

SOUTH AFRICAN

# LABOUR BULLETIN

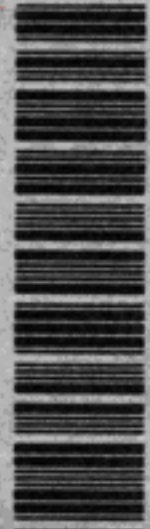
July 1994 Volume 18 Number 3

Lula interview  
Post-election strikes  
Stopping the gravy train




AFRICA PER ST  
HD 5441  
S7  
S6

PER LOCK/



TJ756402

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN  
VOL. 18, NO. 3, JUL. 1994  
FEP02 Received on 15/07/1994



WITS LIBRARY

## Labour after the elections: taking stock



# WORKERS' WORLD

A magazine of international labour and politics

No. 11, Spring 1993:

**FOCUS ON ASIA**

## Women workers organising in Asia

- ★ Zimbabwean textile worker interview
- ★ Australia: the social contract
- ★ USA coalminers strike!



Order your copy now from:  
ILRIG, 14 Community House  
Salt River Road, Salt River  
or PO Box 213 Salt River 7924  
Tel: (021) 47 6375

Price R2.50 (cheques & postal orders payable to ILRIG)

Part-time sellers! Contact us to find out about selling the magazine on commission

# SPEAK Magazine

## Putting women first

**Read about** what women are doing to change the inferior position imposed on them by society in male-dominated South Africa.

**SPEAK** is committed to promoting a positive image of women which challenges the negative image often presented by the mass media.

You can buy **SPEAK** Magazine at CNA outlets and news-stands, and some bookshops and supermarkets in SA and neighbouring countries.

Subscription rates for 12 issues are:  
Individuals R24.00  
Organisations R80.00  
Institutions R80.00

For more information, contact us at:  
PO Box 3851 Johannesburg  
3rd Floor 14 New Street South  
(opp. Van der Bijl bus station)  
Tel: 836 5020

**Published by**  
Umanyano  
Publications cc  
89/00595/23  
(member of Independent  
Magazine Group - IMG)  
3rd Floor  
14 New St South  
Johannesburg.  
P O Box 3851  
Johannesburg  
2000 South Africa  
**Telephone:**  
(011) 8365020  
**Fax No:**  
(011) 8366062  
**Editorial Department**  
**Executive Editor**  
Karl von Holdt  
**Guest Editor**  
Mike Murphy  
**Writers**  
Zolile Mtshelwane  
Deanne Collins  
**IMG Management**  
**Services**  
**Production**  
Morice Smithers  
Stan Thusini  
**Photography**  
William Matlala  
**Editorial Secretary**  
Bongi Zwane  
**Circulation**  
Jacqui Mathabe

**Editorial Board**  
**Cape Town**  
Dave Lewis  
Di Cooper  
Henry Chipeya  
Howard Gabriels  
Johan Maree  
**Durban**  
Ari Sitas  
Ashwin Desai  
Geoff Schreiner  
Imraan Valodia  
**Johannesburg**  
Amrit Manga  
Avril Joffe  
Eddie Webster  
Jane Barrett  
Karl von Holdt  
Monty Narsoo  
Moss Ngoasheng  
Phil Bonner  
**Eastern Cape**  
Roger Southall  
**International**  
**United States:**  
Gay Seidman  
**Australia:**  
Rob Lambert

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editorial Board or of Umanyano Publications. Published since April 1974.

**Graphic Credits**  
**Cover:** Fiona Dove  
**Back Cover and Graphics:**  
Judy Seidman  
**International**  
Lula: courtesy of Exposure  
2000 and the Brazilian  
Embassy  
Sao Paulo Meeting: thanks  
to Andre Singer  
**Public Sector**  
Bara Strikers: C. Sols  
Marchers: Morice Smithers  
Houses: Anna Zieminski  
Gravy Train Cartoon:  
thanks to The Star and  
David Anderson  
**Taking Stock**  
Brain Drain: Socialism Yes  
Kevin French  
COSATU Poster:  
The Shopsteward  
Intellectuals: Newsclipping  
Natal Mercury  
OD: Worker College  
Fiona Dove  
**Regional**  
Zimbabwe: Bulawayo  
Chronicle

All other photo's by William Matlala, except historical photographs and personal portraits.

**Subscriptions**  
Six issues per  
subscription. Please  
refer all subscriptions  
enquiries to :  
  
National Circulation  
Services,  
P.O. Box 30720,  
Braamfontein, 2017  
Tel :  
(011) 358-2085/358-  
2000  
Fax : (011) 7268430

If you still have  
problems, phone or  
write to the SALB.  
Please ask for Jacqui  
Mathabe.

**We have moved!**  
Please note our  
new address,  
Tel and Fax  
numbers

**T**he New South Africa is not yet 100 days old. The dust of the historic first democratic election has yet to settle. It is difficult to see the shape of

things ahead.

Nevertheless, this edition of the Labour Bulletin attempts to "take stock" of the labour movement in three key areas: morale among union personnel; the state-of-health of "worker control" (South African unions' most distinctive value system); and the appropriateness of the existent union structures for the New Era.

A second special focus examines the use of human resources in trade unions. An attempt is made to draw lessons from the past two decades while looking for solutions to the current problems, and in two of the articles even "management" techniques are examined for possible adaptation to Labour's needs.

The authors of the various articles have been asked by the Labour Bulletin to cast caution aside, to be provocative, to spark debate. The views expressed are thus rough-and-ready rather than highly polished, but this befits the times in which we live: Reconstruction and Development will be mainly in concrete blocks, not polished marble slabs.

While the taking stock and the fashioning of building blocks proceeds, a ferment of here-and-now worker action continues: the post-elections strike wave has received only piecemeal press coverage, but it is clear that workers feel that in the New South Africa old practices such as the withholding of union recognition rights, and ongoing shopfloor racism, must stop NOW.

