, home of the French CGT, is rumoured to be a possible new location.

WFTU still claims to represent 191 million workers worldwide*, and has consultative status at United Nations bodies like the ILO, UNESCO, UNCTAD, FAO and UNIDO. ♦

* The IUF claims WFTU membership is down to 171 million, with only 3 and a half million fully voluntary



Towards worker-controlled internationalism!

A Labour Bulletin CORRESPONDENT with recent experience of international trade unionism argues that most workers of the world know very little about what is done in their name through the organisations of the international trade union movement. She calls for a new international alliance of non-aligned democratic trade union centres, to campaign for a single, unified and accountable trade union international.

The world has gone through dramatic changes in the past five years. With the collapse of communism and the defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, world capitalism seems virtually unchallenged. But if, to paraphrase Mao Zedong, every obstacle presents an opportunity, we can identify some positive features in the current situation.

First, all recent major upheavals have been decisively influenced by mass mobilisations of workers and their families. Mass action in Eastern Europe, the Soviet

Union, China, Latin America, the West Bank/Gaza, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Burma, S. Korea, South Africa, and a number of African countries, has challenged, paralysed or led to the collapse of military regimes, bureaucratic elites, and capitalist governments, regardless of the repressive measures at their disposal.

Second, although economic failure and hardship underlies much of the discontent expressed worldwide, there is also a profound democratic aspiration. Demonstrations everywhere

repeatedly call for justice, social responsibility and accountability.

Third, the rejection of the 'socialist' model as typified by Eastern European states has not led to the wholesale embrace of capitalism by workers. Aspects of life under capitalism do seem attractive from afar, particularly the range and choice of consumer items, but the negative impact on jobs, housing, health care and other social services is becoming obvious. There is a growing popular rejection of the 'free market' solution.



Fourth, after a period of decline trade unions appear to be growing again in numbers and strength in many parts of the world. Many advanced capitalist countries are witnessing an end to the erosion of union membership. Many of the trade union movements in former communist states are asserting their independence or being challenged by more independent formations. New trade union organisations are being formed in countries which lack a tradition of a strong labour organisation, and often where an 'economic miracle' is supposed to have undermined the need for collective activity.

All of these developments mean international trade union solidarity has can no longer be a 'conscience' item on conference agendas. Traditionally solidarity has been seen as a generous 'gift' from more 'advanced' organisations to the needy. There has been very little sense of what the union movements of the South can contribute to worker struggles in the North. And the unions of the South have spent all their energy building links with unions in North America and Europe, and paid very little attention to developing contact with comrades in other countries of the South.

But the power of the multi-

national corporations and finance capital, and the austerity programmes of governments everywhere, mean we have to seek practical solutions which mobilise our potential strength on a world scale. Our strategy should rest on building and linking the power of organised workers which exists in many countries.

So, how do we build and strengthen democratic trade unionism at home and internationally? In this article I will raise a number of criticisms of the ICFTU and WFTU, which are the major trade union international organisations. I will then put forward an argument for a new international alliance of non-aligned and democratic trade unions. I hope that this article will stimulate and contribute to further debate on these issues.

The need for information and accountability

Both the ICFTU and WFTU are extremely sensitive to public scrutiny. Needless to say, this grew out of the Cold War rivalry between the two organisations, but it has also limited the degree to which trade union activists can find out what is being done in their name.

Most internal documentation is classified 'private and confidential'. Of course, this is justified if trade unionists are in danger in their countries and security measures are necessary to protect them. But the main preoccupation seems to be to limit



the information available to 'the other side' - ie, to the rival international. For both organisations the 'other side' also appears to include their own memberships!

The ICFTU and WFTU would both claim that part of the responsibility for explaining what is being done lies with their own affiliated national centres or federations. National centres/federations would then claim that individual union affiliates should bear responsibility for reporting back to members. This is a route begging for a communications breakdown!

In the main, report-backs are done in the international section of conference reports. But a review of these over the last ten years shows that often only general references are made. In fact, the news publications which are produced by the ICFTU and WFTU tend to be self-congratulatory and are certainly not aimed at an activist audience.

Every activist understands the need for financial accountability. Yet even the amounts of money which are at the disposal of the ICFTU and WFTU are treated as secret information, as are the sources of the money (although lately there appears to be some relaxation by the ICFTU). Equally difficult to get hold of is information about how the money is ac-



tually spent.

There is considerable evidence that both the ICFTU and WFTU use money to 'win friends and influence people'. Equally worrying is money spent by ICFTU and WFTU affiliates in the form of direct aid which serves to increase the dependency of union organisations in developing countries. The enthusiasm for this type of unilateral activity by the US union centre, the AFL-CIO, even embarrassed the ICFTU for a time. The ICFTU was forced to distance itself from the AFL-CIO after embarrassing allegations of union-busting and collaboration with governments against genuine workers' organisations.

A retired general secretary once described how he used to play one side off against another. One year he was given a Chevrolet by the AFL-CIO, and the next year a four-week 'medical recuperation holiday' in a Black Sea resort by the Soviet ACCTU!

This would be comical if it were not so serious. The general secretary in question openly admitted that both gifts distracted him from the task of building his organisation. They also fuelled a smear campaign by his government that he was misusing union funds. This publicly discredited trade

unionism.

Some national centres are more secretive than others. When a UK-based charity, War On Want, published the late and deeply committed Don Thompson's book *Where Were You Brother?*, detailing what became known as 'trade union imperialism', both the author and War On Want were treated by the TUC as traitors. Their biggest 'crime', it appears, was to strive for openness and to dare to make this information available to trade union members.

On the other hand, where national centres have attempted to explain their international work, the response from members has been positive, leading to a stronger international consciousness. This contrasts with the cynical view that matters should be kept 'private and confidential', which reinforces the patronising belief that workers are only interested in their pay and conditions. Perhaps more significant is that workers can learn from discussing and reading about each other's struggles and experiences.

The free flow of information is an indispensable aspect of democratic practice, and could serve as a first step in opening up the international trade union organisations.

Independence and democracy

Independent democratic trade unionism is a demand which is put forward most

forcibly by the trade union centres associated with the ICFTU. This demand is also popular with many of the relatively new formations such as CUT in Brazil and COSATU, and those centres such as the CGIL which exist outside of the main world federations. Thus a broad consensus exists across a spectrum of national centres who would argue that trade unionism is most effective if it is independent of the state.

The WFTU until very recently preferred not to elaborate on its view of trade union independence. It has only just started coming to terms with the concept, following the collapse of its 'independent' Eastern European affiliates.

One of the most stinging criticisms made of many national centres sympathetic or affiliated to the WFTU has been that they serve as mere transmission belts for government policy, that they are in effect government-controlled, and dependent upon the state for finance and other benefits. While this description is accurate for many present (and former) WFTU affiliates, it does not paint the whole picture. As the recent miners' strike in the USSR and sectoral disputes elsewhere have illustrated, important groups of workers can and do act independently of both the state and their own bureaucratic union leaderships. Sometimes they have to fight both.

This is an important point to grasp. It underlines the

inter-relationship between independence and internal democracy. Can a trade union movement which is not controlled by its members be truly independent?

Many ICFTU affiliates would proclaim that their independence proves that they are democratic. But for both ICFTU and WFTU affiliates in developed countries, it is on international work that there is least control by members. It is also on international work that there is the greatest reluctance to challenge their own governments' foreign policies.

In the advanced capitalist countries, most national centres/federations receive substantial funds from their governments for trade union education and international work, even when the governments in question are openly hostile to trade unionism. Reagan, Thatcher and Mulroney of the USA, UK and Canada continued to provide finance to national federations while at the same time enacting a range of anti-union legislation. This continues today.

But does such reliance on government funding undermine trade union independence? The ICFTU affiliates in question would doubtless answer "no". They might admit that without this funding they would be less able to provide services to their own members and give assistance to trade unionists in other countries. But, they would argue, what is important is who controls the finance, and who decides

how it is used.

But who does control the finance and decide how it is used? Certainly not the members!

The AFL-CIO made similar claims when it was reported that it was receiving millions of dollars from President Reagan's National Endowment for Democracy fund to use overseas. The same fund was used to support the Contras and to fatally destabilise the Nicaraguan experiment. While the AFL-CIO vigorously denied that there was any government control of how the money should be spent, the fact is that it was used to finance pro-US unions and undermine genuine trade unionism, often by bloody means.

American trade union activists would not have agreed to this if they had known about it, and if they could have exercised control over the AFL-CIO leadership. The lack of information and lack of accountability make it difficult to accept the AFL-CIO argument that it is "independent" when it receives and uses this kind of money. It is clear that no trade union organisation - whether the Soviet ACTTU or the US AFL-CIO - can claim to be independent when it is not democratically controlled and accountable to its members.

A number of AFL-CIO affiliates are fighting to establish the accountability of the federation, particularly of its international work. One



of the lessons they are learning, and which is shared by activists in the UK, is that the trade union bureaucracy which controls the national centre/federation is often a law unto itself. It often monopolises information and controls the appointment of staff and the allocation of resources.

Unless trade union independence is protected by worker control, there will always be a danger of 'behind the scenes' deals being struck which undermine genuine international solidarity. Often international solidarity depends on the adoption of a particular political line or affiliation. It is often those who shout loudest about "independence" who are at the forefront of attempting to undermine the independence of other organisations!

Solidarity with the South African struggle

The one case of international solidarity which took place on terms determined by those who received the support was perhaps in the struggle against apartheid.

One reason for this is that there was a high degree of membership awareness. This was stimulated not by union bureaucrats, but by activists at local level through individual unions and the anti-apartheid movement. This made it more difficult



The main issue around which South African workers received international solidarity was apartheid

Photo: David Vita/Impact Visuals (Afrapix)

for the bureaucracy to operate secretly. COSATU in particular was able to sustain a mass movement in South Africa and at the same time effectively campaign for support throughout the world without being compromised by membership of either the WFTU or ICFTU.

In fact, the support most appreciated by COSATU appears to have come from centres/federations acting independently of either the ICFTU or WFTU, particularly the Dutch and Scandinavians (though they are ICFTU affiliates), and non-aligned organisations such as OATUU and the Italian CGIL, new emergent unions like the Brazilian CUT, and the smaller Commonwealth TUC.

It was the American consumer activist Ralph Nader who said, "There is no such thing as a free lunch". Could

it be that what COSATU appreciated were the offers of solidarity without strings, solidarity based on respect for the independence of COSATU?

The struggle for genuine solidarity

The relationship between trade union movements of the North and South dates back to when colonial governments were in retreat.* Local and often militant 'native' trade unionists were given instruction on 'The Principles of Modern Trade Unionism' by worthy trade union officials sponsored by the retreating colonial power. This kind of 'solidarity' was intended to teach the 'native' unionists a 'responsible' attitude towards the interests of capital after independence.

As the Cold War intensified, trade unions in developing countries were

not left alone for long! Sooner or later, and usually depending upon the pace of the Cold War at regional level, they were made offers that they found hard to refuse.

This is not to say that trade unions in developing countries were blind to the dangers, or that financial support was not desperately needed to help strengthen organisation. But once hooked, an insidious culture soon developed which changed the meaning of solidarity into something quite different. Assistance was provided not on the basis of common class interests (although a convergence of North/South bureaucratic interests often developed!), but on an unwritten pledge of loyalty to the funding organisation.

It was precisely these concerns which encouraged the 'active non-alignment' of COSATU. This position has been sustained despite considerable pressures for more flexibility and pragmatism.

OATUU's struggle for non-alignment

OATUU also had to contend with similar pressures. Many of its affiliates had slipped so deeply into the pockets of international organisations that they feared any disruption of external funding would be fatal. It took a determined campaign spearheaded by the current secretary general to untangle the web of depend-

* The term 'North' refers to the advanced capitalist countries of Europe, North America and Japan; the term 'South' refers to all other countries, including the developing countries and the underdeveloped ones.

ency which suffocated pan-African trade unionism.

Drawing upon his experiences as a past president of the non-aligned Nigeria Labour Congress (still among the largest trade union organisations in the world), he realised that African trade union organisations had to change the way they related to the internationals and donor agencies. Better to risk splitting the African trade union movement than to allow its unchallenged domination by overseas interests to continue, especially in the face of mounting repression, enforced structural adjustment programmes and escalating poverty.

OATUU adopted a policy of discouraging African centres/federations from affiliating to any international union organisation apart from itself. A weighted voting procedure was established within OATUU which favours those centres/federations which follow the policy of non-alignment. At the same time, donor agencies and internationals were persuaded to enter into Co-operation Agreements which provide some safeguards against the misuse of funds and establish guidelines on the type of assistance required.

For the first time in many years, OATUU has achieved a degree of unity which can only strengthen its ability to tackle the many serious problems facing African workers. Of course the cycle of dependency/loyalty has not

been broken entirely, especially as many ICFTU affiliates act unilaterally without reference to the OATUU/ICFTU Co-operation Agreement.

However, this initiative to forge a non-aligned international solidarity based on the common interests of workers is an important breakthrough. It is being closely observed in the Caribbean, Asia and Central and Latin America.

The impact of reduced funds

The revenue generated by membership subscriptions available to northern trade union centres/federations has decreased over the last decade. The British TUC, for example, has shrunk from 12 million to 8.3 million members in that period. Government aid to many northern trade union centres/federations for overseas solidarity programmes has been decreasing in real terms too. Finally, there is a steady drift of what resources do exist away from the South towards Eastern Europe, where the ICFTU in particular hopes to exploit the now almost universal disenchantment with the WFTU.

Instead of encouraging moves towards greater South-South unity, this reduction in funding could actually increase North-South dependency. Trade union centres/federations of the South could be driven to break ranks with their sister organisations to compete for



the decreasing money available from the North.

Indeed, many donor agencies, as well as the ICFTU, have recently declared (despite their previous activities to the contrary) that an essential objective in their assistance to trade unions in developing countries is to encourage "self-reliance". It is remarkably convenient that "self-reliance" should now be to justify a switch in resources away from the South just when it is most needed!

Without doubt, trade union movements in developing countries will continue to require considerable support and finance in their struggle against the conditions which threaten the livelihoods of millions of workers. There is, however, no justification for basing this redistribution of resources on a patron-client relationship.

In the long run, international trade union solidarity actions and programmes can only be effective if they are based on principles which deepen democratic practice and accountability within individual national centres and international organisations of the North and South. If such solidarity helps us to rediscover the common interests of workers round the world, we may yet establish the internationalism which inspired the early pioneers of



the workers' movement.

A new International?

The virtual collapse of the communist bloc and its effect on the WFTU has raised the question of rebuilding a single unified world trade union international. The WFTU, with Soviet support, appears determined to continue, albeit in a trimmed down way, desperately seeking a new role for itself.

The ICFTU, on the other hand (and the ITSs), are busy reallocating resources to strengthen relationships with trade union formations in Eastern Europe. Regular delegations are sent to advise on trade union structures. Solidarnosc in Poland and the new Czech union federation, CKOS, are already affiliates.

What should be the response of non-aligned trade union organisations in this situation?

First, it is clear that international solidarity is going to be crucial to defend the livelihoods of millions of workers against the activities of multinational companies and the austerity and structural adjustment programmes of governments, and to extend trade union and democratic rights.

Second, the absence of accountability and internal democracy within the existing internationals is a major obstacle to ensuring that the

long-term independence of trade unionism is preserved.

Third, despite claims to the contrary, there is little evidence to indicate that the mentality of the Cold War or the Euro-centric view of the world is being challenged within the structures of either the ICFTU or WFTU.

Fourth, the most dramatic advances in trade unionism have invariably been won by trade union movements which can rely on the strength of their own members, and which are prepared to mobilise to pursue their demands.

The issue of whether or not to affiliate to the ICFTU is not the most appropriate question. In fact, it seems highly unlikely that COSATU will change its 'active non-alignment' policy soon. However, the question of ICFTU affiliation may be posed over the next few years. Recently COSATU agreed to participate in the ICFTU Southern African Co-ordinating Committee, and this has fuelled speculation worldwide.

Is affiliation a viable option for organisations like COSATU? The Dutch FNV, and the Swedish, Danish and Norwegian centres/federations, which make up the 'progressive group' within the ICFTU, would argue that the best way to change the ICFTU is to join it. But the 'progressives' themselves only have limited bargaining power within the ICFTU, and this bargaining power is based on specific conditions.

The 'progressive' group has considerable resources at their disposal, inherited from a long period of social-democratic consensus in their countries. These resources are very valuable to the ICFTU, and this gives them the room to manoeuvre.

On the other hand, within the countries of the 'progressive' group, there are large anti-apartheid organisations which enjoy the support of many thousands of trade union activists. If it became known that the 'progressives' were curtailing support for COSATU to pressurise it into affiliating to the ICFTU, shock-waves would be felt from worker-activists in every locality.

The 'progressives' have been able to act flexibly within the ICFTU by balancing these two factors - access to substantial resources to fund ICFTU projects, and real *pressure from below* to maintain good relations with the SA trade union movement.

The progressives have won the space inside the ICFTU to act outside of it in giving support to the SA unions. But the price is that they have to report their actions to the ICFTU Southern Africa Co-ordinating Committee. This means that their work is in a sense co-ordinated through ICFTU structures.

This suits both the old guard within the ICFTU, and especially the bureaucratic apparatus, and the bureaucrats of the 'progressive' group. Both experience press-

ure from their membership to provide solidarity to SA unions. The combination of bilateral solidarity by the 'progressives' with co-ordination through the ICFTU structures helps to contain this pressure, since both can claim credit for the solidarity. In this sense both the conservatives in the ICFTU, and at least a section of the 'progressive' organisations, have a common interest.

At the same time, the conservatives in the ICFTU remain confident that they can contain the 'progressives', while receiving substantial funding from them.

Clearly, COSATU does not have the same bargaining powers as the 'progressives' - but it has other strengths.

COSATU enjoys enormous prestige with worker-activists everywhere, and this is one of its greatest strengths. The ability to link with these layers of activists, both inside and outside the ICFTU, would be seriously undermined by affiliation, unless COSATU explicitly stated that it intended to challenge decades of Cold War practice. But sooner or later it would be acting alone, and vulnerable to accusations of biting the hand that feeds it!

A far better strategy is to maintain links with those activists within ICFTU affiliates, and strengthen the relationship with those forces prepared to fight for genuine international solidarity worldwide.

On a continental level,

COSATU is committed to strengthening OATUU, which itself has only recently emerged from the quagmire of affiliation problems. A concerted input from COSATU could help the organisation to emerge as a powerful tool for South-South solidarity, and challenge the domination of the Northern centres/federations over trade union activity.

So the question is, not whether to affiliate to ICFTU, but rather - What are the objective needs of the workers' movement worldwide in the current situation? How can we contribute to the growth of a genuine international solidarity which is based on our trade union principles of equality, accountability, independence and unity in action?

By posing the question in this manner, we can escape falling into the sectarian trap of placing the organisational 'needs' of the internationals before the needs of the workers of the world.

The new emergent and largely non-aligned trade union movements such as COSATU, CUT, OATUU, KMU, and others are potentially in a powerful bargaining position. Their strength includes the support of extensive networks of worker activists in the established unions of Europe and North America. If their strengths are shared and consolidated, the non-aligned trade union movements, together with union activists



within the unions affiliated to the ICFTU and WFTU, could play a decisive role in campaigning for the following:

- the establishment of an international democratic trade union alliance which brings together all those centres/federations and regional organisations who agree on the need for a single, unified, democratic and accountable world federation, and who are prepared to openly campaign for it;
- the free flow and exchange of information about international solidarity assistance and the utilisation of resources;
- the planning, resourcing and implementing of specific campaigns reflecting the needs of the working class internationally.

This approach would establish a position of collective strength from which the non-aligned movements could engage in a dialogue with existing world bodies and their affiliates. This would be a logical development from 'active non-alignment' towards *worker-controlled internationalism*. I believe this approach is far more likely to be successful than any project of "entering the internationals to democratise from within". ☆

the *practice* of *solidarity*

ACTWU vice-president JOHN HUDSON describes the strong union-to-union solidarity built between the SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) in the US.

The organising campaign was not going well. Courtaulds, a British textile multinational, was getting the upper hand through numerous unfair labour practices at its Virginia plant in the US, which ACTWU was trying to organise in 1987.

ACTWU contacted unions representing Courtaulds workers around the world, asking them to send letters to the company protesting its tactics. Unions in England, France and Italy answered our call. But National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) shopstewards at Courtaulds in Durban, South Africa decided they should do more.