It is also clear that "wage earners" in a very different category are being sorely tempted by "old" practices: the furore over politicians' salaries is all the greater because of Mandela's pre-election promise that there would be no more "fat cats" in the new government. Cosatu's response to these developments (covered here in "Stopping the Gravy Train") is an early indication that the "Freedom-equals-more-freedom-for-some-than-for-others" logic will not go unchallenged.

Could it be that Cosatu will now assume the mantle of spokesperson of all those who can never come within shouting distance of any gravy train, let alone climb aboard? And will Cosatu assume this role over against former comrades-in-arms who - perhaps blinded by the post-elections duststorm - see nothing wrong in picking up where the Apartheid Regime left off, save in the field of racial discrimination, narrowly defined? With the ANC-in-Government playing the role of referee rather than leader on questions of wealth redistribution ("All groups were given an equal opportunity to influence the Budget"), space has opened up for Cosatu to shrug off its sacrifices to parliament and to take on a positive wide-ranging leadership role not seen since the VAT campaign two years ago.

The current period of Reconstruction and Development undoubtedly requires a spirit of National Reconciliation, of labour and capital working together despite underlying class antagonisms.

But this does not in any sense imply acceptance of the logic of the gravy train: that Public Office is first and foremost an opportunity for personal gain. Socially responsible forces must make crystal clear the dictum that serving one's fellow South Africans in Public Office is a privilege. Payment for this service has to be reasonable, of course, but there is no basis whatever for determining public sector salaries by simple reference to salaries in the private sector, where the whole point is to amass as much personal wealth as quickly as possible.

Unless this principle is defended, the RDP budget allocations - which are not generous when the scale of the Apartheid inheritance is borne in mind - will in large part be poured into a venal political and bureaucratic elite for whom the notion of Service is an old-fashioned curiosity.



**Mike Murphy, Guest Editor**

# SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

Vol 18 No 3 July 1994

## Table of Contents

---

### Editorial

Editorial notes	1
Contents	2
Readership Survey	4
<i>Mike Murphy reports on the Labour Bulletin's survey of its trade union readership's views on the Bulletin</i>	

### Labour Action

"Struggle as usual" in the New South Africa: <i>Zolile Mtshelwane reports on the strike wave that rolled around the country in the wake of the elections</i>	6
Miners to make optimum use of RDP: <i>Deanne Collins outlines the first union plan to ensure meaningful RDP delivery to its members</i>	11

### International

Interview with Lula <i>Langa Zita and Karl Von Holdt talk to the Brazilian presidential campaign front runner while visiting SA</i>	12
--	----

### Public Sector

Public sector pay cuts: <i>Deanne Collins reports on a recent NALEDI workshop where the possibility of a public sector wage freeze was raised</i>	16
Consultation before legislation <i>Lucy Nyembe and Deanne Collins examine Nehawu's response to unilateral government activity in the Public Sector</i>	20
Stopping the Gravy Train <i>In the light of the furore over politicians' salaries, Deanne Collins addresses key points of principle affecting public service pay</i>	21



**COVER FOCUS:****The labour movement after the elections – taking stock**

- Introduction 24
- The Big Brain Drain 25  
*Sakhela Buhlungu examines the reasons for the exodus of union officials from unions into other forms of employment*
- Worker Control 33  
*The distinctive feature of South Africa's "new generation" unions from the 1970s is reappraised by Deanne Collins with an eye to its potential for survival in the 1990s*
- Restructuring the Labour Movement after Apartheid 43  
*Geoff Schreiner considers the capacity of the current Cosatu structures to deal with the entirely new challenges of the current period, and suggests far-reaching changes*

**FOCUS: Building blocks for unions in a new era**

- The Role of "Intellectuals" in trade unions 50  
*Jabu Gwala and Mike Murphy discuss the value to unions to date of "intellectuals" in senior official capacities, and the scope for continued inputs of t his kind in the 1990s*
- Intellectual inputs into trade unions: 1994 55  
*Jeremy Baskin describes the role of NALEDI, the new Cosatu-linked policy research institute*
- Unions for Unions? The case of MSF in Britain 58  
*Colin Adkin and Brian Harris describe how staff in Britain's biggest white collar union bargain over their own pay and conditions*
- Teambuilding in Unions 62  
*John Fisher explains how an experiment being conducted in a large British union uses Counselling techniques to foster more effective working relations amongst union officials*
- Organisational development: A technique for Union building? 67  
*Gino Govender argues the value of harnessing what was originally a management technique to the task of making union staff, aims and structures cohere*

**Regional Focus**

- Trade Union strategies in an integrated Southern Africa 73  
*Dot Keet sets out the challenges presented to unions in the region in the light of changing government and business strategies*
- Mozambique: The OTM confronts a changed political economy 83  
*Alfred Mafuleka details his findings from a recent visit to Maputo, which included an interview with the OTM General Secretary.*

**Cover photo: Cape Town workers assembling for Cosatu Living Wage march**

# *The South African Labour Bulletin's* **Survey of its trade union readership**

**E**arly in 1994 the SALB carried out its first ever readership survey amongst its key readership - trade unionists. The survey sought to investigate the Bulletin's distribution, what its readers like and what they don't like about it, what other journals they were reading, and their ideas for improvement in contents, layout, language, editorial policy and advertising.

## **Scope:**

The survey interviewed a representative cross section of readers. 19% were general secretaries, 15% other senior union officials, 23% union education officers, 17% midrank officials/organisers, and 25% shopstewards. 17 unions or federations were surveyed, including 13 from the COSATU stable.

## **Distribution of/access to the Bulletin**

The survey found that the bulk distribution system of the Bulletin via the unions was not working well as far as shopstewards were concerned. Although union officials obtained their copies quite regularly, shopstewards complained about great difficulty in obtaining copies of the Bulletin. As one shop steward (and Branch Chairperson) complained: "The organiser always steals the Branch copy!"

It became clear that the current distribution system is far too haphazard and will have to be corrected without delay.

## **Readers' Rating of the Bulletin**

In general, readers rated the Bulletin very favourably. Particular kinds of article were favourites with different kinds of audience: for example, higher ranking union officials preferred articles covering strategic and socio-political debates. Lower down the ranks the preference was for articles with a

more practical, historical or factual content. But all readers were agreed on the broad range of articles appearing in the Bulletin, thus appealing to different tastes and needs.

On the issue of whether the Bulletin should or should not cover the views of business (company directors/personnel managers etc) responses were mixed. At a senior level the two main views were:

- 1) "keep the SALB a strictly labour journal"
- 2) "bring business into the debates, we must engage."

Lower down the ranks the views expressed were

- 1) "keep business out – it's our journal"
- 2) "know your enemy! Let's hear what they have to say!"

## **Suggestions for future inclusion**

Senior officials wanted theoretical and policy input, and constructive criticism of the labour movement.

Mid-ranks officials sought mainly information servicing (eg. news of what is going on in the unions).

Shopstewards asked for news, topics and research on workplace issues, and a forum for exchange of views.

Education officers reinforced the needs expressed by the middle and lower union levels.

## **Layout, Readability**

Nearly all readers approved of the current layout, style and language level used in the Bulletin, although various useful suggestions were made to improve these areas.

## **Editorial Policy**

The SALB policy of being "pro labour but independent" met with criticism from non-COSATU respondents who felt the Bulletin





## Knowledge is power...

Can they get hold of the knowledge that gives the power?

was too pro-COSATU. Some major COSATU affiliates felt that the SALB could be more critical of COSATU, in a constructive way. The consensus was for the Bulletin to remain independent and not develop into the voice of a post-election labour/business/ government consensus. However the preference was for the Bulletin to seek more diversity of views and become more freely critical inside and outside the house of labour.

### Advertising

There was no objection to use of advertising, especially as a cost-cutter, subject to the need to not allow ads to overwhelm content, and subject to sensitivity to labour movement values (no sexist, racist, anti-health ads). An awareness of the strategic power of advertising was seen as necessary, expressed most amusingly by the quip: "When Coke workers are on strike, advertise Pepsi."

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey concluded that the Bulletin is held in very high regard in the labour movement, but serious attention must be given to the question of distribution, since current reach among the unions is far less than meets the apparent demand.

The editorial staff is currently introducing some of the suggested improvements made by readers into the 1994 editions, but the main concern will have to be how to distribute the Bulletin more effectively. A pilot distribution-improving plan, with the help of the unions, is currently under way. If successful the plan can be extended to other unions. The estimation is that the readership amongst unions can be trebled if this problem can be solved.

Bearing in mind the recent and sudden closure of WIP for financial reasons, the SALB will be approaching unions for assistance to solve the distribution problems as a matter of urgency. ☆

# *“Struggle as usual” in the new South Africa?*



SALB Writer ZOLILE

MTSHELWANE reports on the strike wave that rolled around the country in the wake of the elections.

**C**ontrary to some analysts' expectations, strike action has not slowed down immediately after the elections. Over the month of May, there has been a wave of strike action across different sectors of the economy.

## **□ The auto sector has had its fair share of strikes:**

About 6 000 Volkswagen workers in Uitenhage went on strike in the third week of May. The workers were protesting against racist practices by line management and the bosses' delay in processing grievances related to these practices. About 40 workers occupied the manager's office during the strike, and they are facing disciplinary action resulting from the occupation. The workers returned to work after negotiations with the union. There is, however,

dissatisfaction about pending disciplinary action against the 40 workers.

Nearly 3 500 Delta Motor Corporation workers went on strike in support of demands to withdraw from the company's medical aid scheme. The strike was suspended pending further negotiations.

The entire workforce of 6 500 at Toyota went on strike in protest against management's refusal to pay workers agreed production bonuses after, workers alleged, they had met their production schedules. Negotiations are continuing.

About 140 workers who were fired by Mercedes Benz in 1990 occupied the factory for four days. These 140 workers are part of the 500 who were dismissed by the company. The company was reportedly in the process of hiring new workers, rather than re-engaging those who were fired. The occupation was ended when



management called in the police who evicted the sit-in workers. Management has reportedly offered to make available R1 million to help the dismissed workers find other jobs. Meanwhile, 70 of the 140 workers appeared in the East London District court on June 15 on charges of trespassing.

**□ The mining industry has also suffered a series of strikes:**

About 14 000 miners at Goldfields' West Driefontein downed tools over racist remarks by a white worker against black workers. The five-day strike ended when management suspended the white worker concerned and agreed to start investigations on the issue.

Nearly 10 000 Kloof workers went on strike on May 5 over the dismissal of the mine branch chairperson. The strike lasted ten days. The NUM and management agreed to refer the matter to the Industrial Court.

6 000 Northam miners also downed tools for 11 days in support of a demand for the recognition of their union. The strike ended when management undertook to address all the workers grievances and started processing stop orders for the union.

1 700 workers at O'kiep mine in Namaqualand embarked on strike action demanding to become members of the provident fund. Workers were also demanding that management reverses its

decision to pay the wage increase as a bonus. The strike was settled after management conceded the workers right to join the provident fund and also reversed its decision to pay the wage increase as a bonus.

Lonrho's Eastern Platinum mines was hit by a seven day strike on June 1 over the dismissal of four shopstewards. The 3 500 workers returned to work after the union and management agreed to refer the dismissals to arbitration.

White mineworkers at JCI's Randfontein Estates gold mine went on strike in support of retaining racist practices in the usage of lifts taking workers underground. The strike ended when management agreed to start negotiations with the white Mynwerkersunie on the issue.

Ninety percent of the



3000 journalists demand pay increases

workforce of 1 400 at Richards Bay Minerals went on a five-day strike at the end of May. The workers were protesting against disciplinary hearings instituted against six workers who were accused by management of sabotage and neglect of duty. Management has suspended the hearings against the six pending a full investigation.