Led by chief steward and veteran unionist Andrew Joyisa, Courtaulds workers declared a ban on overtime until the Virginia election and pledged to go on strike if we lost the election and called on them for further support. We didn't win the Courtaulds election, but Courtaulds workers did win a new respect for the potential

'Through cultural, ideological and practical cross-fertilisation we increasingly function as virtually one union - or one movement - with one agenda. We are working to break down barriers of culture, politics or narrow national concerns that might divide us. Supporting a struggle of textile workers across the ocean thus becomes as natural as supporting one across town. While we are still in the early stages of this process, we see our solidarity as a contribution to building unity among clothing and textile workers worldwide.'

- John Hudson

power of solidarity.

Two years later the first ACTWU delegation to South Africa visited workers at the Hextex woollens mill in Wor-

cester in the Western Cape, who were making plans for what they expected to be a very difficult negotiation. ACTWU responded much as we would to a strike of our own members. We undertook an international pressure campaign, threatening product boycotts against suppliers and sanctions against Hextex. And we raised over \$25 000 to support the strikers from our locals and individual members.

A few months after the strike we were the guests of honour at ACTWU-SACTWU (by then NUTW had merged with several other unions to form SACTWU) victory celebration at the Hextex plant. We *toyi-toyed* into the afternoon, well after the end of the lunch hour, singing a song workers had composed during the strike: "Viva ACTWU-SACTWU Alliance!"

**Building one movement,
one agenda**
Solidarity between South Af-

rican and North American clothing and textile workers has evolved over the years to respond to the challenges we face in a mobile, labour-intensive industry. The stakes are high. Textile and clothing employs tens of millions worldwide. Clothing and textile is still often, as in the US, the largest industrial employer in many developed countries, providing crucial jobs for new immigrants and the working poor. At the same time, this sector is often the corner-stone of industrialisation in developing countries. But whenever wages are pushed upwards, because of labour scarcity or united worker activity, manufacturers move on to the next low wage haven.

These factors provide the basis for both competition and cooperation among industrial workers in different parts of the world. The only effective response by workers to the increasing integration of the world economy is to organise internationally. We must struggle to ensure that economic integration improves the lives of workers in the Third World, rather than impoverishing workers in the industrialised world. Labour must co-ordinate its strategies, and fight together for international fair labour standards and trade union rights. We must fight for high wage growth and development strategies, rather than low wage strategies. We must fight for national industrial policies that help our



ACTWU visits SACTWU: from left. Freddy Magugu (SACTWU), Jack Sheinkman (ACTWU), Lionel October, John Copelyn and Edgar Blaauw (all of SACTWU)

Photo: SACTWU

national industries compete on non-labour cost factors such as product quality, design content, and market responsiveness. We must co-ordinate organising and bargaining strategies on both company and industry levels. And we must fight for trade practices that allow for fair and orderly adjustment in developed countries, while sharing production opportunities, markets and jobs with developing countries.

ACTWU has worked with the South African Clothing & Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) and its predecessor unions over the last ten years to build a solidarity that can help to address these challenges. We have learned that solidarity is most effective when it is linked to the general task of union building. Solidarity has thus come to mean our entire "union" of interests and needs in the process of developing social and

political unionism. Supporting a struggle of textile workers across the ocean thus becomes as natural as supporting one across town.

While still in the early stages, we see our solidarity as a contribution to building unity among clothing and textile workers worldwide.

Origins of solidarity

The relationship between ACTWU and SACTWU evolved from the desire of the new generation of unions in South Africa to build international solidarity through 'union to union' ties.

NUTW and ACTWU representatives met in international meetings in 1979, and established regular contact. ACTWU was motivated primarily by a desire to further contribute to the fight against apartheid.

The first real opportunity for solidarity action presented itself in the

monumental NUTW battle to organise the Frame Group, with over 20 000 workers. The Frame struggle was similar in its size, length and impact on the fortunes of NUTW to ACTWU's struggle at JP Stevens in the 1970s. ACTWU worked with other textile unions around the world to pressure Frame into recognition through international industry links.

Then, when health and safety became a key organising issue, ACTWU sent its Health and Safety Director Eric Frumin to South Africa for two weeks to help establish brown lung and steward training programmes.

Frumin returned to ACTWU enthralled by NUTW's militancy and worker democracy. He shared his experience in ACTWU meetings over the following year, giving our members their first taste of South African unionism. We exchanged educational materials and research on companies that operated in both countries.

In early 1985 NUTW President Nelson Mthombeni visited ACTWU as part of a tour of South African trade unionists sponsored by the New York Labour Committee Against Apartheid, which ACTWU had been instrumental in founding. Many ACTWU members then became more involved in anti-apartheid work, and particularly in supporting their union brothers and sisters. ACTWU locals in some cities helped establish anti-

apartheid committees.

During this period ACTWU, at the request of NUTW, ran a 'corporate campaign' against Tidwell, a US company. Tidwell had set up a factory in the Ciskei, where trade unions were banned. NUTW was unable to make inroads organising Tidwell workers. ACTWU put together a coalition of labour, civil rights groups and churches that was able to mount sufficient public pressure to force Tidwell to close down in the Ciskei.

The maturing of solidarity

At an International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF) meeting in 1987, not long after the Courtaulds campaign, ACTWU and NUTW leaders had their first detailed discussions about formalising a solidarity programme. However, we shared few common multinational employers which would have lent themselves to co-ordinated strategies. Moreover, the 1986 US sanctions legislation prohibited the import of South African textiles. Our focus was therefore more on global developments in the industry, which promised to heavily impact both of us. NUTW was specifically concerned that South African industry, which had seen wages rise dramatically due to labour activity, was starting to move into low-wage southern African nations. That region promised to eventually attract Western investors as

well. A proposal to the ITGLWF to establish an African regional presence was our first specific collaboration in an international body.

Our interaction and consultation on a range of other union matters was having a positive impact on building both our unions. There was a growing awareness among the members of both unions that brothers and sisters in far-distant lands were becoming part of our union life, and were crucial allies in confronting the global challenges that faced us.

We also believed we could benefit from more systematically sharing our union experiences. ACTWU was the product of a merger of four unions, and NUTW was about to enter similar mergers. NUTW was therefore interested in our experience with more complex union structures and internal management issues.

ACTWU felt that it could learn from the highly democratic and participatory structures that NUTW and other COSATU unions had built. A new generation of ACTWU leaders were coming into their own. They saw their mission as rebuilding working class militancy, and the South African situation had many useful parallels. Moreover, among unions in other countries with whom ACTWU had contact, NUTW was by far the most willing and able to build a multi-dimensional relationship.

Both unions agreed that di-

rect interaction among workers was the most important vehicle for building solidarity. A plan for regular delegations was outlined. In 1988 ACTWUSA President Amon Ntuli and General Secretary John Copelyn toured ACTWU affiliates for three weeks. They toured shops, observed negotiations and organising campaigns, participated in steward training programs, and met at length with our departments.

ACTWU members were fascinated to hear about conditions under apartheid in South Africa and the struggle for change. But basic workplace and union problems were the main focus. The emphasis on class issues stressed the similarities rather than the differences of our situations, and demonstrated that the job of building workers power was much the same, whether the political context was apartheid or Reaganism. Ntuli surprised many ACTWU members when he observed that while conditions for American workers were generally better outside the factory, they were often worse *inside*, in terms both conditions of work and employer resistance to unions.

This tour reinforced the understanding of international solidarity as an extension of shopfloor solidarity. Our members' passion for contributing to the fight against apartheid was certainly strengthened. But it also became clear that we were not simply giving

charity to ACTWUSA. One ACTWU member said: "I expected to hear about a poor, struggling little union. But they're the fourth biggest textile union in the world. They could teach us a thing or two about organising!"

ACTWU was then invited to send a delegation to attend an ACTWUSA congress in 1989 and tour ACTWUSA branches. For most ACTWUSA members, we were their first foreigners. But ACTWUSA members embraced us as "comrades" in their struggle, and pledged to stand with us in ours.

Organic solidarity

In February 1990 ACTWU and SACTWU agreed on a Solidarity Programme to guide our relationship into the future. We organised our solidarity work into five categories: Basic Solidarity, Worker to Worker Solidarity, Local to Local Solidarity, Department to Department Solidarity and International Solidarity.

Two SACTWU leaders then visited our national convention in Miami in June 1990, followed by a national tour of ACTWU locals. Work is underway to match up each of the 31 SACTWU branches with an ACTWU local or joint board. Future 'worker to worker' delegations will be organised around these local ties.

SACTWU organiser John Eagles spent two months working in an ACTWU organising campaign in Virginia. ACTWU president Jack

Sheinkman toured SACTWU branches in early 1991, and organiser Eddie DeJesus will participate in a SACTWU training conference in late April. Further staff exchanges are being discussed involving organisers, researchers and corporate campaign operatives. SACTWU organisers have been invited to work in key ACTWU organising campaigns. Corporate campaign staff are investigating the use in South Africa of the various strategies of non-workplace pressure ('corporate campaigns') we have developed in the US. In recent months ACTWU, in co-ordination with its Amalgamated Bank, has been assisting in securing bridge funding for SACTWU's co-operative sewing venture in Durban, Zenzeleni Clothing.

We are also starting to compare notes on our respective needs for national industrial policies that encourage our industries to be competitive on non-wage factors such as quality, design and market responsiveness.

Solidarity is indeed becoming both the creator and the result of conscious social unionism. We work together on problem solving in the building of our separate unions, we refine our common language, and in doing so we strengthen our ability to confront global industry issues. The next frontier is to expand this model of organic solidarity to clothing and textile workers in other countries. ☆

Casualisation and sub-contracting: employer weapons against unions

More and more workers in South Africa are being employed as casual, subcontracted or part-time workers. This development poses a challenge to the trade union movement. New divisions are opening up in the workforce, and the job security of union members is being threatened by the increase in the numbers of non-permanent workers.

'Subcontracting': challenge to trade union gains

Diluting the ranks of permanent, unionised workers with large numbers of highly mobile subcontracted workers, who are very difficult to unionise, is designed to undermine the overall power and influence of trade unions. The following report on labour contracting firms was written by GILTON KLERCK and the TRADE UNION RESEARCH PROJECT (TURP).

Subcontracting is an indirect form of employment of groups of workers by companies through the use of labour contracting firms. These firms are directly responsible for selecting, hiring, often

even transporting, and paying the groups of workers that they 'deliver' to factories and plants under the terms of their own contracts with the companies.

Companies hire labour

contractors when they need groups of workers for specific kinds of work, or periods of time. Such subcontracted workers tend to be used in defined areas of work, such as in the canteens in large plants. Or they are hired as a group for specific purposes, such as clearing a building site before construction begins.

Thus, subcontracted workers are employed in workplaces which are neither owned nor controlled by their own direct employers. They are therefore subject to two systems of dependency and control. Such workers are dependent on the labour contractor for their access to jobs and for their wages, and

upon the client company for their work. Both their immediate contractors and the bosses of the companies where they work treat them as 'their' employees. These workers have to cope with the demands and disciplines of two sets of bosses

Subcontracted workers are different to contract workers. The latter are directly employed on legally binding terms for a predetermined period of time, often renewable/extendable, by agreement between employer and worker. As such, the terms and conditions of their employment are accessible to the scrutiny and demands of trade unions organising in that work place.

The conditions of employment of subcontracted workers need to come under the same forms of union monitoring as those of contract workers. However, the subcontracted workers and their direct contractors are often attached to plants for too short a period of time for this to be easy to achieve. Also company bosses can disclaim knowledge of, or responsibility for, the wages and employment conditions of such subcontracted workers, and refuse to discuss them with the unions in their plants.

'Operations of labour contractors

The majority of the labour contractors surveyed seem to have started business in the mid-1970's and have shown steady expansion since. The

manager of a firm which contracts out cleaning staff reported that, "Our average growth rate has been 20% a year since 1968. As a specialised industry we must increase."

In this period a growing range of jobs have been opened up for the employment of subcontracted labour. These include cleaning staff and security guards, maintenance and gardening, and meal catering. Labour contractors are now even supplying office staff, drivers, machine operators, and semi-skilled workers and artisans.

Some also offer a wide spectrum of skilled labour (such as computer programmers for employment on a short contractual basis, for example to replace employees on leave, to bolster the size of the work force when site inspections are about to be carried out, or during work over load situations.

Labour contractors tend to operate in their own specialised areas, but even so there is competition between them to offer competitive prices to companies wishing to hire temporary workers. Contractors have to offer attractive deals, while also ensuring that their quotes cover their own operating expenses and yield some profits. They have a powerful incentive to drive down their labourers' wages as far as they can.

Labour contractors therefore aim to recruit amongst

the most needy and vulnerable sectors of the population. As the manager of a firm contracting temporary manual labour said, "I would never work for these wages, but with all this unemployment there are so many applicants that we can pick out the cream of the crop."

In addition to taking advantage of large pools of unemployed, labour contractors recruit amongst particularly vulnerable social groups such as women, people with no skills or experience, migrants from the rural areas, and immigrants from neighbouring countries.

Most contractors are quite clear as to why workers take up such insecure temporary employment with them at very low wages. As the manager of a security guard firm stated:

"They do not choose. They have no choice, simply because the employment situation is so poor." Another labour contractor hiring unskilled day workers declared: "Unskilled contract Africans, I don't think they have a choice really, as piece work comes along, they take it."

Motivations for companies to use subcontracted labour

The main reasons why this form of employment is being used more and more in South Africa are as follows:

1. **Factories can respond** to fluctuations in production without having to meet the costs of employing a large permanent work force. They

can make rapid changes in the size of their work force by calling in teams of subcontracted labour only when needed. For example, one oil refinery was able to supplement its permanent work force of about 700 with up to 1 500 subcontracted workers.

2. Client companies are also spared the costs of time-consuming calculations and administrative problems by passing them onto the contracting firm. Part of management's supervisory and personnel functions can also be placed on the shoulders of the labour contractor. As one labour contractor put it: "They don't have to hire and fire. They don't have to establish if the guy is good or not...They also don't have the headaches with the Industrial Council, and all the other bits and pieces that are involved, which is all very costly."

3. By frequently changing the labour contractors they hire, company managers also create competition between them and in so doing ensure 'competitive' rates for a proportion of the workers they employ. In this way they are reinforcing the lowering of wages caused by competition amongst unemployed workers themselves.

4. Subcontracting also enables management to evade non-wage demands, such as pensions and provident funds, medical aid schemes, and so on, by making them the 'responsibility' of the labour contractors. These, in turn, can use the highly im-

permanent nature of the jobs they offer to evade these costs.

5. The hiring and firing of employees is not as difficult for managers where workers are 'subcontracted'. It is simply a matter of extending or cancelling a service contract. This avoids the types of dissatisfaction - and even industrial action - that can arise with permanent workers. One labour contractor pointed out that "lay-offs are both costly and damaging to employee moral and company prestige."

6. Routine and repetitive jobs, requiring very little skill and offering little or no advancement opportunities are offered to temporary subcontracted workers. In the words of one labour contractor: "A permanent employee in such a position is apt to become quickly bored and dissatisfied. Temporary employees can be used for these jobs....[this] can eliminate dissatisfaction, costly absenteeism, and [staff] turn over when permanent employees are assigned to these tasks..."

7. In terms of health and safety, subcontracted workers carry out the most dangerous work in the plant. So while organised workers negotiate health and safety agreements, and refuse to do dangerous work, this does not mean that the workplace becomes any safer. Subcontracted labour does these tasks.

8. By creating two layers of workers - the permanent, relatively well paid and secure;

and the temporary, low paid and insecure, management can create a divide in the workforce which makes united action less likely. One labour contractor described this tendency in the following terms: "I would suggest that temporary workers are not really considered or seen as part of 'the team' because their salary is not paid by the company." A factory supervisor put it in the following words: "These (subcontracted) workers are not allowed to become part of the furniture."

9. Even where permanent workers and trade union organisers are conscious of the need to organise subcontracted labourers, the highly impermanent nature of their presence in any one work place makes this extremely difficult. This means that sizeable proportions of the work force can be kept ununionised. It is very difficult for the unions to establish relations with and organise such workers. And it is the deliberate policy of labour contractors to keep out unionists: "Everyone is having problems with the trade unions and we are very strict about unions."

10. Above all, it is evident from the words of labour contractors and from the way they operate, that one of the main motivations for company management in using subcontracted workers, is their usefulness in strike breaking. Or as the manager of one labour contracting firm put it : "...big companies

are interested in hiring us to use contract labour, under the blanket of the Industrial Council, so they don't have to put up with the unions. The big ship-building companies, I can tell you now, will never use permanent labour again. They gave me all their files and marked the problem-makers. That's the name of the game. Don't cause trouble if you want a job."

The availability of such workers for such a role relates to their work situations but also to characteristics that derive from their broader social and employment situation.

Difficult to organise

The situation and attitudes of subcontracted workers themselves can make them difficult to organise. There are some key characteristics of workers involved in 'subcontracted' forms of employment that are of significance - and danger - to the trade union movement in South Africa.

- There is great competition amongst unemployed and unskilled workers to be hired by labour contractors and therefore they are more likely to accept extremely low wages. This has wider implications for other workers.
- Their employment is mostly very temporary. Thus they have to be constantly

careful to satisfy the labour contractor, or they will not be taken on for others jobs. Such insecurity and extreme dependency tends to make such workers very passive.

- Also, they usually work in rapidly changing groups, so there is very little opportunity to build up a sense, and practices, of group solidarity in relation to their immediate employers.
- Furthermore, they do not often stay very long at any one work place, so that is it very difficult to build up a sense of identity with the permanent workers where they are temporarily employed.
- This is reinforced by attitudes that are quite common among the more permanent workers. They often see temporary subcontracted workers as a threat to their jobs or to the wages and conditions they have managed to achieve.
- Subcontracted workers are moved around very often to different work sites, so it is very difficult for trade union organisers to reach and organise them, or even to learn about their conditions of employment.
- Workers employed by labour contractors are accustomed to being rapidly moved around as groups from work place to work

place. They can thus - knowingly or unknowingly - be easily used for strike breaking.*

These last two characteristics are very clearly the major motivations for company managers turning more and more to utilising this form of labour.

Danger for unions

There is a close link between subcontracting and the advanced technology and management techniques of 'post-fordism'. While the 'good side' of post-fordism is that it creates a multi-skilled workforce, this does not mean that unskilled labour is a thing of the past. Big companies simply subcontract these tasks.

Also, subcontracted labour allows management the luxury of using Just-in-Time (JIT) methods. Any problems or unforeseen peaks and slacks in work can be accommodated with subcontracted labour "just-in-time"!

Subcontracted labour complements deregulation. Not only does deregulation create the space for subcontractors to flourish without constraints, but subcontracting labour is also a way of deregulating part of the workforce in a company, by removing these workers from regulation or protection by trade unions. Subcontracted labour could create serious divisions in the labour movement.

* As one labour contractor put it : "I have done jobs in companies where workers are striking. When my guys come to me and say that they have problems getting home. I said 'No problem, then just get another job, this is not a problem I am making. You must work if you want the money and live with these problems, which are the fault of the system I live in, not mine'.

Unless unions address this issue, their membership will consist of a diminishing number of highly skilled workers, who enjoy all the benefits of stable employment, while masses of workers only have access to subcontracted and other super-exploitative forms of work.

Already we are seeing a sharp increase in the number of subcontracted workers, and this will increase. One approach unions can adopt is to negotiate the conditions of employment of subcontracted workers on an industry-wide basis in centralised bargaining forums. ☆

during slack periods. At the same time, retailers want to be able to expand rapidly the number of their workers to respond to increases in trading. This, according to management, is the most important reason for the large number of casual and part-time workers employed in retailing.

Imraan Volodia is at the Trade Union Research Project (TURP) at University of Natal, Durban. This article is based on research carried out for SACCAWU in 1989 and 1990.

Flexible labour gives management a capacity for less costly as well as rapid labour force adjustments. A flexible labour force enables managers to hire and fire workers, according to their changing labour needs, without having to meet the costs (such as severance pay and pension pay-outs) that would be involved in reducing the number of permanent workers.

The approval by the authorities of extended shopping hours has increased the need for flexible forms of labour. Management sees flexible labour as a very satisfactory way of coping with evening and weekend shopping. Also, management sees casuals as an answer to permanent workers' opposition to working during extended shopping hours and over weekends.