Pret Klerk mine in Nigel also suffered a strike as workers were demanding the recognition of the NUM and higher wages. Management fired all the approximately 700 workers after a day of strike. The union won a reinstatement of all the workers. The issues that sparked the strike will be addressed in negotiations with the bosses.

4 500 workers at JCI's Western Areas mine went on strike on May 8 in the wake of violent clashes amongst workers. Mine management attributed the clashes to tensions between two ethnic groupings in the mine. Eight workers have been killed since the fighting that started on April 17 when one worker was found dead. The NUM and management have negotiated a code of conduct that will regulate relations amongst workers. Peace monitoring structures have also been set up to enforce the code of conduct.

### ■ About 3 000 journalists at Argus

Newspapers voted in favour of strike action to back their demands for higher salary increases. MWASA is demanding a 15 percent increase, the SAUJ wants 13 percent, while management is offering eight percent backdated to April 1, or nine percent backdated to May 13. The two unions decided to take the dispute to mediation, saying that that did not rule out their right to strike should this process fail to satisfactorily resolve the impasse.

### ■ About 15 000 clothing workers around

Durban and Tongaat embarked on a four-day strike in support of their demand to be paid for April 27, 28 and May 10

(i.e. the Elections and Inauguration days). All the employers agreed to pay the workers for April 27 and 28 immediately. However, May 10 will not be paid immediately, but an agreement was reached that this will also be paid not later than December.

### □ Strikes erupted in the Commercial sector also:

SACCAWU members in 37

Shoprite\Checkers stores in the Eastern Cape and the PWV went on strike in protest against the dismissal of three shopstewards. Approximately 4 000 workers were involved. The dismissals have been referred to arbitration.

A wave of strikes hit Pick and Pay stores in the Transvaal. Workers were protesting against management's inconsistency in applying the disciplinary code of conduct. Over 1 500 workers were involved in these actions. Management has agreed to investigate the workers complaints and will inform the union of its findings.

Nearly 3 000 Joshua Doore group workers staged sleep-ins countrywide in protest against the imminent retrenchment of 750 workers. Another 2 000 workers marched to the group's head office in Johannesburg on June 11. The workers gave management an ultimatum to respond to their demand within two weeks.

Spar workers marched in Johannesburg in protest against the dismissal of 50 workers for staying away on May 10. A memorandum was handed in and workers are awaiting management's response.

### □ And in Transport:

About 200 workers at one department of the Transkei Road Transport Corporation went on strike on June 2 in protest against corrupt managers within the department, whom the workers demanded be suspended. A company cheque of R700 000 was reportedly intercepted whilst in the process of being deposited in a personal account held in Cape Town.





Public sector workers struggle before April 27th: set to continue?

140 workers (reportedly TGWU members) at Jowell Transport in Port Elizabeth went out on strike demanding the reinstatement of two colleagues. Management agreed to reinstate the two, but fired the entire workforce who had embarked on strike action.

Unitrans faces industrial action after workers voted in favour of a strike to support the demand for centralised bargaining.

### ❑ Public sector

The public sector also experienced strike action:

Nearly 500 civil servants in Mmabatho went on strike demanding pay parity with their South African counterparts. The workers were employed under the now-defunct Bophuthatswana homeland. Mmabatho is now part of the North-West province. The provincial government

encouraged the workers to appoint a committee with which to start talks on their grievances.

About 350 Telkom workers in Brakpan staged a one-day sit-in demanding subsidised transport. The workers agreed with management to start negotiations on the issue.

Nearly 350 Evaton council workers in the Vaal Triangle went on a two-week strike over the administrator's failure to implement last year's wage agreement. The administrator agreed to implement the agreement with immediate effect.

120 Embalenhle town council workers near Secunda went on a two-day strike over wage increases. Negotiations are continuing after the workers returned to work.

Bethal town council was hit by a three-day strike over wages. Approximately 350 workers were involved. Negotiations were

resumed after the workers returned to work.

About 96 Emjindini town council workers near Barberton went on a four-day strike over wage increases. Workers returned to work after management agreed to resume negotiations.

About 500 traffic officers in Brackenfell in Cape Town embarked on a three-day stoppage in demand of better working conditions. The officers are members of NEHAWU. A committee of five people each side was appointed to look into the officers' grievances.

### ■ Building industry

The building and construction industry had its fair share of strikes as well:

Nearly 400 CAWU members in LTA in the Southern Cape went on a four-day strike in May. The workers were demanding better pay and a provident fund.

Nearly 1000 workers in the brick and cement manufacturing industries in the Peninsula embarked on intermittent strikes in demand of better working conditions.

### ■ The food sector also experienced some strikes:

About 20 FAWU head office staff members went on a three-day strike from June 1 to June 4. The officials were protesting against salary deductions made for arriving late at work on a Saturday. The office-bearers of the union reportedly deducted a full day's salary from all those who arrived late. The issue has been referred to the NEC for a decision.

Approximately 120 Golden Lay workers at Roodepoort embarked on a one-day strike against management's decision to reduce delivery crew members from two per truck to one. The strike ended after an agreement with the union to negotiate the issue in terms of laid down procedures.

About 700 workers at Langeberg Foods in Boksburg downed tools over the retrenchment of 97 women workers. The strike started on June 7 and ended on June

9 after management and FAWU agreed to refer the retrenchments to arbitration.

TW Becketts in Wadeville was hit by a one-day strike in June 15 over the dismissal of two workers. The 120 -strong workforce agreed to return to work after their union and the company agreed to discuss the issue at a meeting scheduled for June 23.

### Comment

These strikes are a pointer that tensions at the workplace are not going to be wished away because there is a new government in place. In fact, workers are demanding that the changes that are happening on the political sphere must extend to the workplace. Workers are no longer prepared to suffer silently in the face of lower and middle management's racist prejudices. Jeremy Daphne of SACCAWU commented that since the election workers' attitudes are hardening against management. Daphne said: "Workers are now more likely to oppose perceived racism and unequal treatment in the workplace."