Most casuals are employed over weekends. Casual workers are also used

Increase in casual and temporary labour: the case of shopworkers

IMRAAN VOLODIA reports on an investigation into casual and temporary labour in the retail industry.*

The retail industry in South Africa employs a large number of casual and temporary workers, together referred to as 'flexible labour'. The table below shows the number of flexible workers and full-time workers in the retail trade in South Africa in March 1990¹. According to these figures, over 25% of all workers employed in retailing are flexible workers. While this is a startling figure, casuals and part-timers form even larger proportions of the workforce in some of the major retailers. For example, one of the large supermarket chains employs

a total of 23 444 shop-floor workers. These consist of 338 part-timers, 8 343 casuals and 14 763 full-time workers³. For this retailer, over one third of the workforce consists of flexible labour.

Management motivations for using flexible labour

Trading patterns in the retail industry change all the time. There are peak and slack shopping periods in each day and every week. There are also periods of increased trade during the year, such as towards Christmas. These trading patterns create an incentive for management to trim the permanent and full-time workforce to the bare minimum, so that they do not have to pay many workers

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Shopworkers: victims of casualisation

Photo: Jabu/Labour Bulletin

for packing and filling stores at night. Only casual labour is used for these purposes, called "twilight filling" in the industry. As one manager put it, "it is becoming more difficult to get workers to agree to work extended hours and this is forcing us to employ casuals."

Some managers do admit that employing flexible labour can be a useful way of protecting themselves against strikes and stayaways. When permanent workers go on strike, management feels that stores can operate with flexible labour.

One manager admitted that, although it was not company policy, many store managers employ casuals as a means of "keeping unions away". He stated that his company would oppose unionisation of casuals because, when strikes paralyse the company, casuals are the only way of carrying on with

business.

Productivity was also mentioned as an important issue by managers. They felt that flexible workers are more productive than their permanent counterparts. As they are employed for shorter periods and only when their labour is needed, casuals are eager to be productive in order to secure further part-time employment or even gain permanent jobs.

Management not following by legal regulations

The Wage Determination applying to the retail industry states that casual workers must be paid at a premium. This should, in theory, discourage the use of casual labour. Managers see this as an infringement on their right to employ labour of their choice at the going rates. Most managers also feel that flexible workers (in particu-

lar casuals as defined by the Wage Determination) are not a cheap form of labour.

In practice, many retailers do not abide by the regulations laid down by the Wage Determination. A human resources manager at a major retailer admitted that, although it is illegal, many store managers employ casual workers for longer periods and at wages lower than those set in the Wage Determination.

In fact, there are widespread irregularities in the industry. Many 'casuals' who were interviewed work more than the regulated three days per week. Some casuals work a full 45 hour week. Also, many casuals are not paid according to the set wage rates.

Needs of casual and part-time workers

Investigation shows that most workers who are em-

ployed as casuals and part-timers in the retail industry are middle-aged women who desperately need fulltime employment. Casual and part-time work is seen as a means to a fulltime permanent job. Many fulltime workers at the major retailers had first worked at the company concerned as a casual or part-time worker.

At one retail outlet studied, all the casuals were university students. This was by agreement between the management and workers in the store. The workers felt that it was necessary for their children at schools and universities to have access to casual employment. At the same time, it was important that casual workers did not pose a threat to the job security of the permanent workers. For that reason, it was agreed that students could not exceed 30% of the workforce.

While part-time workers receive most of the benefits associated with permanent employment, casual workers receive no fringe benefits at all. They are not paid bonuses, they are not entitled to any leave. Casual workers complained about having extremely insecure jobs and difficult working conditions, irregular hours, no stable family life and so on.

The dangers for the union movement

Clearly, the increase in flexible labour will affect the trade unions' ability to use the strike weapon. In retail-

ing, a strike is an extremely powerful weapon because it is difficult for retailers to sit it out.

Strikes have been a feature of bargaining in the retail industry, and shopworkers have made substantial gains through use of this weapon. However, flexible labour provides management with a quick and dependable source of alternative labour. This could undermine the capacity of permanent workers to take successful strike action.

More importantly however, the growth of flexible labour is dividing the workforce. On the one hand, there are the permanent, better paid workers with relatively stable and secure jobs.

On the other hand, there are casual and part-time workers who earn low wages and do not enjoy the benefits of secure employment.

This division between relatively secure and better paid workers and insecure and poorly paid workers should be a particular concern for the union movement. In the retail industry, casual workers are seen as second class workers by many permanent workers, some of whom are union members and even shop-stewards.

Sometimes, however, a better relationship exists between permanent and casual workers. For example, at one store, casual workers came out on strike in support of a permanent worker who had been dismissed.

Conclusion

While this article focuses on the retail sector, the use of casual, temporary and subcontracted labour is on the increase throughout industry. The growth in flexible labour must be seen in the light of the economic problems facing capital. During a recession employers not only retrench workers, but also try to alter the way in which work is carried out. Thus, in the retail industry, management is attempting to maintain as flexible a labour force as possible.

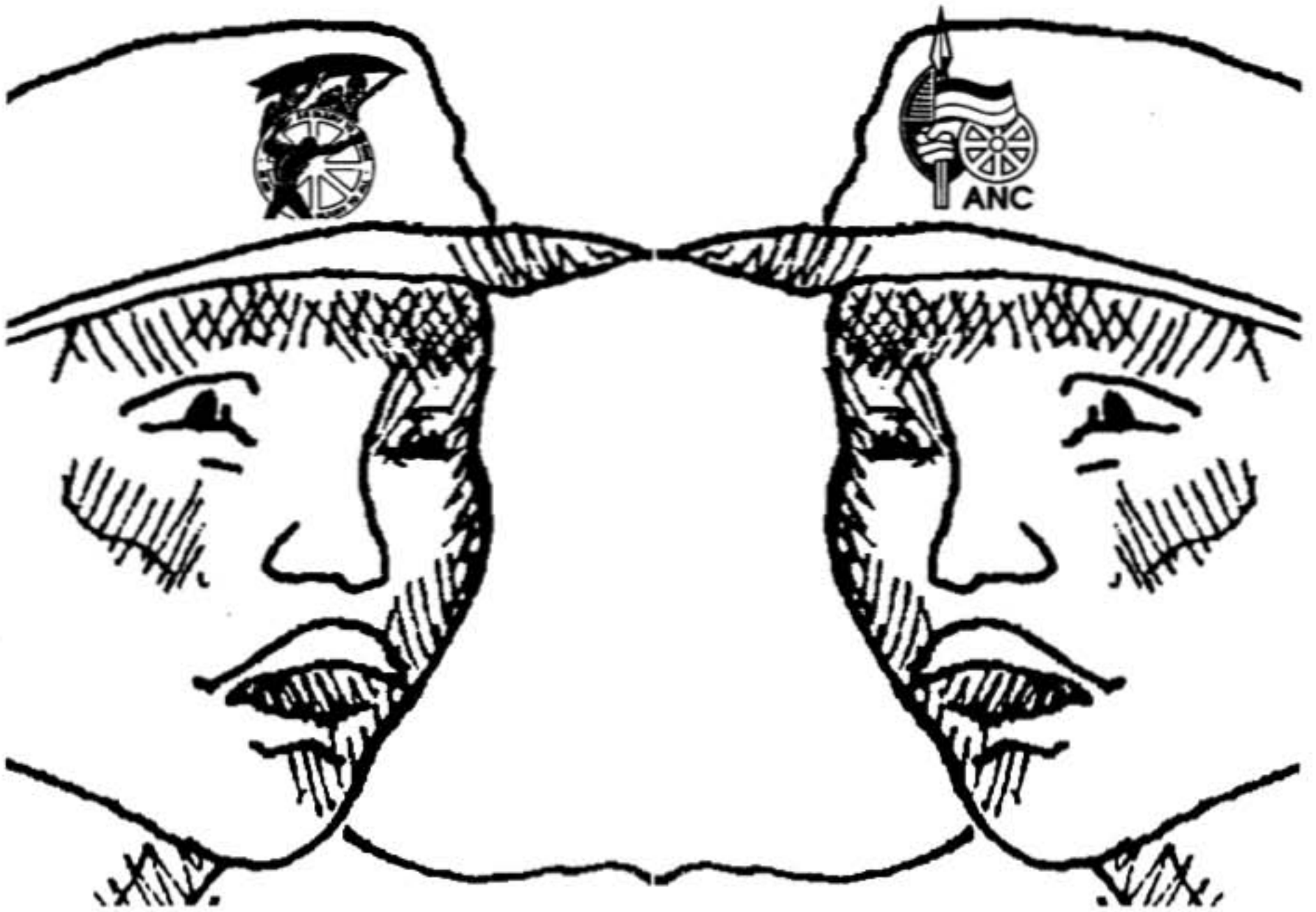
The increasing use of flexible labour is also the employers' response to the gains made by trade unions in wages and conditions of employment. The dangers that flexibility poses in terms of the job security, strength in dealing with the bosses and unity of the working class should clearly be a major concern for unions. However, developing a response to these initiatives by capital is a difficult issue which needs to be debated within the union movement. ☆

NOTES

(1) It has been impossible to find statistics showing the growth over time in the employment of non-permanent forms of labour in retailing. Central Statistical Service has only recently differentiated between full-time and other forms of employment in the retail statistics.

(2) Central Statistical Service, July 1990

(3) Interview with manager of a large retail chain. The figures are for December 1988, and exclude students employed for Christmas period.



Preparing ourselves for permanent opposition?

A reply to Copelyn and Zikalala by JEREMY CRONIN, who makes the point that: 'This is not an "official" SACP response to Copelyn and Zikalala. The views expressed here coincide, more or less (I would like to believe), with those of many of my Party comrades. But my views are not "the Party line", any more than the views of Copelyn and Zikalala represent some official COSATU or general trade union perspective. The debate is open and it cuts across organisational affiliations. So much the better.'

In the last issue of the *South African Labour Bulletin* (March 1991) John Copelyn ("Collective bargaining: a base for transforming industry") and Snuki Zikalala

("Overlapping leadership in alliance partners") both defend the need for an independent trade union movement in a changing South Africa. They also both

fiercely attack overlapping leaderships ("the wearing of two or more hats") within the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance.

I agree absolutely with

them that trade union independence is of the greatest importance. Unfortunately, many of their arguments are so weak, they are likely to undermine the very cause they seek to defend.

While there may be some difference of emphasis or outlook between Copelyn and Zikalala, one cannot help noticing the very important points of convergence between them. Perhaps the most basic convergence is the fact that they both approach the issue of overlapping leadership (the 'two hats' debate) with the same fundamental assumptions about wider political issues.

Trade-off at Sun City

Copelyn's article is a revised version of a paper first presented to the Annual Convention of the Institute for Personnel Management at Sun City in October last year. I am not going to argue that trade unionists should never travel to Sun City to speak to Annual Conferences of personnel managers. The real question is: What do they do when they get there?

Copelyn uses the occasion to brief personnel managers about the debate within COSATU on trade union independence, overlapping leaderships with the ANC and SACP, and related issues. He reassures his audience that his own view that "union leadership cannot serve two masters, whether those masters are in alliance or not ... is gaining such ideo-



Jeremy Cronin: 'The debate is open.....so much the better.'

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

logical hegemony that I believe it is very likely to grow into the dominant position within the union movement" (p31). But the emphasis is on "very likely" - it is not yet certain.

Why is Copelyn so generously sharing all this information with management? He is using our debate as a point of leverage with them. He is taking it upon himself to sketch the outlines to his Sun City audience of a possible trade-off between unions and management. He is trying to convince personnel managers of the need for national collective bargaining.

Unless there is national collective bargaining, he warns them, unions "will have to focus their attempts on developing close ties with political parties which will give them access to state power" (p32).

In other words, give us national collective bargaining

and do yourselves (and John Copelyn in his own particular ideological battle against the wearing of many hats) a favour. Otherwise, organised workers might start turning even more solidly to the ANC and SACP. If you don't want organised workers spearheading a political challenge for state power, then you had better make some labour relations concessions.

In the old days, communists (and others on the left) too easily used terms like "class collaboration". I will resist that temptation here. But what is certainly true is that Copelyn has a very limiting and disarming conception of political power, and specifically of the state and workers' relation to it.

The working class and state power

Copelyn correctly criticises the fixation, by socialists in the past, on the state as virtually the only instrument "for transforming the quality of life of workers and the oppressed", and he links this fixation to the crisis of East European socialism. I agree with him that it is important, by contrast, to give "a substantially greater role to the independent organisations of civil society - such as trade unions" (p33).

But it does not follow from this that workers should now abandon the contest for state power, or that a weak state is more desirable than a strong, democratic state that is able to carry through its

democratically mandated policies. For Copelyn, however, like Leon Louw, the only issue of concern when it comes to state power is how to limit it. The ideal state for Copelyn is little more than a rubber stamp "enacting in law the agreements reached by organised labour (with bosses) through collective bargaining" (p32).

Totally absent from this incredibly limited and technical conception of the state is any notion that the state organises and defends class power (of course, in complex and often mediated ways). In the long run, in our situation, the state will either continue to operate in the interests of the bosses, or it will become a means for defending and advancing the interests of the working masses.

Copelyn seems not to believe that workers could one day wield democratic state power, and that their state could work *in conjunction with* their independent mass democratic formations to smash the system of wage slavery once and for all. His conception of workers' (and their trade unions') relationship to the state is one of perpetual opposition.

Twice in a decade

Zikalala presents a very similar, but even more shallow view of politics and the state. "According to American sociologists," he tells us, "people get involved in politics once every five years when they cast their vote, or

at times when legislation affecting their lives is being passed" (p45).

That might be a fair description of the highly depoliticised situation prevailing in the United States. (George Bush, for instance, was elected president by a pathetic 23% of potential voters in what was nevertheless described as "a landslide election victory").

But for Zikalala this sad state of affairs *is simply accepted as a model for what normal politics universally is all about!* "...the political struggle is parliamentary where workers go once every five years to vote either ANC, SACP, Nationalist Party or for other political parties" (p45). At least Zikalala is candid. He has an avowedly bourgeois, and a very conservative bourgeois, understanding of politics.

He continues: "In South Africa after we have achieved our goal of non-racial democracy, we have to uplift the living standards of our people. This can only be done by trade unions persuading the employers to use part of the surplus value for the benefit of the workers."

Why *only* trade unions? How about using democratic state power (including an independent and enlightened judiciary) in conjunction with trade unions, consumer bodies, civics, an independent and campaigning progressive press, and a host of other forms of institutional and organised mass pressure?

And, more decisively, how about progressively abolishing wage slavery altogether? That thought is simply unthinkable for Zikalala. Indeed, he compares the supposedly twice only in a decade character of politics with "Worker-employer struggle (which) is permanent". The objective of socialist struggle is not to perpetuate that struggle, but to abolish employers.

Both Copelyn and Zikalala have a limited, entirely negative and permanently oppositionist view of politics and the state. The working class, organised into trade unions, becomes just another lobby.

Political parties and the state bureaucracy

Another and related point of convergence between Copelyn and Zikalala is their failure to distinguish between political parties and state bureaucracy. In this, ironically, they are uncritically repeating one of the great errors of Eastern European socialism.

The present crisis of socialism is linked not only to the collapse of mass democratic movements into the state bureaucracy, but also to a similar conflation of ruling communist parties with the bureaucracy.

According to Zikalala: "A political party...acts through the institutions of the state and local authority. It is involved in parliamentary politics" (p43). This may well be the case. *But this*

does not mean that a political party in power should be indistinguishable from state institutions, or that out of power it should be no more than an electoral machine.

This is a crucial point, and it relates to one of the absolutely central issues of the present South African situation. As we rebuild a mass ANC and a relatively large SACP what are we trying to achieve? Are we simply building launching pads for MPs, or infrastructure for budding state bureaucrats now waiting impatiently in the wings?

The ANC and the SACP that we are building must be formations with strong internal democracy. They should have powerful grass-roots base structures that defend and advance the political and social interests of their members and their broader popular, and in the case of the SACP working class, constituencies.

In or out of power the ANC and SACP should constantly mobilise, campaign and educate - day-to-day, and not just in election periods. They should be fighting formations, not just twice in a decade electoral machines. The party machinery should be independent of state structures, and be prepared to call to account party members in such structures.

There are two crucial reasons why it is absolutely essential not to disarm ourselves with a narrow parliamentary and/or bureaucratic statist understanding of

the role of political parties.

The *first* reason relates to the middle to longer term. The enormous tasks of national democratic and subsequent (we hope) socialist transformation will demand a politically mobilised population. Only a politically mobilised people will be able to ensure that their democratic state has real power. Gains will need to be defended against reactionary forces, and against imperialist intervention. Setbacks and disruptions must not demobilise our people. Nor must our people allow such difficulties to blunt the revolutionary perspectives of their political leadership.

Trade unions and other mass sectoral organisations will play a significant role in these tasks. But, above all, we must ensure that the ANC and SACP are well equipped to provide general political leadership, and that they are powerful democratic forums for their constituencies.

There is, *secondly*, also an immediate reason why we must not allow the SACP and, most especially, the ANC to become simply a bureaucratic government-in-waiting, with the membership little more than future ballot box fodder. If we take that approach, it is not impossible that the ANC-led alliance may lose or demobilise its mass base. In that case it may actually lose, or at least fail to win decisively, the first one-person one-vote election in our country.

We cannot take an electoral victory for granted. But it is precisely this that both Copelyn and Zikalala are doing, as they fixate themselves on preparing the trade unions for opposition to a future ANC government.

We certainly do not want the unions to be a simple labour wing of an ANC (or SACP) government. But the overall working class cause, including the independence and very survival of real trade unionism in our country could be threatened if the new government in a nominally post-apartheid South Africa turns out to be a tripartite alliance, but with a difference - De Klerk, Buthelezi and Anglo American.

Gone would be the worldwide anti-apartheid solidarity from which all our formations, not least the trade unions have benefited. In would come the AFL-CIO and the IMF, no longer restrained by the former isolation of apartheid South Africa. The township wars would be spread strategically into the work-places, and presented in the commercial media and now privatised TV as "ordinary workers opposing left-wing extremists". Bosses would start to deal only with UWUSA "unions".

I think (and fervently hope) this scenario is unlikely. But it is not impossible. We simply cannot take matters for granted. We cannot afford to ignore the enormous success imperialist circles have had in snatching victory from the grasp of



what remain majority supported political movements (Nicaragua and the Philippines are two obvious recent examples).

The imperialists have used a combination of violent destabilisation, economic pressure, and a slickly presented electoral campaign to propel shaky, cobbled-together, reactionary centrist alliances into office in both these cases.

Back to the "two hats" debate

I have chosen to come to this topical question last, against the background of all that I have just said. I have done this deliberately. Part of the problem with this debate is that it is often argued out abstractly, simply in the realm of general principles. Principles are important, but they must be applied to concrete realities.

Can overlapping leaderships, the wearing of two or more hats, compromise the independence of trade unions (or the independence, for that matter, of any other organisation)? Yes, obviously, such overlapping *can* compromise independence on all sides.

There are precautions that can be taken, and the SACP has had extensive experience of these in its alliance with the ANC. Any SACP member serving in an ANC structure, whether as a leader or ordinary member, is, when he or she is operating within that structure, entirely under its democratic discipline. No SACP member should carry a predetermined Party-caucused line into a fraternal organisation, undermining its internal democracy. As a Party we have tried (and perhaps we have sometimes failed) to be very strict and vigilant in these matters.

I am not suggesting that individuals should be schizophrenic. Carrying a caucused line into another organisation in order to pre-empt its own internal democratic processes, is very different from carrying a general outlook and understanding.

Obviously one does not expect SACP leaders serving on the ANC NEC to forget that they had ever heard of Marxism. Clearly the COSATU leaders serving in Party leadership structures bring an important shop-floor understanding and their



own democratic traditions into our ranks. Hopefully, they and their unions benefit in turn from the political and international overview, and decades of experience that some of our Party leaders have acquired.

In short, while in principle, there might be pitfalls with overlapping leaderships; there are also, in principle, enormous positive possibilities of mutual enrichment. How we weigh up the potential pitfalls against the potential advantages should be determined by actual conditions in a given time and place.

It seems to me that the positive possibilities are particularly relevant in our present concrete situation. The ANC and SACP are emerging out of decades of illegality. We are trying to draw together many different strands - exiles, released political prisoners, those emerging from the deep underground, and tens of thousands of militants schooled in the past decade of mass democratic struggle.

Neither the ANC nor the Party belong exclusively to their pre-February 1990

membership or leadership. In particular, it is crucial that the hundreds of outstanding working class leaders thrown up by trade union struggles in the last period, play an active and central role in the reconstruction of our political formations.

Overlapping leaderships

What about overlapping leaderships and the problem of overloading and resulting inefficiency? Again, this is a real danger, no doubt. But here too precautions can and need to be taken.