Commenting on the wave of strikes in the auto industry, NUMSA's Gavin Hartford said: "Line management is not equipped to deal with workers' grievances." Hartford added: "For line managers, there is no such thing as a new industrial relations climate. For them it's business as usual. And for workers it's the struggle as usual."

If one notes that a number of the above-listed strikes are occasioned – still, in 1994! - by management refusal to grant trade union recognition, then it is not only line management that it is at fault, but their seniors as well. ☆

---

**"Changes in the political sphere must extend to the workplace"**

---



## *Miners plan to make optimum use of the RDP*

*SALB Writer DEANNE COLLINS reports*

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has drawn up a programme of action around the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). In what is believed to be the first intervention of its kind, the Union is taking steps to ensure that the interests and needs of mineworkers are promoted in the implementation of the RDP.

At a workshop held at the end of May, the Union drew up plan to embark on mass education programmes amongst its members to create awareness of their rights contained within the RDP.

The workshop noted that the various demands put forward by the Union in the course of collective bargaining are contained within the RDP. In future negotiations with employers, this link needs to be consciously articulated.

Special RDP Committees will be set up within the Union at national, regional and branch level. The function of these committees will be to ensure that membership and leadership understand and are able to take up projects under the RDP, and to identify clear and winnable demands which can be taken up in the short, medium and long term.

The Union has identified areas within the RDP where it intends to make specific interventions:

### **Basic Needs**

The NUM will seek to participate in "development" structures with a view to influencing policy in favour of its members. The NUM Development Unit, which provides a service to retrenched and dismissed members, will play a crucial role here.

### **Developing Human Resources**

The Union plans to lobby the Minister of Education and Training for paid education leave for workers and shop stewards, as well as launch a national campaign around this issue.

Policies around affirmative action will be developed as a matter of urgency.

### **Building the Economy**

The Union has prioritised a number of areas of involvement :

- Health and Safety in the Mining Industry
- State financial assistance to marginal mines
- Worker participation in decision-making structures in the industry
- Plans of action around hostel democratisation and housing.

The Union will also lobby for the creation of the post of a Deputy Minister for the industry who is not hostile to the needs of labour.

### **Democratising the State and Society**

The NUM intends to develop a lobbying strategy for parliamentarians and state officials. Union policy documents will be used to brief these officials on NUM policies on various issues.

The Union will campaign for local government elections as soon as possible, and will continue to campaign for the issuing of ID documents to workers to ensure that they are eligible to vote in these elections.

The Union will also lobby within COSATU for the proposed Conference on Civil Society to be held as soon as possible, as the RDP sets out an important role for civil society.

### **Comment**

On the day of his appointment to the Cabinet as Minister without portfolio, Jay Naidoo warned the comrades assembled at COSATU Head Office for the Elections Victory celebration not to be complacent about the RDP. Naidoo emphasised that the RDP will not be handed out on a plate, and its successful delivery would require ongoing involvement and pressure from the unions and the organs of civil society. In other words, the better organised the organisation, the more likely it will be to gain from the RDP. Quite clearly, the NUM has taken this advice to heart, and plans to move quickly and forcefully to be near the front of the queue. ☆

# Interview with LULA



Lula, the Workers Party candidate in Brazil's presidential elections, visited South Africa in June to hold discussions with President Nelson Mandela. The former metal worker - who is leading the presidential race in Brazil - found time to speak to LANGA ZITA and KARL VON HOLDT between a diplomatic reception and watching the Brazilian world cup team beat the Russians 2-0.

**L** **about Bulletin:** What is the significance of your visit to South Africa and your meeting with President Mandela?

**Lula:** There is a certain similarity between the problems that exist in Brazil and South Africa. Of course we respect the differences that exist also. Racial apartheid and social apartheid has a lot in common with the problems of Brazil, where you have a privileged minority and a huge majority which is excluded from social development. Mandela's election means that the aspirations of those who are excluded are being met for the first time. At the same time there is a certain fear amongst the privileged sectors of society.

It's the same situation in Brazil where we have those that are excluded, the majority, and where we also have the



privileged ones. Mandela's experience in the first few months of his government could be very similar to our experience from January 1995 when we hope to take power as the new Government of Brazil. That is why this dialogue is very important – because on the one hand you cannot frustrate the majority that voted for you, and on the other hand you cannot fill the rich sectors of society with fear, the sectors that have capital.

To combine these two aspects requires enormous political engineering, and I think that Mandela's experience and the experience of the people in South Africa, will contribute greatly to our approach in 1995. This is the main objective of our visit.

But besides that I have always had a great desire to visit Africa. This is a historic moment in South Africa, and I came to learn!

**Labour Bulletin:** There is a debate in the left in our country about which path of development to follow. Some argue for delinking our economy and others argue that we should be integrated into the world economy. What are your views on this?

**Lula:** This debate takes place in Brazil also. I believe that it is impossible today for any country on the planet to isolate itself from the internationalised economy. The economic blocs that are being built have not only economic power but the power of technology, and we are all somewhat dependent on this. In our case we are trying to combine our inter-national participation with still developing our own domestic potential. Our starting point is to base ourselves in a strongly-organised social movement. Secondly there should be investments in agriculture in our country. Thirdly we should invest more in small and medium sized companies. This means we should give an opportunity to the community to self-manage in the areas of small trade, small industry and cooperatives. In Brazil we believe this is the road to take us out of the absolute

poverty we are facing. It is important to direct state resources towards small projects, which is a very important way of meeting the urgent need for jobs in Brazil.

**Labour Bulletin:** Internationalisation of the economy and the domination of the rich countries creates many constraints on meeting the needs of the people. What kind of international policies can new progressive governments such as ours and, hopefully, yours pursue in this arena?

**Lula:** I believe that the countries of the developing world should come as close together as possible, as quickly as possible. In the case of Brazil we are very interested in developing our relations with Africa in terms of culture and of trade. This is also strategically important from the point of view of relations between the North and the South. Relations with Africa, with China, and with Latin America are priorities for us. We believe the similarities between these countries could guarantee an extraordinary market. For example Brazil could contribute the technology for oil prospecting in deep water, in which we have great experience.

Culturally too we need to recover the historical relations between Brazil and the people of Africa. We could have South African students in Brazil and Brazilian students in South Africa. We should not lose this opportunity that history has given us.

**Labour Bulletin:** Some of us believe there is a need for the transformation and democratisation of global economic institutions such as GATT, the World Bank and the IMF. New world leaders of the calibre of yourself and Nelson Mandela could play an important role in such a process. What are your views?

**Lula:** There is an extraordinary need for the democratisation of international institutions, both financial and political. For example countries such as ourselves could influence the way the United Nations responds to the civil war in Angola, or the



December 1989: 400 000 gather in São Paulo during Lula's first presidential campaign

blockade of Cuba. I am convinced that we have to change the way these international institutions work. We cannot allow them to continue operating as if we were still in the cold war. The Berlin wall has fallen, but we also have to overthrow the wall which exists between the decision making powers of the rich countries and the poor countries. This is a political struggle.

For example the Organisation of American States has not taken a position on the overthrow of the democrats of Haiti by the military of that country. The US invades Panama, it invades Granada, it blockades Cuba, and it refuses to take a

position on democracy in Haiti because the international agencies are subordinated to the super powers. We have to end their right to veto. This is the struggle that we are going to have to face together.

**Labour Bulletin:** To move from the international arena to the national one, if you do win the presidential elections at the end of this year, what relationship do you anticipate between your government and organisations of civil society such as the labour movement?

**Lula:** My origins are in the labour movement, and I am aware that my





position can only be sustained through the labour movement and the popular movement. I have the clear cut view that civil society, through its organisations, will have to play a decisive part in our government. We cannot win the elections and forget that all these sectors were the reason why I was elected. They have to participate in a very decisive way in all the decisions the government is going to make. That is why I worked so hard for Vincentinho to be elected the president of CUT. I want a labour movement that is militant, demanding and willing to oppose, as well as to be a partner in the structural transformations that our government is going to undertake. We need the churches, Catholic and Evangelical, we need the support of the peasants, and we need the

grassroots movements.

My main concern is to win the elections and not to permit myself to become a slave of the state machinery. Because otherwise who is going to govern? It will be the bureaucracy, the state machinery, not myself. And who has the support of the people? It is myself, not the machinery of the state.

**Labour Bulletin:** People have criticised the Workers Party on grounds that its road will lead to the same cul de sac as the Chilean path of Allende. What are your views on the possible democratic transition

and transformation towards socialism?

**Lula:** In the first place we are not in a transition from democracy to socialism. We are in transition from a regime which is authoritarian in the economic sphere, in which a minority dominates, towards a democracy which includes, as citizens, all Brazilians.

It is not possible to repeat in a country like Brazil what happened to Allende in Chile. In the first place the president of Brazil has to be elected with at least 50% of the votes, whereas in Chile Allende took power with 30% of the votes. In the second place Brazil is culturally very different from Chile. In the third place organised civil society has in Brazil today much more importance than civil society had in Chile. So we are going to win the elections, we are going to make the structural reforms that are necessary, and I think the way we have chosen is the best one.

In 1985 I did not think it was possible to reach the presidency through elections, but in 1989 I won 47% of the vote. Now in 1994 it becomes more and more clear that we can win the elections. What is the greatest challenge? I cannot win the elections with leftist speeches, and govern with a rightwing practice. I have to win with a stated policy which I can comply with and follow in practice. This is my commitment. This is why I believe in the participation of civil society, of the labour movement, and the popular movement. ☆

---

**“ If I am President, I will need a labour movement that is militant, willing to oppose, as well as to be a partner...”**

---

*PUBLIC SECTOR FOCUS:*

# *Public sector pay cuts: a challenge for the unions*

SALB Writer Deanne Collins reports on a recent workshop for COSATU's public sector unions, and reflects on the problems facing public sector workers as government juggles with the conflicting demands of its IMF public sector pay commitments, its RDP promises, and its low-paid public sector employees.

## **Introduction**

During the pre and post-election period, frequent calls were made for cut-backs in the public sector. The agreement signed between the TEC and the IMF (International Monetary Fund), which is binding on the new government, explicitly calls for "wage restraint" in the civil service as a condition for an \$850 million loan from the IMF. The agreement states that the government will "contain the civil service wage bill consistent with no real increase in wage rates." In addition, there is widespread expectation that in order to deliver on the RDP, government expenditure in other areas will have to be cut.

At the end of May, NALEDI, the

research institute which is associated with COSATU, held a day long workshop on the subject of "cutbacks, public sector wage restraint, and the costs of transition." The workshop, which was attended by representatives of most of the COSATU public sector unions, provided a opportunity to focus on these important issues.

A paper presented by NALEDI pointed out that the new government already faces many demands on its budget. These demands will limit the amount of money available for wage increases in the public sector.

## **Transition Costs**

The costs of the transition to a democratic government have proved to be far higher than was expected. These costs now total over R3 billion, and may go as far as R5 billion once all the accounts have come in. The biggest costs were the elections, the integration of the armies, and pay increases for the police and National Peacekeeping Force.