In the case of COSATU leaders currently serving on the SACP's national Interim Leadership Group, they are expected to attend a single, usually day-long national meeting once every two months. They are also asked to represent the Party, perhaps once or twice in a month, at one or another meeting. But these latter requests are always entirely subject to their main-line COSATU commitments. Certainly this arrangement is a little more arduous than Zikalala's twice in a decade view of politics. But we hope that it enables our Party to benefit from the trade union comrades' experience and understanding without unduly overstressing them.

Of course in real life taking precautions is never a guarantee. And that is why the two caps debate cannot be resolved simply in the abstract. Both Copelyn and Zikalala attempt to announce timeless principles. They

both use the same phrase: "You cannot serve two masters at the same time". Leaving aside the rather feudal and sexist notions buried in this phrase, what exactly does it mean?

As an ordinary, disciplined member of a civic and a trade union are you not "serving two masters"? Are you not bound by their respective decisions? What if the one supports a stay-away and the other is opposed? We could go on speculating and multiplying potential pitfalls in this way forever. Obviously occupying several *leadership* positions increases the dangers of possible conflict and of undermining independence. But where, abstractly, do you draw the line if you simply invoke the bald "you cannot serve two masters" slogan?

Zikalala, in particular, ties himself in knots on this one. Not being able to serve two masters, he tells us, "does not mean that a trade union leader cannot be active in his party branch or be elected to a party congress. Views of a trade union leader can be known but he must avoid taking part where a political decision is made." (p44) For heavens sake, what does Zikalala imagine happens in a party branch or party congress? Or are these (again following his American sociologists?) supposed to be talk-shops while the real political decisions get made somewhere else?

In short, yes, trade union independence is crucial for

now, for the period of transition, and in a socialist future. Yes, overlapping leaderships pose serious challenges and real potential dangers, and if there is a need for such overlapping we need creatively to guard against negative outcomes.

But above all, let us anchor the two hats debate in the concrete circumstances of the present. We are involved in a complicated transition period, whose outcome is far from clear. In this situation, from a working class perspective, the most critical *organisational* task is to build a powerful, mass-based, democratic and fighting ANC.

In the post-February 2 situation the ANC, understandably and correctly, has been drawing a very wide range of strata and ideological tendencies into its general orbit. We should not allow this important process of growth to undermine the long-standing working class bias of the ANC. In practical terms this means, amongst other things, that working class leaders need to be present at all levels of the ANC.

It could be disastrous in the present situation if, in the name of trade union independence, COSATU were to forbid working class leadership from occupying its rightful place in our political formations. It would not serve the cause of the working class, and nor, in my view, the long-term prospects for a vibrant and independent trade union movement. ☆

The Slovo critique: *socialism utopian and scientific*

JOHN HOFFMAN* - better known to many of our readers as the Communist writer DIALEGO - responds to the debate between Joe Slovo and Pallo Jordan (*Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 6 and Vol 15 No 3). He argues that 'backward circumstances' led to a 'backward socialism' which had more in common with the *utopian socialism* condemned by Marx than with the *scientific socialism* developed by him. Scientific socialism builds on and extends the political democracy and liberal rights established by bourgeois democracy - and so the dictatorship of the proletariat should be seen as a *post-liberal state*. In contrast, the backward socialism of Stalin glorified authoritarian, pre-liberal forms of political rule.

Slovo's pamphlet has been widely discussed and generally welcomed. It is in my view a veritable model of a 'discussion paper'. It is courageous and critical. It raises uncomfortable and difficult questions in a searching and open-minded way. Everything, Slovo insists, must be justified anew. We can no longer assume that there are any axioms or assumptions which can be taken for granted - hence the title of the pamphlet: *Has Socialism Failed?*

Indeed since Slovo's

pamphlet appeared, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) - a country with a special relationship with the South African liberation movement - has ceased to exist as a national entity and the USSR itself, the country of the October Revolution, is in the grip of a social, economic and political crisis of truly awesome proportions. It may well be that in desperation, its rulers will introduce some form of capitalism in order to revive its economy and maintain its political cohesion.

The unthinkable dances menacingly before our very eyes. In a situation like this, who can deny the need for the kind of 'no holds barred' critique which Slovo has initiated? It was Marx himself who adopted as his own motto the Latin tag: 'de omnibus dubitandum'. Question everything! This is surely the historical moment for each of us to do likewise.

Have Marxists been overthrown by history?

The British communist journal *Marxism Today* carried

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on its February cover in 1990 a Karl Marx spattered with eggs and tomatoes - the champion of the people now the hapless target of popular wrath. Some contributors to the journal pointed with ill-concealed glee to what they saw as a painful and terrible irony. Marxism, they argued, has fallen victim to its own dialectical processes. It has begun to supersede itself before our very eyes. With the collapse of communist party states in Eastern Europe, Marxism, in a word, has been overthrown by history.

Given the 'shock-waves', as Slovo calls them, triggered by the events of 1989 (p 1), it seems to me that the 'overthrow of Marxism' thesis deserves a considered response. After all, the argument is no more scandalous than the question which Slovo takes as the title of his pamphlet. Unless we can find a convincing reply to those who say that Marxism itself has collapsed with the Berlin Wall and the socialist states, we do not deserve to be taken seriously. For on the face of it, the 'historical petard thesis' appears a plausible reaction to the fate of so many states and parties who have adopted Marxism as their official creed.

Moreover it is an argument which recalls Marx's own criticisms of the "mighty Hegel" - the philosopher whose *idealist* theory of dialectics decisively influenced the development of Marxist thought. For Marx criticised Hegel by basically



*Has Marxism been
'overthrown by history'?*

turning his own theory against him. Hegel, we recall, had argued that dialectics exist in both nature and society as an inexorable and universal force for change. The founders of Marxism agreed. But, they contended, these radical premises are contradicted socially by Hegel's conservative view of property, class divisions and the state, and philosophically by the way he ascribed historical movement to the 'labours' of a metaphysical god - a divine creator subject to none of the dialectical processes he supposedly embodied.

Is it possible that Marxism itself has now fallen victim to a similar kind of internal (or, as it is sometimes called, 'immanent') critique? The argument might be presented

as follows. Marxism stands or falls as a theory which is tied to and seeks confirmation in historical practice. "The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is purely *scholastic* question": thus runs Marx's famous second thesis on Feuerbach. Theories, in other words, are not autonomous visions which simply arise in the minds of people. They are mental reflections of the material world. They derive from practice and they guide practice. Theory and practice are inextricably linked.

"Can we simply blame the practise?"

This being so, what then are the implications of the crises and traumas which have afflicted the socialist world since 1989? Ever since the Russian Revolution, 'dissident' Marxists have complained of an apparent gulf between Marxist theory and Marxist practice. Marxism, they argued, is a theory of emancipation and yet (they assert) its self-professed adherents have built societies which are autocratic and repressive in practice. Trotskyists contend that the fault lay with Stalin and the Stalinists. Others have blamed Lenin. In the 1960s and 1970s it became fashionable in New Left circles to insist that the problem had been created by Engels who, it was said, had over-simplified and vulgarised Marx's writing.

By the late 1970s the

French Marxist Louis Althusser (once the great champion of the Marxist classics) could conclude that Marxism itself is in crisis, and disillusioned radicals joined with liberals and conservatives in arguing that Marxism is an inherently autocratic and totalitarian *theory* because the societies which invoke its name are autocratic and totalitarian in *practice*. The Polish philosopher in exile Lesek Kolakowski in a substantial three volume work described Marxism as "the greatest fantasy of our century" and insisted: "Communism realised it [the fantasy - *ed*] in the only way feasible in an industrial society, namely, by a despotic system of government" (Kolakowski, pp 523; 527).

Marxism in other words is not only an oppressive theory but - the argument runs - it stands condemned as such by its own premises. Central to its theory of knowledge is the link it asserts between theory and practice. If then Marxist theoreticians always end up establishing systems which are autocratic and repressive, can we simply blame the practice without at the same time implicating the theory? Marxists - of all people - cannot plausibly argue that theories bear no responsibility for the historical practice enacted in their name.

Central both to Slovo's pamphlet and to the responses which it has already provoked is this basic prob-

lem. If Slovo is to convince with his argument that "the fault lies with us, not with socialism" (p 11), then he must stimulate us to find arguments which successfully refute what I have called the 'overthrow of Marxism' thesis.

The 'argument of circumstances'

In his pamphlet Slovo refers to the fact that socialist theory was applied "in new realities which were not foreseen by the founders of Marxism" (p 11). A number of the responses to his pamphlet make the same point, emphasising in particular the problem of trying to build socialist societies in backward countries. Harry Gwala quotes the words of the late Paul Baran: "socialism in backward and underdeveloped countries has a powerful tendency to become backward and underdeveloped socialism". This, Gwala comments, is the kind of scientific approach we would expect of Marxist-Leninists who employ their tools of dialectical materialism (Gwala 1990, p 40).

I will call this the 'argument of circumstances' since it seeks to explain the apparent gulf between Marxist theory and practice by referring to the hostile and unpromising environment in which real socialist societies had to emerge. The argument is on the face of it an effective rejoinder to the 'overthrow of Marxism' thesis since it explains the

problems, errors, excesses and distortions of the socialist countries with the 'tools' of Marxist theory itself. After all, Marxism itself acknowledges that new societies will necessarily be shaped by the circumstances in which they emerge. Does not Marx say (for example) that a communist society is in every respect stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges?

In other words, the distortions within 'existing socialism' reflect a unity of theory and practice in difficult and unforeseen circumstances. Harry Gwala speaks of the effect which Tsarist autocracy had on Bolshevik organisation; the fact that before World War II, communists in Eastern Europe lived mostly under dictatorships rather than democracies, and they were compelled tactically to form alliances with their own national bourgeoisie and rich peasants. As a result, Gwala argues, the tenets of Marxism-Leninism were somewhat diluted, but (and this is the point) in ways which Marxism itself can adequately explain.

Jeremy Cronin puts particular emphasis on the need to "locate errors within a broad objective situation". He stresses the problems generated by civil war and external invasion, both after the revolution and during World War II. Russia's economic backwardness dramatically affected the

quality of its socialist structures while the isolation of the country meant that it had to extract a surplus from its people - a circumstance which resulted in the massive oppression of the peasants (Cronin 1990, p 98).

Again the point of the 'circumstances argument' is that the apparent contradiction between Marxist theory and practice is explicable in terms of the harsh and hostile environment in which socialist countries had to develop. The 'fault' lies with history. Far from Marxism being hoist upon any historical petard, its explanatory power has if anything been *enhanced* by its capacity to provide a materialist analysis of painful and difficult circumstances.

It is significant however that although Slovo does himself allude to the relevance of circumstances, he is wary of the argument as a response to the traumas of 1989. But why his reservations? If backward circumstances create a backward socialism, doesn't this observation vindicate rather than undermine a Marxist theory of history?

The problem of justification

Jeremy Cronin comments that "in writing his pamphlet, Slovo felt that any historical explanation might seem like special pleading, like an attempt to explain away errors and deviations". As Slovo himself puts it, historical circumstances help "to explain, but in no way justify, the



awful grip which Stalinism came to exercise in every sector of the socialist world" (p 11).

This comment goes to the heart of the problem. I say this because the sharp distinction Slovo makes here between "explaining" historical circumstances and "justifying" them is not as straight-forward as it seems. For Marxists must surely argue that moral positions ultimately derive from a scientific assessment of material circumstances. There are no 'supra-historical' verities to which we can turn - no 'transcendental ideals' which stand outside of the historical process. This is why Marx and Engels insist in the *Communist Manifesto* that "the theoretical conclusions of Communists" merely express in general terms "actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from an historical movement going on under our very eyes". 'Communism' is not an abstract ideal: it is the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.

If we argue therefore that the socialist societies

emerged through painful and difficult circumstances as historically progressive phenomena, then we are not simply *explaining* these circumstances. We are also (at least in a general sense) justifying them as well. What we are saying is this: "We certainly don't like some of the things which have happened in the name of Marxism in the socialist countries and we would not condone such criminal excesses and tactical blunders if they occurred in our own movements. But given the circumstances in which the USSR and Eastern Europe had to develop, how could things have been otherwise?"

Of course the actual way in which events turn out can always be different at the level of detail. Perhaps, Jeremy Cronin notes, a more co-operative approach with the peasantry might have been possible in the 1920s. Both Stalin and Trotsky argued for a "harsh approach to the peasantry" whereas Bukharin took the opposite view. Cronin takes the point pressed strongly by Pallo Jordan that the writings of anti-Stalinists deserve to be seriously if critically read.

But if what happens in general terms is judged to be historically *necessary*, how then can we condemn it? This point emerges particularly poignantly in the case of Pallo Jordan's fierce critique of Stalinism. "It is our task," Jordan says emphatically, "to explain what has led to the atrocities we condemn," and



Joe Slovo

Photo: Anna Zieminski

he takes Slovo to task for identifying the symptoms rather than the causes of the illness (1990a, p 67). But how successful is he in getting round what I have called the 'problem of justification'?

Jordan divides Stalin's critics into two basic camps which derive from the contrasting position of Trotsky and Bukharin. Both Russians accepted that the isolation of the revolution in a backward country created conditions for the emergence of a parasitic bureaucracy. However Trotsky favoured the position supported by the left oppositionist Preobrazhensky, that the USSR would have to industrialise at the expense of the peasantry, whereas Bukharin argued that the worker-peasant alliance should be maintained so that the economy could be developed at a much more leisurely pace. This was a policy debate with momentous historical consequences since once the 'gentler' policies of the New Economic Policy (NEP) (favoured by Bukharin) were aban-

doned, then (Jordan tells us) the Soviet state began to act in a dictatorial manner like the Tsarist state before it.

This raises two points which are relevant to the problem of justification through historical explanation. The first is that Jordan himself acknowledges that Trotsky - although a bitter opponent of Stalin - supported policies which created the conditions for authoritarian rule in general. Indeed, Trotsky had already displayed marked 'Stalinist' tendencies in his argument with Lenin over the trade unions when he favoured militarising the workers. Stalin may have been more successful than Trotsky in combining Marxist rhetoric and Russian nationalism, but there is nothing in Jordan's own account to show that had the USSR developed under Trotskyist leadership, its character would have been fundamentally different. "Once," as he puts it, "the CPSU succumbed to the needs of primitive socialist accumulation, there was no way of breaking the cycle" (Jordan 1990a, p 74).

But what about the policies advocated by Bukharin - greater freedom for small property owners and private enterprise? This brings me to the second point raised by Jordan's critique of Slovo. It is revealing that at no time does Jordan suggest that it have been *better* for the USSR to have continued with the NEP (as Bukharin wanted) than to have em-



Pallo Jordan

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

barked on a programme of rapid industrialisation (which both Stalin and Trotsky supported). However even if Bukharin's policies *had* won the day, Jordan argues (I think correctly) that the seeds of the authoritarianism which reached such horrendous proportions under Stalin had already been sown during the civil war and its immediate aftermath, ie even before the decision to abandon the NEP was taken.

The Social-Revolutionaries and other right-wing socialist parties were banned in 1918. Three years later the sailors of the Kronstadt garrison rose in rebellion against what they perceived to be a new tyranny. In March of the same year factions were outlawed in the CPSU and in this way, Jordan comments, "the cancer had been planted in the body of the party". Significantly, as Jordan himself makes clear, both Trotsky *and* Bukharin supported the suppression of oppositional tendencies. His dilemma therefore is this:

His own analysis demon-

states that the problem of authoritarianism and repression arose out of the circumstances surrounding the fate of the Russian Revolution. He claims that the Soviet leadership faced 'a range of alternatives at all the crucial turning points of its history', but in fact he is quite unable to give any indication as to how *under these circumstances*, authoritarian policies could have been avoided. Although hostile to Stalin, he notes that Stalin's approach was supported by the overwhelming majority of Soviet Communists. With the adoption of a strategy of primitive socialist industrialisation, he tells us, the authoritarian die was cast, and yet he appears to support Trotsky rather than Bukharin. Even if Jordan's sympathies are more Bukharinite than we suspect, the point is that Bukharin himself (as Jordan points out) displayed the same willingness as the other Bolsheviks did to crush dissent and opposition.

In what sense therefore can it be said that *under the circumstances* things could have been significantly different? Indeed in one version of his critique Jordan argues that the rise of Stalinism was not inevitable but it was historically necessary. Necessity, he says, implies an element of choice but the choice is not unlimited "for the alternatives themselves are structured by previous choices and inherited circumstances" (Jordan 1990b, p



34). In other words, general trends always manifest themselves through particular (and thus 'accidental') circumstances so that the precise configuration of every event could always have been different. I agree. The same (it seems to me) could also be said about a dialectical view of 'inevitability' as well, but this is just a terminological point. What is significant here is that Jordan concedes that some form or other of authoritarian rule was historically necessary in the USSR after the Russian Revolution.

That being so, how is it possible for him to *condemn* developments which he judges at the same time to be historically necessary? He exhorts South Africans to "rediscover the true meaning of the communist vision" and praises the oppositionists in the socialist world who stood out against the "degradation of the ideals of communism" (1990a, p 74). But the truth is that (from a Marxist point of view) ideals and visions can only emerge from and be realised in concrete historical circumstances, and his own account gives us no reason to

suppose that a significantly less repressive outcome was historically possible.

His historical explanation emphasises the basic circumstances which others have noted and leaves him with the same dilemma. Backward circumstances lead to a backward socialism. It is true that Pallo Jordan is much more critical of Stalin and Stalinism than say Harry Gwala (although Gwala himself finds that Stalin's excesses are "not justified"). The problem, however, is that since he offers no argument to suggest that a radically different scenario could have occurred, it is hard to see how he can extricate himself from the implicit justification embodied in the "circumstances argument".

The dictatorship of the proletariat as a post-liberal state

Up until now we have assumed that the system which emerged in the USSR after the revolution was autocratic and authoritarian in character. Although some Marxists might dispute this, it is (in my view) greatly to Slovo's credit that he calls a spade a spade and does nothing to hide the fact that the Russian Revolution posed serious problems for the development of democratic institutions in the new society.

There may be moments in the life of a revolution, Slovo argues, "which justify a postponement of full democratic

processes" and he feels it necessary to raise (without actually addressing) "the question of whether the Bolsheviks were justified in taking a monopoly of state power during the extraordinary period of both internal and external assault on the gains of the revolution" (p 17). The point is put delicately but the thrust of his argument is clear. Should the Bolsheviks have dissolved the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 when this action led many socialists at home and abroad to condemn the new Bolshevik government as a dictatorship?

Slovo records the fact the Bolsheviks received less than a third of the popular vote when the assembly was elected. The elections took place before October 1917. The assembly only met after the revolution. Lenin argued that as a result the assembly had ceased to be representative of Russian opinion but, as Slovo recalls (pp 14-16), even so significant a revolutionary as the German socialist Rosa Luxembourgh disagreed. She expressed grave reservations over the action by warning that "freedom only for the supporters of the government is no freedom at all".

Slovo cites these words and argues that they "may not" have been appropriate in the special conditions which prevailed after the revolution in 1917 since (as she puts it) "without a limitation on democracy", there was no way in which the revolution

could have defended itself in a situation of civil war and massive intervention from outside. The comment is of considerable significance, for in describing the dissolution of the assembly as a *limitation* on democracy, Slovo implicitly challenges the argument which both Lenin and Trotsky used to justify their actions at the time.

For the Bolsheviks did not justify dissolving the assembly as a restriction or limitation on democracy. They presented it as the adoption of democracy in 'a higher form'. The democracy of the soviets was, they contended, a thousand times higher than the old bourgeois democracy as represented by the Constituent Assembly. It was this argument in particular that Rosa Luxembourgh criticised. Despite her opposition to the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, she was (like Slovo) prepared to acknowledge that the Bolsheviks might have had a case for limiting democracy in conditions of extreme crisis. What she was, however, unambiguously opposed to, was the way in which the Bolsheviks, as she put it, had made a "virtue out of necessity". They had presented a *limitation* on democracy as though it was a higher form of democracy itself.

But it might be argued that on this matter the Bolsheviks were right and that Rosa Luxembourgh was wrong. By suppressing a minority of exploiters, they were creating, as Lenin said at the time, a

"democracy for the majority" on the grounds that a dictatorship for the bourgeoisie is a democracy for the workers. Dissolving the Constituent Assembly, banning opposition parties, restricting freedom of the press etc. did not constitute a 'limitation' on democracy since the suppression of class enemies is itself implied by the very idea of a socialist state as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Slovo is right to be wary of this argument. The truth is that the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat as developed in the Marxist classics denotes a form of the state which *builds upon* rather than suppresses liberal political institutions. The classical Marxist view is that democracy under capitalism is inadequate and formal since in itself it does not give workers resources and power. However the political and legal rights which workers do enjoy under capitalism are profoundly important for they serve to educate the class in the meaning of freedom and emancipation. Liberal or bourgeois democracy is described by Marx and Engels as a system which "perfects" the state in the sense that it promises self-government in theory - all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law - and in this way compels the workers to struggle for self-government in practice.

It should be noted that Lenin himself had generally analysed bourgeois democ-

racy in these terms up to around January 1918 - the date on which the Constituent Assembly was dissolved. This is why I would not really agree with Karl von Holdt's argument that Lenin's view of democracy is generally problematic (von Holdt, 1990). Of course Lenin (like Marx and Engels) saw political democracy as 'bourgeois democracy', but he stressed that his democracy was a necessary precondition for socialism itself. It was a system which had to be *transcended* and not suppressed. It was a question of making the 'formal freedoms' of bourgeois society 'real' - not dismissing them as mere fictions to be swept away.

In my view therefore, the classical Marxist conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat must be characterised as a *post-liberal* form of the state. It is a system in which (in Slovo's words) power is exercised "in the interests of the overwhelming majority of the people" and which embodies 'an ever-expanding genuine democracy' (p 15). It is a concept which takes for granted freedom of speech and association (freedoms which Marx and Engels defended throughout their political lives) but looks to a deepening of the democratic process so that the mass of the population can begin to exercise real power over their lives.

What happened after 1918? Opposition parties were banned, critics were



silenced, and power became ever more concentrated. The classical Marxist view of proletarian democracy as a *transitional* form of the state - a state dissolving its concentrated powers back into society - ceased to have any meaning. To speak of the withering away of the state in a situation in which this state now exercised (increasingly) autocratic powers seemed absurd and paradoxical. The dismal truth is that 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as it actually emerged after 1917 was less representative - less free and less democratic - than the bourgeois system of democracy it was supposed to have surpassed. It is true that the Bolsheviks were not confronted after February 1917 by a liberal bourgeois democracy. They were confronted by a provisional government that showed alarming signs of veering towards military dictatorship. Nevertheless the suppression of liberal political freedoms in the name of a higher democracy in 1918 led to the tragic polarisation between those socialists who supported Bolsheviks and those who now

called themselves 'democratic socialists' because they opposed 'dictatorship'.

Slovo himself makes the point that Lenin did not address in any detail the nature of established socialist civil society - questions such as the relationship between party, state, people's elected representatives, social organisations etc. But this is not surprising. The 'space' for this kind of consideration was shut out by the development of an authoritarian model of socialism which looked upon 'civil society' (ie, social institutions outside the party and state) as a realm which was basically subversive and anti-socialist in character.

It has to be said (and this is a point at which Slovo himself hints) that the noting of the state as a 'dictatorship' in Marxist theory is a much more complicated and nuanced idea than is sometimes thought. The term 'dictatorship' was only used positively by Marx and Engels in rather unusual contexts where, for example, they were building bridges with authoritarian minded allies whom they wished to placate, or making polemical points against socialists with liberal or anarchist views. The point is that a democratic socialist society is only 'dictatorial' in the rather technical sense that like any society with a state it must 'dictate' to those who threaten to destroy its institutions. A socialist state, however, which 'dictates' in

a way that prevents the members of this or that class from enjoying the classical liberal freedoms of association and speech, ceases to be democratic.

But what happens when such a state represents the majority? Isn't this in itself enough to make it democratic? Those who argue in this way overlook a crucial point. The fact is that a proletariat which suppresses traditional civic freedoms, also suppresses itself, if opposition parties and papers are banned and critics are silenced, how can *anyone* in such a society be said to exercise meaningful democratic rights? Engels once declared that a nation which oppresses another cannot itself be free. The same is true of a class even when its members constitute a majority. A majority which represses a minority (in the sense of the overt repression which developed in the USSR after 1918) can only repress itself since the conditions under which the opinion of the majority can be properly and reliably expressed no longer really obtain.

While it is true that after 1918 Lenin himself began to justify the authoritarian measures of the new Soviet state as the expression of a higher form of democracy, he did so hesitantly and with caution. Stalin, by way of contrast, made a full blooded virtue out of necessity, extolling pre-liberal forms of political rule as though they represented a new and more



Was the 1917 revolution a progressive event?

glorious form of Marxism. It is therefore with Stalin's (rather than Lenin's) name that Slovo rightly associates the model of what he calls "socialism without democracy" (p 3).

The Russian Revolution: a progressive phenomenon?

Those who argue that the revolution produced a repressive and authoritarian society are right to do so. But this point has an important bearing on the problem of justification as noted above - the problem as to how Marxists can criticise developments which are historically inevitable. We have seen earlier how even staunch anti-Stalinists like Pallo Jordan argue that the Russian Revolution (and all that flowed from it) was historically necessary and yet want to vehemently criticise what actually happened as a result.

The problematic character of the society produced by the Russian Revolution makes it necessary to emphasise an important point about the 'circumstances argument' which might otherwise be missed. Marxists do not derive their perspectives from historical events as such. As materialists, we are only obliged to derive ideas from historical *change*. This change is only *necessary* when it reflects itself in historical developments which are *progressive* in character, that is, they take human history to a higher stage.

A number of communists (or 'post-communists' as they sometimes style themselves in Britain) are now arguing that the Russian Revolution itself is to blame for the crisis in the socialist world. The revolution laid the basis (argument goes) for a post-1918 Leninism which developed into Stalinism and

therefore the event represents a disaster (and not a triumph) for the socialist movement. It was not a step forward but a step backward, and therefore Marxists should not feel obliged to 'justify' the event (and all that flowed from it). The revolution fails to qualify as 'a real historical movement going on before our eyes', that is, as a progressive development which makes the case for real communism.

What are we to make of an argument like this? It is certainly worth remembering that even in 1917 there were socialists who opposed the Russian Revolution. Veterans like George Plekhanov and Karl Kautsky argued that Russia was not ready for socialism. The bourgeois revolution of February 1917 had, they contended, not yet created the material and cultural basis for the development of a higher society. To attempt a socialist revolution under these circumstances was therefore futile and self-defeating.

Of course Lenin and the Bolsheviks assumed that the October Revolution would serve as the catalyst to socialist revolutions in the 'developed' West and no-one anticipated that the revolution would find itself isolated in a backward country. But given the fact that this isolation did not occur, we have to ask the question: under *these* circumstances what kind of socialism could emerge? The problem of democracy after

1918 is itself part of a wider problem - the question of when the development of a socialist society actually counts as a progressive rather than a reactionary phenomenon. The point is not as bizarre as it sounds.

In Part 3 of the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels review a wide variety of other socialist and communist doctrines prevalent at the time. One factor in particular differentiates these socialisms and communisms from the argument advanced in the *Manifesto*: the attitude towards capitalism. Non-Marxist socialisms, the *Manifesto* argues, either take an uncritical and reformist view of capitalism, or even worse, they take a position towards capitalism which is reactionary in character. Reactionary socialists (as the *Manifesto* describes them) look backwards by expressing support for pre-capitalist ideas of a medieval kind. Communism in this view is not a *higher* form of society which builds upon the technological achievements and political culture of the capitalist system. It is merely a (backward looking) moral ideal or utopia which shuns bourgeois ethics and practices. It is a reactionary or "crude" (as Marx and Engels sometimes call it) communism because it projects socialism as a system of shared poverty rather than as a system which utilises and builds upon capitalist abundance.

It is surely not difficult to identify elements of this

"crude communism" in the institutions and practices of existing (or formerly existing) socialism. Slovo himself refers to the "primitive egalitarianism" which reached lunatic proportions under the Pol Pot regime, the absence of cost accounting, a dismissive attitude to commodity production, the premature abandonment of market forces, and a doctrinaire approach to questions of collectivisation (p 22).

While we are right to criticise these developments, it is important to be clear about their character. They are not, strictly speaking, deviations from socialism as such. What they are (as Marx's own writings make clear) are deviations from a *particular kind* of socialism - namely a *scientific* socialism - a socialism which seeks to build upon and thus move beyond the capitalist system. A scientific socialism is a progressive socialism because it seeks to transcend capitalism. A socialism which simply *rejects* capitalism on moral grounds and sets about suppressing the market by force accords with the kind of socialism which the *Manifesto* calls reactionary. In this sense Harry Gwala is right to argue that backward circumstances create a backward socialism. But the implications of this comment are grave indeed.

For the *Manifesto* makes it clear that a socialism which is simply anti-liberal and anti-capitalist is very different from socialism which

is post-liberal and post-capitalist in character. The one builds upon capitalism and its achievements, the other merely 'negates' or rejects it. The one harnesses the energy and dynamism of capitalism - its technology, its liberal culture, its scientific achievements - and puts them to progressive use. The other simply rejects capitalism by seeking to impose autocratically crude communist norms so that (and this is the really uncomfortable point) individuals become even less free - even further away from human emancipation - than they would be under a system of liberal capitalism.

Slovo refers to "episodes of direct compulsion against producers" in the development of socialism after 1917 - the forced collectivisation in the 1930s, the extensive use of convict labour as a direct state and party exercise (p 22). It is true that capitalism had its own period of primitive accumulation in which the system comes into the world dripping blood and gore, and South African democrats for their part know only too well how capitalists can for long periods of time support and connive with colonial and racist forms of rule. Nevertheless if we want to understand the popular uprisings in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the current crisis in the USSR, then we need to confront the painful fact that individuals can enjoy greater freedom under liberal capitalism than they do under a form of autocratic



socialism which involves the "direct compulsion of the producers".

Under capitalism, as Engels put it, "the principle of freedom is affirmed" and the "oppressed will one day see to it that his principle is carried out" (*Collected Works* 4, p 474). But what happens if under *socialism* the principle of freedom is dismissed as a bourgeois prejudice (ie, it is not affirmed at all), and workers find themselves subject to the kind of direct coercion characteristic of pre-capitalist systems? What is historically progressive about that?

Our problem therefore is this: given its tragic isolation, the Russian Revolution brought into existence a system which displayed at least some of the features of what Marx and Engels would have identified as utopian rather than scientific socialism. These features were characteristic of a reactionary rather than progressive socialism - an autocratic rather than a democratic socialism - a socialism thus dramatically at odds with a scientific socialism which is necessarily post-capitalist rather than pre-

capitalist in its political and economic character.

Marxism and solidarity: the dilemma of a democratic socialism

The painful question now arises: should Marxists have followed Plekhanov and Kautsky and refused to have supported the Russian Revolution at all? Should they have identified themselves body and soul with a socialism which turned out to be reactionary rather than progressive in significant respects?

I think that we are right to pose this question but we are also right to think long and hard before we answer it affirmatively. Because the men and women who sacrificed so much to build socialism in the USSR were acting with great selflessness and courage. Workers all over the world were inspired by their example. As a result of the revolution, millions of people fought for freedom and equality who would not otherwise have had the confidence and courage to do so. Rosa Luxemburg, though sharply critical of Lenin's tactics, was to say of the Bolsheviks that they went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world by crying out "I have dared!" (1972, p 251). This, she argued, is what is "essential and *enduring* in the Bolshevik policy" and "and in *this* sense, the future everywhere belongs to 'Bolshevism'".

Can Marxists really call themselves revolutionaries

unless, like Rosa Luxembour, they feel compelled to express solidarity with those who seek to build a better world? It is true that revolutions may occur under circumstances in which heroic efforts are likely to fail. To "carry out", Rosa Luxembour declared, "the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialist revolution in a single country surrounded by reactionary imperialist rule and in the face of the bloodiest world war in human history - that is squaring the circle" (1972, p 242). It was a venture which she believed was tragically doomed. Was she wrong therefore to support it?

The problem is not a new one for Marxists although it has to be said that with the Russian Revolution it was a problem which took on a particularly acute form. For crucial to Marxism as a scientific socialism is the argument that people are educated, and can only really be educated, by material circumstances themselves. This is a philosophical point with critical political implications. The *Communist Manifesto* makes it clear (as we have seen) that the theoretical conclusions of Communists are not invented by reformers but spring from the historical movement 'going on before our very eyes'. This is why Marxists are implacably opposed to conspirators and elitists - to those who believe that they can manipulate events or act paternalistically on behalf of people. As far as



Marxists are concerned, the materialist argument for circumstances is also a political argument for democracy.

But it is here that the problem arises. For the fact that people are educated by circumstances (and are not 'enlightened' by paternalistic leadership from on high) inevitably means that people will from time to time (Marxists included) find themselves in circumstances which are not of their choosing. Under such circumstances they may be 'compelled' to take actions which they know (or which they should know as long as they remain Marxists) are necessarily problematic in character. Thus Engels told the German socialist Joseph Weydemeyer that "we shall find ourselves compelled to make communist experiments and leaps which no-one knows better than ourselves to be untimely" (cited by Levin 1989, p 69). Marxists are part of the historical processes they try to understand and like everyone else, they have to learn from their mistakes. Only 'utopian socialists' believe otherwise.

It is true that Marx and En-

gels for example *tried* to distance themselves from those who raised communist demands during the (bourgeois) democratic revolutions of 1848. But they were not wholly successful. There is evidence to suggest that some of the formulations during this period were made by Marx and Engels not out of theoretical conviction but in order to cement tactical alliances with other socialists who were impatient at the pace of events. Thus the argument in the *Communist Manifesto* that a backward Germany (as it was in 1848) might experience a proletarian revolution "immediately" following on from a bourgeois revolution, is difficult to square with the *Manifesto's* general analysis of how workers become class conscious. It is also contradicted by other comments Marx and Engels make at the time where they envisage the "permanent revolution" as a much more protracted process.

But why should contradictions of this sort arise? An even more dramatic example is furnished by the uprising of workers in 1871 leading to the formation of the short-lived Paris Commune. Marx and Engels were opposed to the uprising since they considered that under the circumstances it could not possibly succeed. Paris was ringed by the troops of an invading German army which would inevitably assist the French government (which had retreated to Versailles) to

restore 'order'.

But when the uprising did occur, how did Marx and Engels respond? Did they complain that because the uprising was 'untimely', they would therefore have nothing to do with it? Did they use the occasion to deliver (in a schoolmasterly Menshevik fashion) a severe reprimand to the communards for taking destiny into their hands before the material conditions for political success had come to fruition? The creators of Marxism did nothing of the kind! As the *Civil War in France* demonstrates, they felt compelled out of a sense of solidarity to present the Commune as the heroic attempt by ordinary men and women to "storm heaven" and lay the basis for a future communist society.

The workers, Marx writes of the communards, "have no ideals to realise" but "will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men" (1971, p 76). For this is the point. People have to make history for themselves. They can only learn from their own experience and therefore from their own mistakes. It is significant that Rosa Luxemburg defends the Russian Revolution in the same way and for the same reasons that Marx and Engels support the Paris Commune.

It is also revealing that the German socialist, Eduard Bernstein should find Marx's comment about "ideals" to be either "self-deception" or "a

mere play on words on the part of the author" (1961, p 222). For Bernstein and his fellow 'revisionists' had ceased to believe that a revolutionary reconstruction of society was either possible or desirable. They did *not* think that people must do things for themselves and therefore identified themselves as liberal rather than *democratic* socialists in their opposition to revolutionary developments.

Slovo makes no attempt (he tells his readers) "to answer the complex question of why so many millions of genuine socialists and revolutionaries became such blind worshippers in the temple of the cult of the personality" (p 12). But at least part of the explanation surely lies in the tension just noted between the logic of Marxism as a scientific socialism and the pressure of circumstances which compels revolutionaries to undertake experiments of a 'utopian' kind. It is true that the Paris Commune lasted only for a few months and did not undertake any unambiguously authoritarian measures in its defence. But what if, against the odds, it *had* maintained itself in power through the introduction, say, of a draconian authoritarianism and the consolidation of Stalinist style personality cults? How would Marx and Engels have reacted then?

The USSR did survive. It weathered the fierce onslaughts of counter-revolution and Nazi attack. It

involved millions of its citizens in the construction of a new social order. It inspired millions elsewhere at a time when fascism had strangled the Spanish republic and capitalism was crippled by slump. "I have seen the future and its works". The utopian character of the USSR was apparently belied by its practical successes and the popular support which Stalin enjoyed. Moreover the capitalist countries remained bitterly hostile to the USSR so that it seemed that criticism constituted treachery to the makers of a new world. George Orwell continued to regard himself as a socialist but his fierce attack on Stalinism in *Animal Farm* and *1984* was, it is said, worth a cool million votes to the British Conservative party in the postwar period.

The need for solidarity can pose grave dilemmas for democratic socialists, and reflects the fact that the tension between scientific socialism and circumstances which generate utopian perspectives and practices is a real one. It is a tension which arises because Marxism as a scientific socialism sometimes has to face in two directions at one and the same time. Precisely because our values are rooted in the 'historical movement going on before our very eyes', Marxists cannot analyse society in terms of timeless 'values' which stand outside the historical process. If this is its enduring strength, it also creates prob-

lems. For what happens when there are circumstances (as in the case of the Russian Revolution) which compel Marxists to act in ways which are contrary to the 'logic' of their own theory? We then have to witness the tragic spectacle of Marxists (as with Lenin after 1918) defending the indefensible and trying to justify what cannot be justified.

The problem is therefore, as Slovo says, a "complex" one. The contradictory relationship between Marxist theory and Marxist practice - between a scientific logic and utopian circumstances - arises as part of the historical process itself. Marxists are subject to the same historical circumstances which compel humans in general to "enter social relations independent of their will". Long historical processes have to be endured in the struggle for human emancipation. These processes involve heroic leaps and untimely experiments. They are also contradictory in character for they require Marxists to organise politically and support coercive state institutions in order to reach a world in which the state and (hierarchically organised) politics itself will disappear.

The lessons of 1989

There can be little doubt (as Slovo acknowledges) that the prestige and credibility of Marxism has been seriously damaged by the fact that a "socialism without democracy" has been created in the



name of Marxism. This has generated a sense of theoretical 'crisis' as our critics gleefully proclaim that Marxists have been overthrown by history.

On the other hand the rise of unpopular and autocratic states can only be understood in Marxist terms as developments which are radically at variance with the logic of a scientific socialism. The collapse of these states demonstrates beyond all shadow of doubt that utopian forms of socialism are unworkable and ultimately unpopular (even if they are not without some progressive features like the desire for peace and the solidarity given to national liberation movements).

Circumstances imprison but they also liberate and the events of 1989 have helped to liberate Marxism from the tragic strait-jacket of circumstances placed upon it after 1917. The popular revolutions in Eastern Europe have made it possible to point once again to historical developments as a vindication of the logic of Marxism (however painful and unwelcome this vindication is).

The tensions between theory and practice remain inherent in the historical process but we are now in a position to answer our critics with a confidence and a conviction that was not possible as long as we believed that we had to defend the problematic legacies of 1917.

In a word: Marxists no longer need to make virtues out of necessities. This, it seems to me, is the real lesson of Slovo's courageous critique and it is the reason why socialism does indeed have a future. ☆

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Has socialism failed?

the debate continues....

MIKE NEOCOSMOS* comments on three contributions to the debate on Joe Slovo's "Has Socialism Failed?"**

WOSA

The contribution from the Trotskyist WOSA is perhaps the easiest to deal with. They rehash tired old formulae concerning the 'sin' of 'socialism in one country'. They see this as the universal explanation for all the evils of Stalinism - as if socialism could occur in all countries at the same time. They trot out crude statements that a united front is 'good' while a popular front is 'bad' and that a conception of stages necessarily leads to bourgeois domination.

They need to go beyond the vulgar notion that all that exists is capitalism. For them an ideal (not to say idealistic) opposition between the working class and capitalists is the only possible contradiction. They fail to understand the simple fact that there are many different forms of capitalism,

some of which are more in the interest of the working class than others. They also forget that people in capitalist societies - as in 'actually existing socialism' - are in *reality* divided into many more classes and groups than the two they always talk about.

The result is that not only have their organisations been historically staggeringly ineffective (there has *never* been such a thing as a successful Trotskyist revolution in any country), but also that they have been guilty of the kind of sectarianism and contempt for debate with which they now smugly taint the SACP.

One would have expected a little more self-criticism from the comrades of WOSA than simply jumping on the 'let's have a bash at the SACP' bandwagon. Because WOSA gives no hint of any self-criticism of the Slovo kind, it is

very difficult to take their arguments seriously.