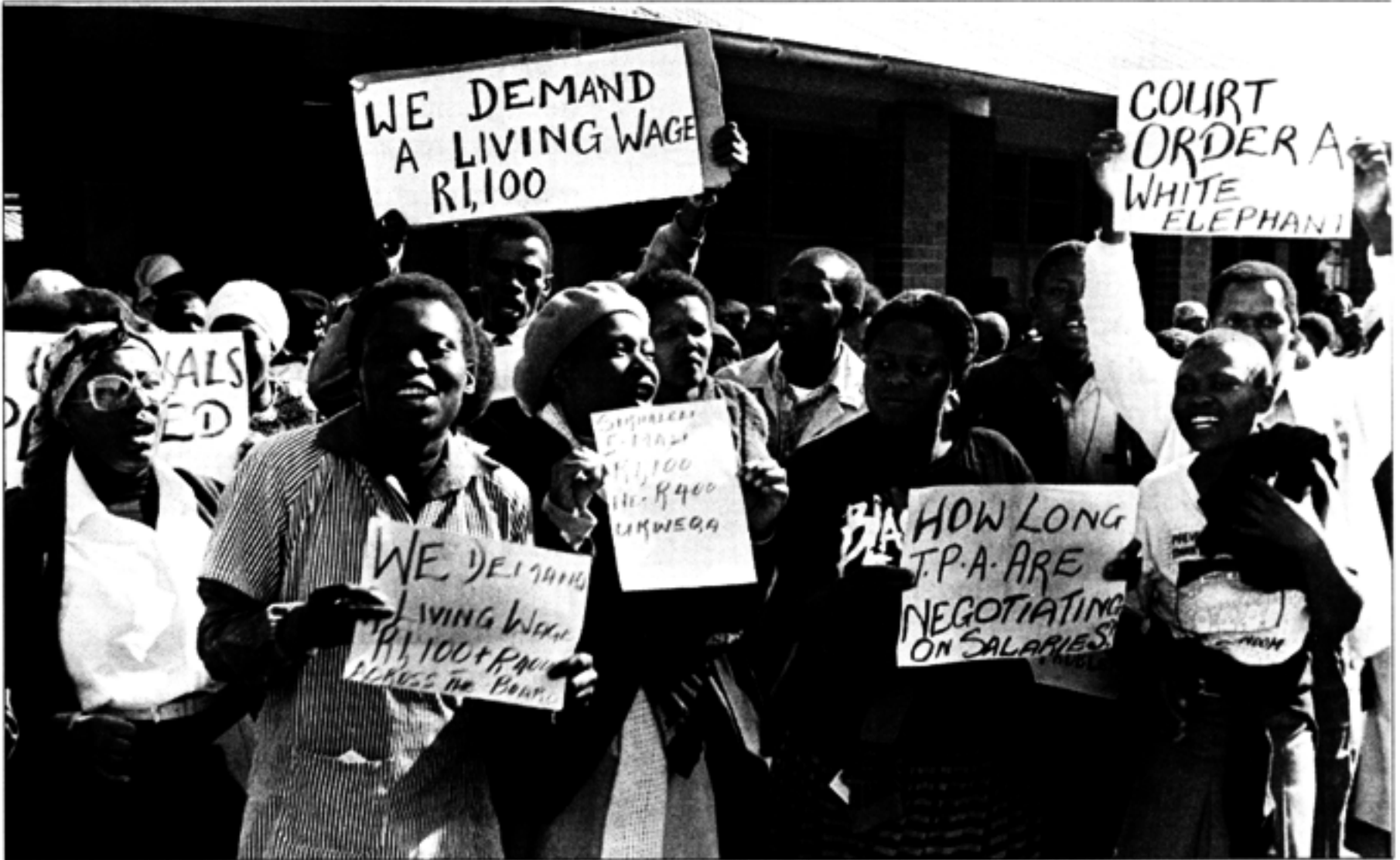
The costs of transition will add up to between 2,4 and 4% of the proposed budget for 1994/95.

The government is already committed to keeping expenditure down and not increasing its budget. It did not set aside nearly enough money for the costs of transition. The only way it can meet these costs is by cutting back in other areas or by raising tax or borrowing more.

## **Paying for the RDP**

The cost of funding the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) will also affect government expenditure. The RDP is





Hospital workers picketing at Bara: Their wages are low – can they endure a wage freeze?

not intended to result in an increase in government spending. Instead, money will be reallocated from other items of government expenditure - like salaries - to investment in the RDP. NALEDI points out that “the state - and the wider public - may see a trade-off between higher salaries for public servants and increased expenditure on services and infrastructure ”

The commitment contained in the RDP to improving conditions in the poorest areas of South Africa means that richer areas, like the PWV region, are going to have to subsidise development in the poorer areas, like the former “homelands”. The large majority of ANC members live in these poorer areas, so there will be great pressure to deliver.

There is widespread perception that increasing public sector workers wages will result in squeezing services to the public at large, especially the poor majority. This is the explicit conclusion of the World Bank, whose opinions carry weight amongst some South African policy-makers.

Up until now, local governments have been earning money through providing electricity. In line with the RDP, it is likely

that they will now lose this revenue, as ESKOM needs that money in order to be able to provide electricity to Black areas. This means that municipal workers may also face cut-backs.

### **Cutting the Cake a Different Way**

A 10 % across-the-board increase for all public sector workers -which would give workers a small increase over and above inflation - would cost in the region of R4 billion. This is 3 % of the budget. In NALEDI’s opinion, given all the demands on the state budget outlined above, the state will probably resist any such increases. NALEDI suggests that one strategy the public sector unions could adopt is to explore ways and means of working within current budgetary constraints to secure the best deal for their members, particularly the lowest paid workers.

### **Higher Increases for the Lowest Paid**

NALEDI suggests that the unions push for higher wage increases for the worst paid workers. Most of the worst paid workers are

found in education, health and the police, as well as in local government. These workers also make up the majority of members of COSATU's public sector unions.

15% of workers employed by the Central Government earn below R1250 per month. The overwhelming majority of these workers are black, and many are women. In black education, more than one in ten workers earn less than R1250 per month. In the police force, the figure is one in seven.

The worst-off state employees work in small municipalities and local authorities, where the average wage is under R700 per month, This is way below the Minimum Living Level (MLL).