Pallo Jordan

Although Cde Jordan makes many important points, he is not immune from the above kind of criticism either. He accuses the SACP's publications of a "consistent pattern of praise and support for every violation of freedom perpetrated by the Soviet leadership, both before and after the death of Stalin" (p74). He also remarks that "the political culture nurtured by the SACP's leadership over the years has produced a spirit of intolerance and political dissembling which regularly emerges in the pages of party journals." (p74). These points may be correct, but one searches in vain through the publications of the ANC for a serious critique of 'actually existing

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** Labour Bulletin Vol 15 No 3

socialism'. It is to Cde Slovo's credit that he was the first in Southern Africa to provide a thoughtful public reassessment of 'actually existing socialism', whereas leadership on this question did not come from 'non-party Marxists' within the ANC.

The crucially important point however is not just to berate communist parties (or other organisations on the Left) for their lack of democratic practices. The point is to understand the reasons for the lack of democracy in order to combat it. Centralist and anti-democratic practices generally are features of all political organisations without exception, including those of the working class. Like all political organisations, working class political organisations are products of capitalist relations. The political organisations of the bourgeoisie are themselves anything but democratic. We have to understand this and not fall into the trap of believing that undemocratic practices are the results of Marxism itself, or the results of socialism. They are the result of bourgeois relations (including a bourgeois division of labour between mental and manual labour and between state and civil society) against which no party is immune.

Communist parties may have been guilty of not struggling against such tendencies with enough strength, or of not recognising them.

However, they cannot be

held accountable for the 'muck of ages' which, as Marx said, affects the proletariat itself, born and produced as it is within the confines of capitalist oppression and exploitation.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Cde Jordan's dismissal of the Marxist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat (DOP) must also be commented upon. The dictatorship of the proletariat was abandoned as a guiding principle of the CPSU as long ago as the 1950s and thereafter by most communist parties. This principle was replaced, by the party under Krushchev, with the supposedly more correct notion of the 'state of the whole people'. A number of points need to be made here:

- The abandonment of the DOP slogan did not contribute fundamentally to the democratisation of the Soviet state. 'Statism', 'commandism' and 'violations of socialist legality' continued unabated. It is far too simplistic to blame the DOP "for the horrors perpetrated in its name" (p69). The dictatorship of the party continued in the absence of the DOP. Some, like the present writer, would argue that in reality the DOP - ie proletarian democracy - had ceased to exist long before it was officially abandoned. It is far too convenient to see the concept of the DOP itself as

an expression of Stalinist dictatorship.

- Krushchev's slogan of the 'state of the whole people' may sound more democratic (after all the term dictatorship does sound nasty!), but the slogan had more in common with bourgeois ideology than with the views of Marx, Engels and Lenin, for whom all states implied class rule. This slogan therefore contributed to confusing the masses by asserting that a 'classless state' could exist. After Krushchev, 'statism', 'commandism', and the dictatorship of the party were justified, no longer in terms of the need to maintain a 'class dictatorship' as before, but in terms of 'defending the gains of socialism against imperialist aggression'. Thus the DOP is not a necessary precondition for the dictatorship of the party. How the DOP came under Stalin to be equated with the dictatorship of the party, is (partly) a theoretical question which has still to be adequately resolved.
- Jordan's assertion that the DOP "owes more to French revolutionary practice than to Marx and Engels" (p69) is not supported by evidence. On the contrary, evidence shows the opposite. Marx himself writes to his friend Weydemeyer in New York (March 5, 1852) that he himself did

not discover the class struggle, which had been described by bourgeois economists long ago. Rather Marx says he proved that the existence of classes was linked to the development of production, that "the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat* ... (and) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society* ..." (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* 1 vol.:669, emphasis in original). There is nothing here, of course, regarding the dictatorship of a political party.

Opportunism

Cde Jordan may be correct, and Marx might have been wrong in his estimation of his own work. The point however is that his dismissal of the DOP shows a lack of seriousness towards theory, a failure to produce evidence and a pandering to the same opportunistic tendencies with which the majority of communist parties - 'encouraged' from Moscow - 'abandoned' the notion themselves (accompanied by a greater or lesser degree of soul-searching of course).

This may sound harsh, but how else are we to understand the fact that the communist parties - and Jordan - forget that the DOP was meant - for classical Marxism - to imply a greater form of democracy - a proletarian form - which

bourgeois society never experienced and can never produce. This concept was meant to refer to *objective reality* and not to a slogan which could be adopted or abandoned by party decree. It has a similar status to that of the party's leading role, which as Cde Slovo correctly points out, has to be proven through an objective analysis of the party's political practice rather than simply asserted. Abandoning the DOP is similar to abandoning the class struggle. The class struggle exists objectively whether one likes it or not. To 'abandon' it would however, indicate that the party has failed to recognize that objective reality.

In fact Cde Slovo himself is less than convincing (and seems less than convinced) that it was a correct decision for the SACP to abandon the DOP, noting that "the word 'dictatorship'....opens the way to ambiguities and distortions" (*Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 6, p20). Unfortunately too much time has been spent considering the word itself rather than the content of the historical period which the term was meant to refer to.

There is only one short step from abandoning the DOP to asserting that the 'class struggle' is an unfortunate term which is 'out of place in the present world' or 'out of date' as it is 'incompatible with democracy'. While the SACP has fortunately not taken this step, other com-

munist parties, such as those dominated by 'Eurocommunism', have.

Von Holdt

Karl Von Holdt, whose interventions are often politically stimulating, asserts that Lenin did not "develop a theory of the state, politics and democracy . . ." (p96). However, he makes this pronouncement without providing evidence for his assertion. According to his own account, he comes to conclusions such as this on the basis of a reading of only two of Lenin's works, *What is to be Done?* and *State and Revolution*, (and of four other secondary sources); whereas 45 volumes of Lenin's work have been published in English, arguably over 60% of which was devoted to the issue of democracy. This is especially true of his writings on the Agrarian and National Questions which for Lenin were the most important democratic issues of the day.

The issue is not whether von Holdt is correct or not. The essential point is that his mode of argument is based purely on assertion without reference to any evidence, and that an extremely important theoretical contribution by a major socialist writer is dismissed out of hand. The point is not that writers in the *Labour Bulletin* should adopt academic styles of writing (academics often confuse rather than clarify issues with their multitudinous

references). It is rather that unsubstantiated theoretical assertions are precisely a feature of the Stalinism which Von Holdt and Jordan are concerned to criticise.

Such crude assertive contents are characteristic of the various texts on the so-called "Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism" churned out in millions of copies by Progress Publishers through which countless dedicated activists had their first contact with 'Marxist theory'. Unfortunately 'Marxist theory' as practised in the USSR never scaled any new heights, nor did it give rise to any important contributions which revolutionised our thought. It could not do so in an atmosphere where vulgarity in theory became the general line of the CPSU and where Stalin's famous book *A History of the CPSU* (short course) for long had the status of a bible. The most important contributions to the development of Marxist-Leninist theory in recent times have emanated from Western Europe and the Third World.

Theoretical work should be serious

Unfortunately none of the above three contributions to the debate on socialism in the Labour Bulletin really seem to approach theoretical work with the seriousness it requires. Their assertive form of argumentation and their (conscious or unconscious) ignorance of evidence is misleading. It denotes, at the

level of theory, a kind of fear of contestation. This fear corresponds objectively, in all essential respects, to the fear of democracy which 'commandism' and 'statism' show at the level of practice.

Intellectuals have a duty not to belittle theoretical work. They should be prepared to struggle against their own limitations - as well as against bourgeois ideological practices - in the same way that the working class and the masses have so gallantly struggled and continue to struggle against oppression. Anything else is a negation of their responsibilities and of their duty to the oppressed.

In the absence of a struggle for democratic practices in theoretical work (which includes rigorous standards of argumentation) there is the real danger that Von Holdt's laudable call to intellectuals to "reinvigorate the theory and practice of social transformation" (p96), will remain an empty platitude, and that the debate on the future of socialism in South Africa will be still-born. ❖

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WOSA replies to 'a perturbing contribution by Cde Neocosmos'

On reading Cde Neocosmos' response to the debate generated by Cde Slovo's article in the South African Labour Bulletin (Vol 15 No 3), we were struck not by the theoretical contributions he made (if any) but by the form and nature of his response. Neocosmos accuses us, Cde Jordan, and Cde Von Holdt of belittling intellectual work. Yet it is he who is guilty of this. The tone of his response goes against the spirit of Cde Slovo's paper. It is an example of that tendency Cde Slovo warns against, which substitutes name calling and jargon for healthy debate with non-party activists. In fact, the tone of Neocosmos' response creates the conditions for the embattled ghosts of Stalinist practices to rear their heads again.

Despite these characteristics of Neocosmos' contribution we will respond, starting with two points of clarification. The first charge by Neocosmos that needs to be answered is that our initial contribution was an attempt to join the "let's have a

go at the SACP bandwagon". This is an unfair charge. It was actually Cde Slovo who called for and prompted the debate on the future of socialism. Our article in the Labour Bulletin clearly stated that our response was intended as a comradely contribution to a debate initiated by a comrade organisation.

Trotskyism and 'permanent revolution'

The second point of clarification concerns Neocosmos' charge that there has never been a successful "Trotskyist revolution". We must respond to this not because we wish to defend WOSA as a Trotskyist organisation. We reject this label as it is misleading. Rather we wish to defend revolutionary Marxism which Neocosmos attacks under the guise of Trotskyism. Furthermore, his use of the term "Trotskyist revolution" is misleading in another way. We are aware of national liberation, working class and even socialist revolutions, but we have never heard of an attempt to launch a "Trotskyist revolution".

If, however, Neocosmos uses the term "Trotskyist revolution" to suggest that the theory of permanent revolution is not applicable to revolutionary struggles, then he does not understand the history of the Russian, Chinese, Cuban, Vietnamese, and other revolutionary processes. In each of the above cases, the liberation organisations analysed the balance of social forces, and concluded that, for

the national aims of their struggle to be successfully achieved, they had to transcend capitalist relations of production. And that is indeed what happened in these countries. Because of the balance of social forces nationally and internationally, these revolutions developed from their national democratic beginnings to proletarian results. This process was described by Trotsky as the "permanent revolution"¹.

WOSA on national and class oppression

Our main response, however, is to the substance of Neocosmos' charge that we are "idealistic" because we view "the opposition between the working class and capitalists as the only possible contradiction in society." This is a gross misrepresentation of our position. WOSA's political programme states that "in our country, for reasons connected with the technical problems of diamond and gold mining, racism, racial discrimination, racial oppression and segregation became, for the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a necessary aspect of the production of profit and thus of the capitalist system."² The WOSA programme then goes on to note the racial division between black and white which serves as a vertical scissor to divide all classes within society. Our programme clearly insists and explains how the black working class in our society labours under both national oppression and class

exploitation.

These positions on national oppression do not, however, lessen our critique of the "two stage theory" on the South African struggle. To the contrary, it enhances it. National oppression facilitated the development of capitalism in South Africa. This historical legacy makes the disentanglement of capitalism and racism extremely unlikely. It is extremely difficult to envisage the establishment of a non-racial capitalist society in South Africa³. The theory of permanent revolution has a real application to South African historical and social conditions. Thus, our conclusion is that the national liberation struggle can only culminate in victory if it transcends capitalist relations of production.

Lenin and 'socialism in one country'

Neocosmos' other charge is that we view "the sin of 'socialism in one country' as the universal explanation for all the evils of Stalinism - as if socialism could occur in all countries at once." Two points need to be made here. The first is that Lenin, and subsequently the Left Opposition, always maintained that, in the face of international capitalism, it was impossible to establish a fully developed socialist society in the Soviet Union. This, however, does not necessarily lead us to the conclusion that socialism must occur in all countries at once. Since revolutions are largely influenced by the dialectic of contradictions within

national boundaries, they are bound to occur in different countries at different periods. However, such revolutions are limited to transcending capitalist relations of production. They will not be able to realise a fully developed socialist society within the confines of their national boundaries.

The second point that needs to be made is that it is striking that at a time when most committed socialists, including Cde Slovo, are rejecting the theory of 'socialism in one country' Neocosmos' letter borders on a half-hearted defence of it. Once again, he seems to be trapped in a time warp of past theories and practices.

This response to Neocosmos' letter is not intended to convince him of the correct-

ness of our position, nor to engage in debate with him. Our response is aimed at clarifying for the worker leadership of this country, which is the *Labour Bulletin's* main readership, the misrepresentations contained in Neocosmos' letter. ❖

NOTES

(1) For a fuller explanation of this thesis see M. Lowy "The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution" Verso 1981

(2) See Political Programme of the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action p5

(3) For a fuller explanation of the argument that leads to this conclusion see Programme of the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action p4-13. A similar conclusion is contained in H. Wolpe's latest book "Race Class and the Apartheid State", UNESCO Press 1988

from three sources - German Philosophy, English Political Economy and French Revolutionary practice.

Not least among the concepts Marx and Engels borrowed from this tradition is the dictatorship of the proletariat. In their own writings, they employ it in only a few places - the letter to Weydemeyer, referred to by Neocosmos, the Critique of the Gotha Programme, Engels' introduction to the Civil War in France. When I pose the possibility that the concept might bear some responsibility for the crimes perpetrated in its name, it is because of an awareness that use of the term 'dictatorship' indeed planted in many minds the notion of absolute power.

(ii) Neocosmos misses the essence of my article, which is that in the socialist countries, material conditions of economic backwardness, compounded by the options chosen by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union when confronted with the crisis of legitimacy it faced after Kronstadt, and the objective need for a bureaucracy to supervise both the state and the economy, resulted in what Bahro called "despotic industrialization". What Krushchev chose to call it is neither here nor there. Our concern is the content of the political institutions not the labels stuck on them.

I insist too that Stalinism is neither the inevitable outcome of Marxism-Leninism nor a

A reply to Neocosmos

by PALLO JORDAN

I shall refrain from the sterile trading of quotations from Marx or Engels which M. Neocosmos seems to relish and merely recap the issues I tried to address in my review of Slovo's "Has Socialism Failed?"

(i) I do not dismiss the dictatorship of the proletariat nor did I imply this in my article. It is nonetheless historical fact that the concept - the dictatorship of the proletariat - comes from the practice of the French revolutionary socialists beginning with Gracchus Babeuf and the Conspiracy of the Equals during 1795, and Phillipe Bournarotti, who was a participant in that movement. The term was first explicitly employed by Auguste Blanqui, Bournarotti's most famous disciple, during the 1840s. Marx and Engels admit their debt to these pioneer revolutionary socialists, which is why Marxism is referred to as deriving

product of the "muck of ages" but rather the result of the uncanny synchronization of a number of objective factors - such as economic backwardness, capitalist encirclement, the war of intervention and the devastation that caused; and subjective factors - the war-weariness of the people, the decimation of the best working class cadres during the civil war, the crisis of legitimacy of 1921.

(iii) My purpose in giving such a long exposition of the views of various Marxist critics of Stalinism was neither to score points nor to berate the Communist parties. I proceeded from the premise that only by understanding the material basis of a system can we hope to change or prevent it. I fear Neocosmos prefers to ignore this and seeks refuge in vacuous generalities.

He, in my view, has avoided dealing with the issues. The issue today is how to rescue socialism and its revolutionary democratic content from the muck and mire through which Stalinism has dragged it.

(iv) However there are one or two points which one should take up.

The crude Trotskyist baiting Neocosmos resorts to can only be described as puerile. Really, how many arguments does Neocosmos hope to win in this fashion? It betrays an unwillingness to make the much needed admission that the Marxist critics of Stalin and the Stalinised-CPSU were right all along and that it is time that

South African communists re-examined the work of these critics.

The only reason why such an admission assumes any importance is because the SACP invariably joined in the chorus of vicious lies, calumnies and slanders, orchestrated in Moscow, every time a critical voice was raised. If its publications were to be believed, the makers of the Russian Revolution (with the exception of Lenin, Krupskaya, Svedlov and Stalin) were all traitors! (Until they were judicially rehabilitated in Moscow during the late 1980s!)

The leader of the Yugoslav partisans was an agent of imperialism (until Krushchev re-established links with Yugoslavia after the death of Stalin!). Wladyslaw Gomulka was, in succession, first a vicious spy in the employ of imperialism, then a brave working class leader (after he was released from prison!), then an incompetent leader (after he fell from grace!). Matyas Rakosi used to be the intrepid leader of the Hungarian proletariat until 1956 when (after Janos Kadar came into office!) he was transformed, by edict, into a monstrous brute who had tyrannised his people. In like fashion, the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, previously regarded as the brave offspring of Julius Fucik, were in 1968 branded as, at best, dangerous revisionists deserving to be overthrown by

military force from without!

Both the slanders and their retractions make a mockery of Marxism. They would test the credulity of even the most gullible. Yet people who were otherwise very rational, decent, honest, generous and brave repeated them like a catechism.

(v) The Communist Parties in Eastern Europe (with the exception of Yugoslavia and Albania) did not make revolutions but came to power on the bayonets of the Red Army. There can be no denying though that they bear responsibility for the revolution that has swept socialism from the face of Europe for at least another decade! It was the crimes and corruption of the Communist Party-led governments that so disgusted the working class as to make it the ideological prey of explicitly right wing bourgeois parties (like Kohl's Christian Democrats in Germany).

After the triumph of fascism in Germany during the 1930s, the events of 1989 will probably be recorded as the second greatest defeat sustained by the working class in Europe during this century. As such it merits serious attention which I feel Slovo's pamphlet fell short of because of its silences. I sought also to draw attention to an intellectual tradition within Marxism that has been consistently opposed to Stalinism and therefore deserves the critical appraisal of those who are looking for alternatives to Stalinism. ♦

Von Holdt replies

Neocosmos attacks my article for being based "purely on assertion without reference to any evidence". The only evidence he provides for *his* assertion is that I did not read 45 volumes of Lenin's work. My article is in fact a reasoned analysis of the evidence provided by two of Lenin's most important works and by historical accounts of Bolshevik practice in four secondary texts.

The references at the end of my brief article indicate the texts which are referred to in the article. They do not list every work by Lenin that I may have read. The fact that 45 volumes of Lenin's work have been published in English is totally irrelevant, unless it can be demonstrated that in these works Lenin wrote something which disproves my argument. Neocosmos does not bother to do this. He does refer to Lenin's writings on the Agrarian and National Questions - but in these Lenin discusses the *strategic tasks* of the democratic revolution, *not* the theory and practice of democracy in organisations and in the state, which is the subject of my article.

Neocosmos accuses me of making unsubstantiated assertions, and claims that this betrays a fear of contestation and therefore a fear of democracy and therefore is tantamount to Stalinism! Even if my argument were unsubstantiated, this seems a dubious line of reasoning. But since my argument *is* substantiated, his accusation is nonsense.

Neocosmos should perhaps reflect on his own polemical style, which is scholastic, sec-

tarian, arrogant and bullying. Of course, Lenin himself often used a similar style, so it must be progressive and democratic!

Apart from his spurious comments on my mode of argument, Neocosmos makes two substantive points I would like to comment on.

The first is that undemocratic practices are inevitable because they are the results of "bourgeois relations". Communist parties cannot be held accountable, he argues, for this 'muck of ages' which affects the proletariat itself.

With this one comment Neocosmos negates the whole of Slovo's courageous attempt to take responsibility - as a communist - for Stalinism's brutal assault on democracy, and his attempt to understand how this happened.

I still believe that socialists need to critically examine the works of Marx and Lenin in order to establish the extent to which theoretical weaknesses facilitated the rise of Stalinism under specific historical circumstances. Theory also needs to take responsibility for practice!

The second comment I would like to make is on the 'dictatorship of the proleta-

riat'. Neocosmos believes abandoning this concept is similar to abandoning the class struggle. I would like to suggest that this concept may be the single greatest obstacle to achieving socialism - and not just because the word 'dictatorship' has nasty implications, as Slovo and Jordan argue.

The concept 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is linked to its opposite, the idea that the state in all capitalist societies is also a dictatorship - a 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie'. This concept has created enormous confusion in communist ranks, since it does not allow a distinction between bourgeois democracy and various forms of undemocratic bourgeois rule, such as fascism, military dictatorship, colonial rule, etc. Nor does it allow analysis of different kinds of bourgeois democracy - say the difference between Swedish social democracy and Thatcherism.

The two concepts - dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and its 'antithesis', dictatorship of the proletariat - are reductive and mechanistic. They leave no space for an analysis of the role of hegemony and the relation between hegemony and coercion. This has had disastrous strategic, tactical and organisational consequences, both in the struggle against capitalism and in the struggle to build socialism.

Even a careful reading of all of Lenin's works, in English and Russian, will not solve this problem. We had better start reading other books too! ☆

rethinking SOCIALISM

EDDIE WEBSTER reviews *Participating in management: union organising on a new terrain* (by Andy Banks and Jack Metzgar, Labour Research Review, Midwest Centre for Labour Research, Chicago, Illinois, 1990) and *Age of Democracy: the politics of post-Fordism* (by John Mathews, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989).

There was much that divided revolutionaries and reformists a century ago, but what they all shared in common was a vision that an alternative to capitalism was both desirable and possible. They disagreed about how to achieve this goal, but the destination was not in doubt.

The present crisis within the left arises from the collapse of that vision in both its evolutionary and revolutionary form. It is no longer simply capitalism that is in crisis; socialism is now also in a deep crisis. "At the beginning of this century socialists could believe, and could ask others to believe," writes Anthony Wright, "that socialism is always and everywhere synonymous with democracy and freedom.

"This is no longer possible today. We know that capitalism and democracy can be combined (not that they necessarily are), as yet we do not know this of socialism."

We also know that the living conditions of workers have been highest when the capitalist economy has been growing (although again this is not necessarily the case: the South African boom of the sixties shows that capitalist growth does not necessarily improve the living conditions of workers).

In fact the left in Europe and America has relied on the *expansion* of capitalism (not upon its crises) for its own advance. This has led Gavin Kitching in his book *Rethinking socialism* to the heretical view that "socialists have an interest not in capitalism's collapse in the current crisis, but in its surmounting that crisis and in its continuing development."

Two recent publications from respected labour-linked intellectuals provide further support for this heretical position. The first is by two Americans, Andy Banks and Jack Metzgar and the second



Eddie Webster: "need to rethink the socialist tradition"

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

is by an Australian, John Mathews. They both argue that a new model of unionism is needed to meet the new challenges facing the labour movement.

Worker participation in management

Breaking with the American left's opposition to any form of 'worker participation', Banks and Metzgar propose in the *Labour Research Review* what they call "a union-empowered model of worker participation in management." They argue strongly that unions should become involved in - and in fact take control of - participation programmes.

Many union members are part of worker participation programmes, they note. But only a few unions actively promote the concept, and most accept management's definition of what participation is. Banks and Metzgar argue that unions need to challenge management's de-

finition: there is a difference between "a vague promise of co-operation by management" and a process of participation "that strengthens the union as an institution," they write.

Extending collective bargaining - or subverting it?

The management approach, which they call 'co-operationism', is largely a way of winning over workers to management goals, weakening unions and taking advantage of workers' knowledge for company goals. On the other hand, *genuine* participation of workers in management is the key to developing an organising model for the union of the future, they argue. Unions should use participation to *extend* collective bargaining, rather than allowing management to use participation to *subvert* collective bargaining.

Workers often have first-

hand knowledge to correct managements' mistakes. Workers can use their superior understanding of the production process, Banks and Metzgar argue, to organise themselves and solve problems in the workplace for their own ends.

But, they insist, unions must exclude management from shop councils (supervisors now dominate many participation projects). They call this approach the 'organising model' of trade unionism. This 'organising model' of worker participation must cover major management decisions such as investment, in addition to the usual shop-floor problems.

Current research by Leger and Mothibeli supports the belief that workers have valuable knowledge about the production process which is usually ignored by management. Through careful interviews among underground gold miners, they have demonstrated that these men have a body of 'working knowledge' about rock-falls. British miners call this working knowledge, 'pit sense': workers have a sense when the rocks are going to fall.

While this certainly shows the potential for greater participation of workers in underground safety, management has not shown any willingness to enter into *genuine* participation over safety issues. Instead they bypass this knowledge and ignore the potential for par-

ticipation that exists at shaft level.

While it is true that management has historically governed the work-place in South Africa in a coercive way (what has been called racial despotism), this racist and coercive system of control is now under challenge.

In a study by Judy Maller of worker participation, she concludes that in SA only Volkswagen has begun to enter into any serious sharing of decision-making. Her reasons for arguing this echo the 'organising model of trade unionism' put forward by Banks and Metzgar: Volkswagen has recognised the power of organised labour on the shopfloor and it has begun the difficult and dangerous task of making decisions jointly.

A new model of unionism

The second book is more wide ranging and ambitious than the first. In *Age of Democracy* John Mathews argues that we need a new model of unionism to come to terms with economic and industrial restructuring. Unions must abandon the old model of abstentionism, he says, and lead, with other social movements, the democratisation of economic and industrial life.

Unions, he says, must move beyond their current *defensive collectivism*, and seek to establish a new agenda for industry and the workplace. This means :

Unions must become the



Workers at a union meeting: John Mathews suggests in his book that a model of unionism is necessary which will 'come to terms with economic and industrial restructuring'.

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

principal promoters of high technology and efficiency in industry so that they can marginalise the New Right employers who will be retarding productivity in the name of 'managerial prerogatives'.

- Unions must unleash the energy, creativity and imagination of their members, in a sustained drive for more productive and more democratic workplace structures.
- Unions must concentrate their energies on the broad economic issues.
- Unions must prepare the ground very carefully before they use collective action.
- Unions should concentrate their bargaining on non-wage issues that affect economic performance and work experience, and settle wage issues through central political negotiation.
- Unions need to influence

the pattern of investment, so that they can respond to the concerns of social movements regarding environmental, peace and gender issues.

Social contracts

Mathews calls this model of unionism, 'political unionism', because it calls for conscious intervention at the political level and it sets itself conscious social goals, such as low unemployment, low inflation, and social development. The means for achieving this, he says, are the 'social contracts' which can be negotiated between the trade union movement and social democratic political parties.

In the case of Australia, the Australian Congress of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Australian Labour Party (ALP) negotiated an Accord in 1983.

To back up this new

model of political unionism, Mathews proposes "a new mobilising vision" of "post-Fordist associative democracy". Although it sounds very jargonistic, the central ideas are easy to grasp, relevant and sensible. He argues that we need to extend our notion of democracy from the political arena to the industrial and economic arenas.

Importantly, he says, the state must be seen as the institution which supports and co-ordinates the process of change, rather than the institution which 'delivers' social transformation. That is why he speaks of *associative* democracy - the emphasis is on *associations* of workers and citizens as the agents of democratisation. Associations such as trade unions should be involved in transforming the economy from within, rather than the state regulating it from without.

Rejection of Leninism

Underlying Mathews' vision is a clear rejection of Leninism and the Bolshevik epoch. This, he says, was a wrong turning of enormous magnitude because it led dedicated socialists into a dead-end - the single-minded but futile concentration on the conquest of state power, while neglecting all the immediate social and economic issues that urgently need attention.

Bolshevism also led to a defensive anti-communism among social-democratic and labour parties. The split be-

tween communist and social-democratic parties within the western labour movement, he believes, is now breaking down, making way for a new vision - associative democracy guided by the social democratic movement in the 1990s.

He draws a crucial lesson from the past. If the economy is healthy (ie there is continuing growth and profitability) the labour movement will be far more likely to succeed in constructing a new social order than if the economy plunges into recession.

Where he differs from the 'New Right' is that he believes that only the organised social movements, rather than capital and the state, have the ability to reconstruct the economy. In order to accomplish this, the labour movement should lead the social movements by forging alliances at both the political and membership level.

Socialism not very helpful

How relevant is the idea of socialism to Mathews' vision? He addresses this question in his most recent book, *A culture of power - Rethinking labour movement goals for the 1990s*. Socialism, he says, is not very helpful in meeting the challenge of the 'New Right' because it has a bad image.

Socialism is linked to economic depression rather than growth, to despots such as Pol Pot in Cambodia, to greater state power in the economy, to higher taxation.

All of these, he says, are certainly undesirable images, or policies which the labour movement does not necessarily want to follow.

Besides, he says, it is unclear what the term 'socialism' means. Is it a moral and ethical vision, or is there such a thing as a socialist economics? Much of the recent work on "feasible socialism", he says, turns out to be, on closer inspection, the description of a *democratised capitalism*. If democratisation of the capitalist economy is the goal, then it would be better stated as such, and not confused with early, romantic notions of socialism.

His final criticism of the term socialism is that it is not helpful in formulating goals because it does not generate a programme. What is needed is an alternative vision that moves beyond socialism - what he calls "post-socialism".

Relevant to SA?

There is much that is relevant for the South African labour movement in Mathews' arguments, particularly in the light of the current debate on the 'social contract'. However two points of qualification must be mentioned.

Firstly, he believes that his "new paradigm" is only relevant in countries that have "an advanced democracy with a high level of technology and industry, and strong labour and social movements". Our labour

movement is still struggling for the basic rights of political democracy which Mathews argues the Australian movement needs to move beyond. Half our population is unemployed, illiterate and living in poverty; these basic needs must be the priority in any strategy for labour in the 1990's.

Secondly, unlike the South African labour movement, the Australian labour movement has declined in size from 51% of employed workers in 1976, to 42% in 1988 - as it has in other 'advanced' countries.

The Australian labour movement has also never expressed socialist goals. The dominant strand in our movement has from its beginnings been closely associated with socialism. This continues in the present, both through the alliance between COSATU and the SACP, and through COSATU's own programmes.

However, it would be too easy to dismiss Mathews' argument as inappropriate for the South African left. The central point behind Mathews' challenge is the recognition that no country can avoid the effects of global economic restructuring. Those countries that have tried have only slipped deeper into decline, diminishing the chances of any gains for labour.

Unless, he is suggesting, labour takes the initiative and develops a national economic strategy, the 'New Right' will be able to impose

its narrow sectional vision on the country.

Social contracts can fail

But the 'social contract' strategy for national economic development is not a simple solution. 'Social contracts' can fail, as they did in Britain in the 1970's. In that case the Labour Party government entered into an agreement with the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to control prices, redistribute income, improve housing, freeze rents and expand social services, in return for a voluntary wage freeze.

The agreement eventually collapsed when left-wing unions argued that the government had not delivered its side of the bargain. The failure of this social contract prepared the way for the triumph of the 'New Right' when Thatcher came to power in the 1979 election.

The same applies to any 'social contract' with a future democratic government in South Africa. Unless the government can show visible benefits, a 'social contract' will fail as it did in Britain in the seventies. ANC economist Tito Mboweni said at a recent management conference, that if five years after liberation there is no significant progress towards meeting South Africa's housing shortage, heads will roll.

But clearly the housing shortage cannot be resolved by a future government on its own. A resolution of this problem, as with many other social problems, depends as

well on the strength of grass-roots social movements such as labour. A 'social contract' will only work if these organisations have the power to back up their proposals and compel the employers and the new government to accept them.

These two books suggest that the labour movement in South Africa faces an opportunity and a threat. The opportunity is to build a new vision of the future, in which labour plays a leading role in social transformation. The threat is that capital will enter into a partnership with labour at the expense of the majority of the working people.

But the labour movement will not be in a position to take advantage of this opportunity unless it takes seriously the challenges from writers such as Mathews and Banks and Metzgar. The time is overdue for the left in South Africa to rethink the socialist tradition. ☆

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The 1991 Labour Relations Amendment Act

The CENTRE FOR APPLIED LEGAL STUDIES (CAL S) (WITS) gives an overview of the 1991 LRAA

The 1991 Labour Relations Amendment Act was passed by Parliament on 14 February 1991. It is expected to take effect on 1 May - an appropriate date for the first labour law to have emerged from consultations involving the independent unions. The Act repeals the most controversial features introduced into the Labour Relations Act by the amendments of 1988. Much of the Act is based on the agreement between COSATU, NACTU and SACCOLA (the 'CNS accord'). In the 'Lombia minute' of 13-14 September 1990 the Department of Manpower committed itself to piloting a law based on the 'CNS accord' through Parliament. In this note we set out the changes made by the new law.

The Unfair Labour Practice

The detailed unfair labour practice definition is replaced by a wide definition. This is more or less the same as the pre-September 1988 definition, and will restore the powers the Industrial Court used to have before 1988. Strikes and lock-outs are once again excluded from the definition of an unfair labour practice.

The court can still interdict an *illegal* strike, but now it cannot interdict a legal strike on the grounds that it is unfair.

It is expected that in the near future the National Manpower Commission will publish a code of fair and unfair labour practices to give clarity as to what labour practices are acceptable.

Strikes and lock-Outs

As strikes and lock-outs can no longer be unfair labour practices. However the court now has express power to interdict or grant any other order against *illegal* strikes and lock-outs.

Frequently employers have been able to interdict strikes with little or no notice to the union. For the first time the Labour Relations Act now has a section to regulate the issue of interdicts and other orders in respect of strikes and lock-outs. No court (including the industrial court) may grant any order which would stop a strike or lock-out unless 48 hours notice of the application is given to the person or organisation against whom the order is sought.

There are however two exceptions to this rule. Firstly, an order



COSATU general secretary Jay Naidoo shakes hands with Manpower director E J Knoessen during COSATU's sit-in at the Manpower offices in June 1990 - one of the many actions by unions which contributed to the government's decision to revise their controversial Labour Relations Amendment Act

Photo: Peter auf der Heyde/Afrapix

may be obtained on less than 48 hours notice if the applicant gives notice, on a prescribed form, of his/her intention to get a court order. The applicant will have to indicate when and in what court it is bringing the application, describe in brief the court order it wants, and name his/her legal representatives. If notice is given in this way, the court may grant relief against a strike or lock-out, but only if the applicant proves that there is good cause for going to court on less than 48 hours notice and that the respondent has been given a reasonable opportunity to be heard before a decision on the application is made.

Where a union or em-

ployer planning to stage a strike or lock-out gives at least 10 days notice of its intention to do so, a court order may not be given against the strike or lock-out unless *at least five days' notice* of the application to court is given.

These rules do not apply to disputes involving essential service industries or local authorities: in these workplaces strikes and lock-outs are totally prohibited.

What is meant by 'notice'? In the case of a strike, must the employer give the union the facts (usually in an affidavit) on which it bases its application for an interdict? Hopefully the court will decide that this is so, because this will organisations facing interdicts the opportunity to

get the evidence they need to challenge the application. A respondent must have a 'reasonable opportunity to be heard' in applications brought on less than 48 hours notice. This should also include an opportunity to produce evidence needed for opposing an interdict.

Unlawful strikes

The 1988 amendments presumed that trade union members, office bearers or officials who call, or participate in, an illegal strike are authorised to do so by their union. This was the most controversial of the 1988 amendments. It meant that the union could be sued for damages by the company during an illegal strike. Many

trade unions refused to intervene to settle illegal strikes unless the employer agreed not to make use of this clause in court. Employers began to realise that the 1988 amendments were unworkable. The 1991 amendments repeal this provision.

Industrial Councils and Conciliation Boards

The procedures for referring disputes to industrial councils and applying for the establishment of a conciliation board are simplified:

1. The requirement of a letter of deadlock introduced by the 1988 amendments is scrapped.

2. The certificate of compliance (saying that the union has complied with its constitution) is retained but simplified. It must still be attached but need no longer be signed.

3. The time limits are altered. There is no time limit for disputes which do not concern unfair labour practices. When a dispute does concern an unfair labour practice, the application or referral must be made within 180 days of the date on which the unfair labour practice started. If the referral is outside of this time period, the Director-General may condone this if there are good reasons.

4. A copy of the application or referral must still be sent to other parties to the dispute. However it can now be sent by either registered post, hand, telegram, telex, telefax or in any other

printed form.

Other changes are:

- The Labour Relations Act will now cover employers and employees engaged in activities on the continental shelf off the coast of South Africa, for example on oil rigs.
- Trade unions with members in both the public and private sector (such as NEHAWU) may now register.
- Race cannot be used as a factor in the registration of trade unions. It will be more difficult for racially exclusive unions to prove they are representative and so obtain or maintain registration.
- Where there have been industrial council negotiations on wages and conditions of employment, a dispute need not be referred back to the council for settlement. Once the negotiations end, without a settlement, the parties can take industrial action.
- The procedure for referring unresolved disputes from an industrial council or conciliation board to the Industrial Court for determination as unfair labour practices has been changed. Previously disputes could only be referred to the court by the secretary of the industrial council or the chairman of the conciliation board. Now, any party to the dispute has 90 days to refer a dispute to the court. Where the dispute is referred late, this may be

condoned by the court.

- A frequent problem has been that of the industrial council that stops operating but retains its registration. Such a council is not in a position to resolve disputes, but the Department of Manpower has often refused to appoint conciliation boards to resolve disputes within its jurisdiction. This position has changed. A conciliation board can be established within the jurisdiction of an Industrial Council that has ceased to perform its functions under the Act.
- The Act contains transitional provisions to deal with current disputes. Where any matter has already been referred to the industrial court, an industrial council or a conciliation board, it will continue to be dealt with under the old Act. Where this has not been done before the new Act starts, the new procedures will apply. Substantive provisions of the old Act will continue to apply to all events that happen before the new Act starts. Therefore if (assuming the law starts on 1 May) a worker is dismissed on 15 April, and the application for a conciliation board is made on 15 May, the new procedures will apply. But the old definition of an unfair labour practice will have to be used to decide if the dismissal was fair or not. ☆

Economic Notes

Economic Notes is supplied by Labour Research Service (LRS), Cape Town

Businessmen release new economic plan

or:

How to save capitalism in 2 not-so-easy steps

South Africa faces a Beirut scenario, say Top Company planners, unless there is rapid economic growth in the next five years. The planners expect that political negotiations will be completed by 1995.

But today's stagnating economy will lead to lower incomes, unemployment and more political violence. The economy needs to "change into higher gear" so that the political transformation to democracy is successfully completed.

This is the conclusion of a high-powered team of company economists and international "scenario planners". The Big Capital representatives were joined by top government officials including a deputy governor of the Reserve Bank. The participants are reliably believed to include ANC representatives. They were sponsored by Nedbank - at R5 000 each per day - to devise an economic Plan to drive the SA economy faster.

The scenario plan for higher growth has already been presented to the Cabinet, the ANC leadership, Inkatha, the SA Chamber of Business, and top civil servants. It will be made public in April - *Bargaining Monitor* readers are the first members of the public to read about it.

The scenario planners say that,

as long as the economy stays in low gear, it cannot grow by more than 3% per annum - even if everything goes well. Political change, they say, cannot be successful unless growth is higher than 3%.

But if things go badly in the next few years, economic growth will be closer to zero. This will have disastrous political consequences: poor people will place "unrealistic" demands on the economy, leading to intensified conflict.

Phase One of the Plan is called the "producer orientated" approach. This involves four programmes:

- 1. Massive investment in housing.** The Plan says that two hundred thousand houses must be built every year for the next five years. A further 400 000 serviced sites must be provided each year.
- 2. Electrification.** The Plan says that 1 million homes must be electrified every year for the next five years. This will save people money and time and provide new markets for manufacturers.
- 3. Skills training.** A huge amount of money will be poured into skills training. This will be paid for by a tax on companies. Companies that train lots of people will get tax rebates.
- 4. Relief of unemployment.** Finally, a "Jobs Corps" will be started to provide work for 1 million unemployed workers. They will build the houses and install the electricity.

Phase One gives a kick start to the economy. It will not be sustainable however. So Phase Two is called the "outward looking" phase. The planners say the economy must be restructured to export more. The State must in-

vest in more research and development, new factories and training. Obstacles to exports must be removed.

Investment in export-led growth *now* will produce sustainable growth from 1993. If a start is not made now, it will be too late to meet their target of political change in 1995. The Plan will create 800 000 jobs, they say, not counting the Jobs Corps.

What is the unions' role? They will be expected to sign a "compact" - a kind of peace treaty - with companies and the State. Strikes must be reduced and violence must be banned. Communities must agree not to launch boycotts.

The compacts can be arranged at local level first. Unions and communities which are willing to sign the compact will get the benefits, eg, housing, electricity and the Jobs Corps. Otherwise, no role is given to workers or their organisations in the Plan.

Companies are desperately worried about the future. This is reflected in their failure to invest in new machinery and factories over the past few years. The Nedbank Plan represents enlightened Capital. They have almost become social democrats! Now they can see that their wealth will not be safe as long as unemployment is so high and housing so poor.

But social democratic programmes always require the co-operation of the unions. This co-operation normally

comes in three forms:

- **"Wage restraint"**:
Unions agree to keep their demands low.
- **"Industrial peace"**:
Strike action is restricted.
- **"Co-determination"**:
Trade union officials are drawn into the management of the economy and even individual companies.

The Nedbank Plan wants wage restraint and controls on strike action - but no trade union participation in the decision-making.

The Nedbank Plan offers huge immediate gains for poor workers and unemployed workers. But will the government implement the Plan? Are most companies really prepared to pay for it?

The scenario planners are right in their belief that capitalism will not easily survive under political democracy - unless it can bring about huge improvements in workers' living standards. This is something not achieved to date! ❖

Company profile: Industrial Development Corporation (IDC)



The state-owned Industrial Development Corporation could play an important role under a democratic government. It could be used to expand manufacturing, essential to job creation and economic growth.

The IDC was established in 1940 under the United Party government. Its directors are appointed by the government. Some directors are appointed 'from the private sector', like Derek Cooper, a director of Barlow Rand. There are no union representatives on the board.

The main object of the IDC, as set by parliament, is to expand manufacturing investment. It now has investments of R5 billion. This makes the IDC as big as Anglo American's industrial company AMIC, or Rembrandt.

In 1990 the IDC made profits of R764 million, 21,9% higher than its 1989 profits. The return on assets, a key profitability ratio, was 15,5%. This is almost as good as the average earned of 17,1% by companies on the JSE.

In 1990 the IDC invested R660 million in 223 projects creating 9 400 jobs. (So jobs cost over R70 000 each!). About half this amount was used to provide loans to companies at the normal rate of interest. R100 million was lent to companies at very cheap interest rates.

The IDC scheme to help factories operate night shifts has all but failed. Only R20 million of the R300 million available has been allocated to companies under this scheme. The IDC says this is because of the recession.

In addition R200 million was advanced to the Mossgas project. The IDC is also involved in financing the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme.

From loans and its own profits the IDC invests about R1 billion annually. The government has not provided the IDC with any new funding since 1952, and does not intend to allocate additional funds to the IDC. Instead the government wants the IDC to privatise its investments. The sale of these investments would raise about R4,5 billion.

IDC investments

Foskor	R 330 million
Alusaf	R 300 million
Sasol	R2 000 million
Iscor	R 600 million
National Selections	R 748 million
Industrial Selections	R 712 million

IDC might sell its share in Sapekoe, which cultivates and processes tea and coffee, and Atlantis Diesel Engines. The Corporation may also sell its strategic investments in some of SA's largest companies. These include AECI, Barlow Rand, CG Smith, Impala Platinum, Palabora Mining, Romatex, Sappi, Tongaat Hulett and Sen-

Inflation

Area	Consumer Price Index (1985=100)	Annual rate of inflation (% increase over 1 year)
	Jan 1991	Jan 90 - 91
Cape Town	217.7	14.6%
Port Elizabeth	222.9	15.1%
East London	214.2	14.6%
Durban	208.6	12.6%
Pietermaritzburg	214.1	13.2%
Witwatersrand	222.8	14.9%
Vaal Triangle	213.5	13.1%
Pretoria	229.9	14.7%
Klerksdorp	229.4	14.1%
Bloemfontein	193.5	9.9%
OFS Goldfields	219.7	14.5%
Kimberley	207.6	12.5%
South Africa	219.5	14.3%

Source: Central Statistical Service

Inflation

Area	Consumer Price Index (1985=100)	Annual rate of inflation (% increase over 1 year)
	Feb 1991	Feb 90 - 91
Cape Town	220.5	15.1%
Port Elizabeth	225.2	15.2%
East London	216.3	13.9%
Durban	211.3	13.7%
Pietermaritzburg	216.7	14.1%
Witwatersrand	225.4	15.7%
Vaal Triangle	215.7	12.9%
Pretoria	233.3	15.3%
Klerksdorp	232.2	14.3%
Bloemfontein	196.0	10.7%
OFS Goldfields	221.3	14.4%
Kimberley	209.5	12.8%
South Africa	222.2	15.0%

Source: Central Statistical Service

trachem. These investments are held through the IDC's two listed companies, National Selections and Industrial Selections.

At the moment the IDC is merely sitting on these strategic investments. Instead of privatising them, the government should use its

investments in these large companies to force them to invest and expand. The IDC could demand seats on their boards. This and further investment funding from a democratic government could help the IDC to create jobs and to expand manufacturing. ❖

Profits, dividends and employment

Little economic growth was recorded during the last half of the 1980s. Even so, it seems that manufacturing firms had significant increases in their profits and dividends.

In 1989, there was negative growth rate, but profits grew by a staggering 25,6%. The graph below compares the growth rate (as measured by the Gross Domestic Product - GDP) to the profit rate in the years 1986 to 1989, after taking the inflation rate into account.

Dividends before jobs

Employment creation should be a major concern of South African companies, especially at this time. Yet in 1990, the Top 100 companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) increased their employment levels by only 0,1%.

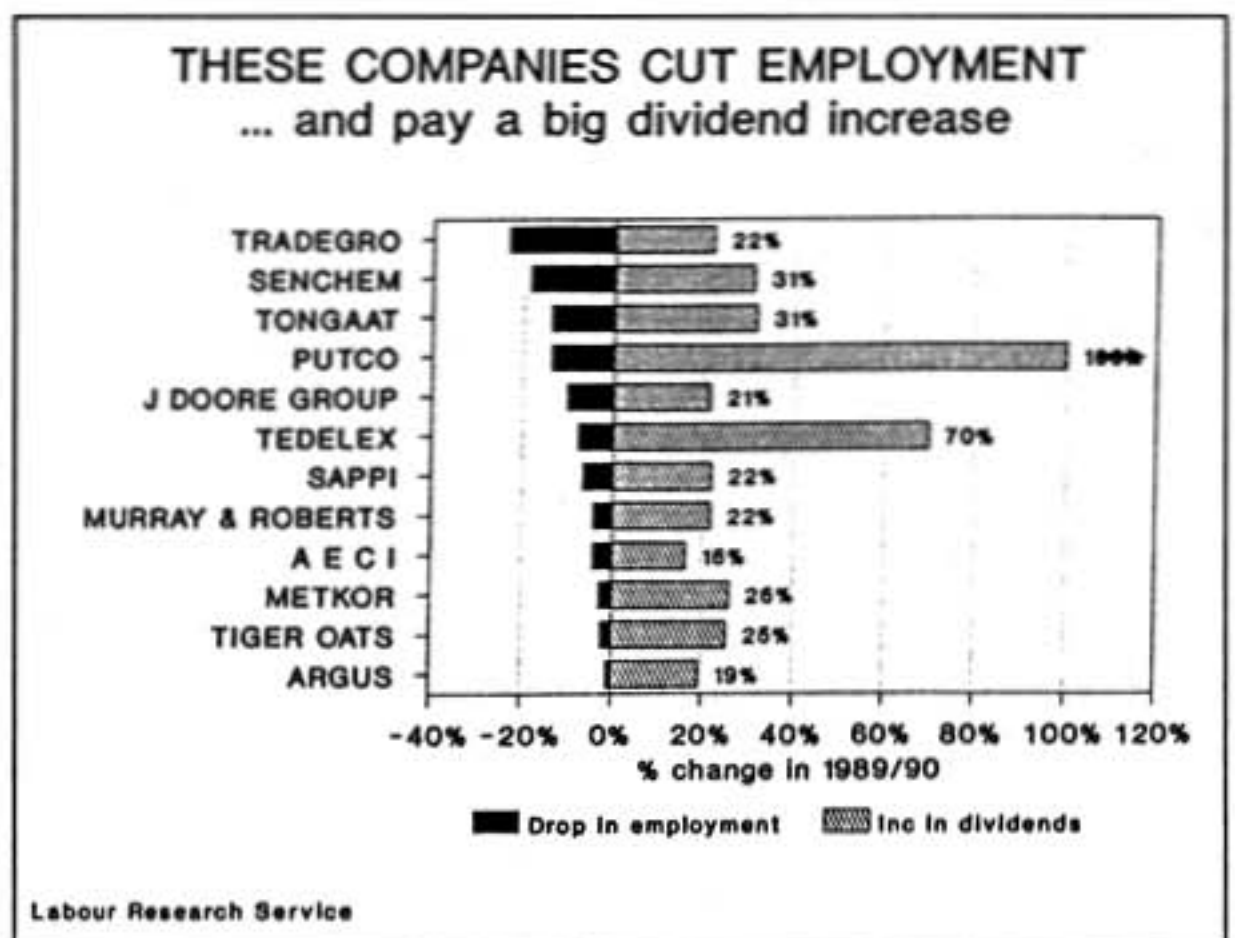
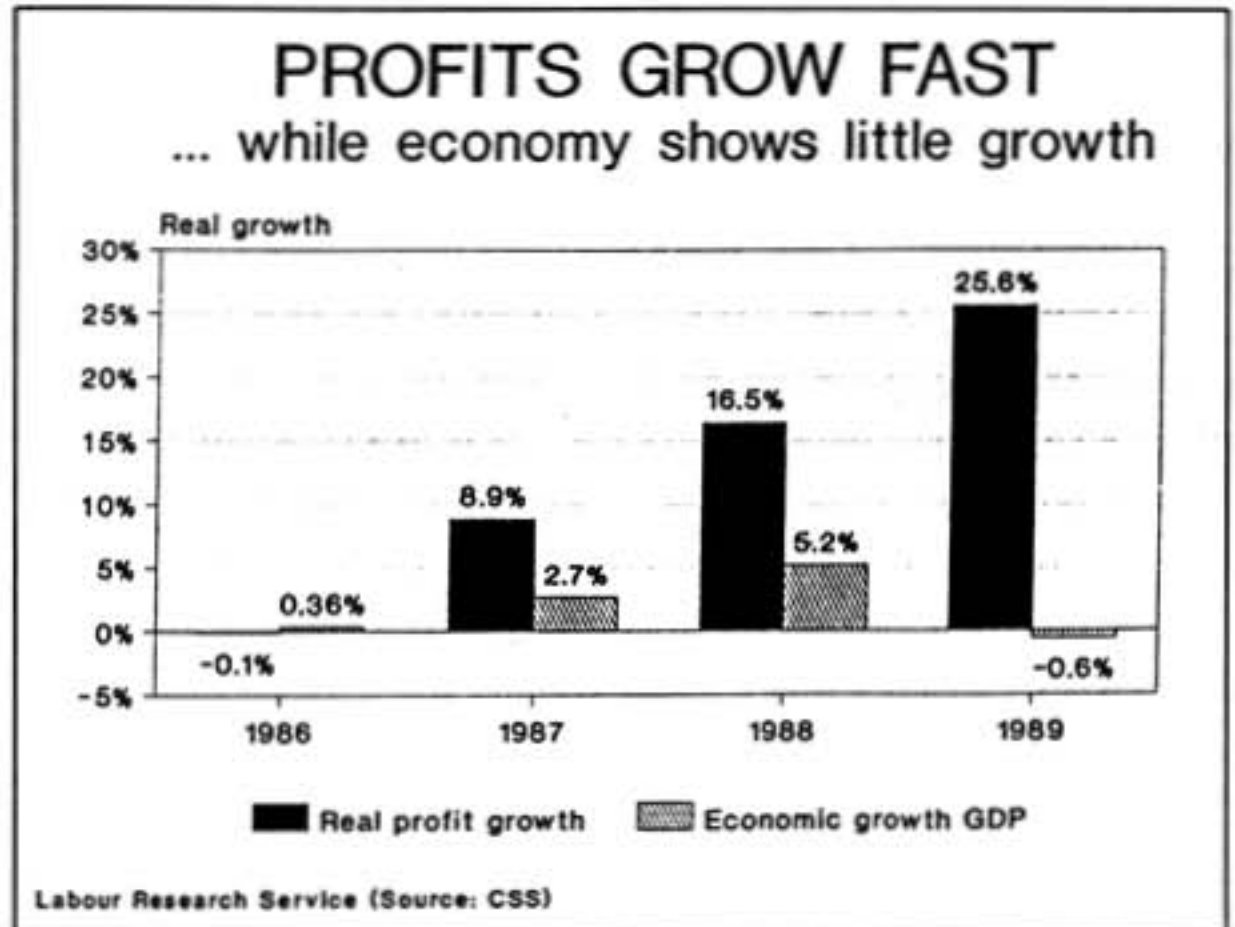
This means that they did not spend money on creating new jobs *and* that they retrenched a large proportion of the existing workforce. These workers have now joined the ranks of the unemployed and are unlikely to get jobs soon.

At the same time, these companies decided to pay an average of 21,3% in dividends to their shareholders. In other words, they saw it as more important to their shareholders happy (and richer) than to create employment.

Directors must also be happy

Meantime, directors don't seem to be having a problem with their incomes. For example, Anglo American paid its directors a total of R17 million in 1990.

Each Anglo director received R10 897 per week. This is 61 times more than the current average labourer's wage of R179 per week. ☆



Showing the way for women in the unions

Morice Smithers interviews ELIZABETH THABETHE, senior shopsteward, Transvaal branch treasurer, branch co-ordinator of the Womens' Group, and member of the CWIU NEC

I was born in 1959 in Katlehong - at that time there were just shacks there, before they built these four roomed matchboxes. My parents were originally from near Swaziland, but they worked in Edenvale. My father worked in a factory and was a supervisor representing the workers on the liaison committee. My mother was a domestic worker, earning very little, but trying her utmost best to help my father to provide for five daughters.

I schooled here in Katlehong. In 1978, after the uprising which started in 1976, we couldn't write exams. Also, because I am from a poor family - we were especially poor once my mother stopped working - I was forced to leave school and lose any chance of going to university. I started to work in 1978 and I am still at the same firm although I left for a short while in 1982, because I could get more pay and better conditions at another company. But then they moved to Bophutatswana, partly to escape from the union, which was well-organised there in the company.

I first joined the union in 1984. There were difficulties in organising because there were people who had been working there for many years who were scared to challenge management. Workers were badly treated, and anyone who com-

plained about things would be told that there were plenty of people outside who wanted their job.

We start to organise

There was a comrade from SFAWU, a woman, who helped to organise us. She explained the struggles they had been waging at Simba. They finally got recognition and she was now a shopsteward. So she began to talk to the workers in the factory - and most decided to join. The comrade from SFAWU arranged that an organiser from Chemical - Bra Wes - would meet us. We all went out at lunchtime as if we were going to eat and met them in a nearby shop where they had union forms for us to apply.

Of course, we had to keep our membership quiet at first, especially from the supervisors who worked hand-in-hand with management. They used to sit with management and decide who should get increases. So if you were not in good relations with the supervisors, then they would say you don't deserve increases or promotions.

Sometimes if they motivated an increase for you, however small, they would come to you and say you must not tell the other workers you were now getting more money. This was one way that they used to try and divide the workers.

Sexual harassment

There were also those who would say 'the job is there in the factory, but you know there's nothing for mahala, so can't you be my girlfriend'. And then if the relationship ended, you could expect to be expelled from the job.

So we became members of the union and succeeded in getting 50% plus one to join. At first management refused to recognise the union, especially when the union asked for time off for shopsteward elections and for shopstewards to be able to meet and to have facilities like telephones for union work. They said the company was there for business, not to look after the union. But finally they had to agree.

Workers didn't really understand exactly what or who the union was. They thought that you join a union and it does things for you. So Wesley came and spoke to them and explained that the union is not the officials or the offices, but the workers themselves. He explained that if we were united, we would make gains. If we were not, we would not get anywhere.

We had elections and I was elected as the senior shopsteward. Things were very difficult in the beginning for us. There was a time in 1986 when all the other shopstewards resigned because they were being pushed from the management side and the workers' side. They couldn't take the pressure and I was left alone in the committee. It wasn't easy for me especially because management didn't take women seriously and didn't see how they could be leaders. But eventually they began to respect me. Maybe I succeeded in the union as a woman because I came from a family where they were no sons and we had to learn to do things that men do, to help my father who was working hard to bring us up.

Of course, many of the male workers also had a negative attitude - they felt they could not be represented by a woman. Yet I was elected by men also because I came from a department in which men and women were working.

It was not easy for me as a woman, but I told myself that if I want to fight for my own people, I cannot be discouraged. I was given courage by the workers in our factory, especially the women, who saw my potential. I also made sure I attended locals where I began to understand more of the problems that workers generally were experiencing and to learn from some of the older shopstewards who were there.

As well as being senior shopsteward in my company I have also been elected as Transvaal

branch treasurer, branch co-ordinator of the Women's Group, and a member of the NEC.

Most unions have now accepted that women's structures need to exist within the unions. They no longer have the criticism that we will be undermining women's structures in the community. I think they have realised that women experience specific problems in the workplace which women's groups in the community cannot attend to, for example the question of maternity rights and sexual harassment.

Building confidence

We have found that some of the women are more open and prepared to talk when they attend the Women's Forum than when they participate in the BECs or in the congresses. They build confidence in the Women's Forum and then are able to attend and participate in other structures. They begin to understand why they are involved and that women can be leaders too. We have been able to develop women so that they have the qualities needed to be shopstewards and from there they are able to move to other positions.

This is especially important when it comes to negotiations. Most negotiators have been male and when they come to issues that affect women, like maternity rights, this is the first thing that is compromised. There is no-one there who really knows all the difficulties that women experience. We can't allow issues that are important to women to be compromised just so that we can maybe get a little more money.

I foresee some problems for women in a post-apartheid SA. We are going to have to work hard now already for more participation. We have to make sure that women's rights are properly enshrined in a new constitution. For example, in the first draft of a Workers' Charter, there was only one sentence for women and we in the COSATU sub-committee argued that one sentence cannot cover all the issues that are important to women.

We have to look also at the fact that even in the unions that have a majority of women members, the leadership is still dominated by men. COSATU is trying to amend the constitution to introduce affirmative action and at the congress in July they are proposing from the EXCO that there should be seats reserved in some leadership structures for comrade women. Such a suggestion has been accepted whole-heartedly by women, but we must look at how this can be done. We believe it will boost the role of women in COSATU significantly. But we believe there

must be action on these things, not just resolutions on paper.

One of the problems facing unions is that meetings are not running as they were before the political organisations were unbanned. Many meetings are not even quorate. The question of the labour movement is seen to have been flattened. Many workers, including shopstewards, are involved in the civics and other political organisations and that takes time. So there is a decline in COSATU and that is being discussed with some urgency. In the end it is workers on the factory floor who are going to suffer.

The unions must remain strong!

We must try to get a balance between the political organisations and the union movement. My own belief is that the labour movement played a key role in getting organisations unbanned. We were also strong enough to get the Labour Relations Amendment Act scrapped. We cannot afford to lose the strength that we had. We fought very strong to get there.

In CWIU we have a resolution for rebuilding structures from the shopfloor upwards. We see that if workers relax now, then their own rights are not going to be enshrined in the constitution or in any future Bill of Rights. We have to continue struggling until we see that our rights are secured.

Our economy is in tatters. COSATU has an economic body which is trying to look at what can be done in order to ensure that the economy is as it should be. It's going to be tough, so we have to start working on it now. The most difficult thing is going to be to try and provide the fruits of the struggle for people from the mess that the racists have left.

The question of what kind of economy we will have is still very much under debate. You know, all of us were gunning for socialism, though now it has been proved wrong in some parts of the world. Due to these mistakes, people throughout COSATU are looking at different economic options, keeping mind the need for an economy which will favour workers.

I'm not sure that a post-apartheid SA is going to be how we envisage it to be. Most people believe that the ANC will take over and that will be the end of all our problems. But an ANC government, or any other government, will represent all South Africans. Therefore I think unions must remain independent in order to be guided by the policies and principles of the labour movement, and make sure the specific interests of workers are catered for.



Working a triple shift

As a single mother, I would like to be able to spend more time with my child but I am always very busy with meetings and other responsibilities. Today for example I have three meetings in addition to this interview. I even have my bag with me because I am only going home tomorrow as a result of these meetings. Fortunately my sisters and my aunt help me with my child so she does not suffer when I am away.

So I work a triple shift - my job in the factory, my duties at home, and my union work. But I must continue because there is still a lot of work to be done in the unions, and I cannot foresee when this will change. It will only become easier if more comrades get involved and share the load.

Because of my involvements, I don't think I will marry soon. I would be expected to do all sorts of things as a 'makoti' and I am not keen on that. I also don't believe that I must be controlled in the way that traditions demand, having to abide by the rules of the man who society says is the head of the family. Fortunately my boyfriend is very co-operative - he believes in freedom of association and does not try to control me and my movements. I think I used my negotiating skills on him to persuade him. Anyway, maybe post-apartheid I will think about settling down. But not now. ☆

IN THE FACTORIES



MAYDAY IS OURS!

ON THE LAND



MAYDAY IS OURS!

IN THE MINES



MAYDAY IS OURS!

IN THE STREETS



MAYDAY IS OURS!

MAY DAY 1991 - SOUTH AFRICAN WORKERS CELEBRATE