NALEDI says that the state could afford to increase the wages of central and local government workers earning below R1250 by 10 % in real terms - in other words, inflation plus 10 % - if other workers got very low or no increases. For local government workers who earn below the MLL, the increase should be higher to at least bring them in line with the MLL of around R1000 per month.

These ideas have already been punted by some of the public sector unions. During the last round of public sector wage talks NEHAWU called, without success, for a wage freeze for higher earners so as to be able to upgrade the wages of the lowest paid.

### **Equitable Benefits**

Wages are one part of a total remuneration package. The workshop also discussed ways of introducing a more equitable distribution of benefits in the public sector.

Luci Nyembe of CALS pointed out that currently a large number of workers employed by the Central Government, particularly women and black people, are excluded from the home owner allowance scheme. There are also inequalities in the treatment of women and men in the retirement scheme and the payment of retirement benefits.

She suggested that, if workers are to accept any kind of wage restraint, this should be conditional upon equal benefits being

extended to all workers. In addition, a programme of affirmative action and training must be put in place to ensure that workers are given opportunities for promotion and better remuneration.

### **Challenging the System**

Phillip Dexter, ex-NEHAWU general secretary and now an ANC MP, focused on the need for the public sector unions to present alternatives to the current mind-set on the public sector. He emphasised the need to shift the debate from "voodoo" capitalist economics and to break the rules set by agencies such as the IMF.

Researchers have pointed out that South Africa still has comparatively low debt, both internationally and to the IMF. The fiscal restraint accepted as part of the RDP was done without exploring all the implications this would have. Much more discussion is needed on what level of expenditure and borrowing South Africa can sustain before decisions are taken on issues like public sector cut-backs.

The negotiations with the IMF were wrapped in a cloak of secrecy and were concluded without any consultation with labour. This is the way in which the IMF operates. It was suggested at the workshop that labour should campaign that the IMF conditions should be withdrawn and that any future dealings with the IMF must be done openly.

### **Charting a Way Forward :**

The workshop recognised that public sector workers are critical to the delivery of the RDP. Currently, delivery of services is very bad. Public sector workers are the people who will make sure there is efficient administration and service delivery. For this to happen, however, government has to make a commitment to invest in public sector workers. It was agreed that workers and communities must develop a common understanding of the way forward on the RDP which will not go against the interests of workers. For this to happen, there needs to be much closer consultation and co-operation





"Large numbers of government workers (especially women and blacks) are excluded from home-owner allowance schemes"

between the unions and organisations like SANCO.

It is also clear that at this stage, government does not have a clear idea of how it will bargain with public sector workers. The workshop agreed that strong centralised bargaining structures are imperative and that there should be one set of negotiations to look at public sector restructuring. The public sector unions need to become much more involved in the restructuring of institutions such as the Commission for Administration, and in the reinstatement of the Public Sector Forum. COSATU unions also need to take control of co-ordination of collective bargaining out of the hands of the more conservative staff associations.

In addition, the unions need to involve themselves in concerted lobbying at the political level. This will include individual policy makers and members of government, as well as linking into departments responsible for financing and implementing the RDP.

### **Conclusion:**

The issue of public sector cut-backs has the potential to create severe discord between government and the public sector unions. This is already an extremely volatile sector, as events in the weeks before and after the elections have shown.

It is clear that government needs to urgently rethink a number of fundamental policy issues. Unilateral decisions will only exacerbate the situation. Appropriate bargaining structures need to be set up as a matter of urgency where the voice of public sector workers and other parties on these issues can be heard.

At the same time, the public sector unions need to devote substantial time and resources to ensuring that they are equipped to intervene in these critical issues. With some exceptions, these unions have lagged behind in the area of policy making and intervention. Hopefully the process initiated at the workshop will be pursued vigorously in the months to come. ☆

# Consultation Before Legislation: *democratising the public service*

By LUCI NYEMBE and DEANNE COLLINS

Changes in the Civil Service announced by Public Service and Administration Minister Zola Skweyiya have drawn response from a variety of interested players.

The Minister announced steps to address apartheid imbalances in the public service and said he was setting up a permanent mechanism to monitor "racial representivity".

Filling of posts recommended by previous Public Service Commissions have been halted. These will be re-advertised. In addition, 1 000 new posts will be made available. These posts include director-generals of government departments. These posts are aimed at "under-represented" groups.

The predominantly white Public Servants Association, as well as the National Party expressed grave reservations about these measures. From a different perspective, so, too, has NEHAWU, which has put forward its own vision of the transformation of the public service.

## **Transforming the Public Service**

NEHAWU points out that the public servant is central to the process of transformation.

This process will take place over a number of years. It is essential that institutions and structures are set in place which will ensure harmonious employer-employee relations in the public service.

## **Bargaining and Policy-Making**

The Union envisages the need for separate institutions to deal with :

- labour matters
- policy matters

A Bargaining Council already exists where annual improvements to conditions of service are negotiated. In the Bargaining Council, the employer and employee representatives are the only interested parties.

NEHAWU sees a need for a much more broadly representative forum to deal with major policy issues such as the reform of public sector labour legislation and the development of employment and pay equity policies. The Union points out that "these are matters where a majority vote cannot resolve disagreements, but where consensus is required to see effective implementation of agreed policies."

In April 1994 a Public Service Forum was established to deal with the crisis in the public service prior to the elections. The Forum has become non-functional, and NEHAWU is calling for it to be re-convened to discuss the issues raised above.

## **Consultation before Legislation**

The Union has also called for worker organisations in the public service to be given first hand information about any changes taking place in the administration. It feels that communication forums should be set up, and unions and staff associations given the opportunity to feed back information to members and make comment before legislation is published.

NEHAWU is calling for channels of communication to be set up between the Minister of Public Service and Administration and other parties to prevent "unnecessary misunderstandings" arising in the future. ☆



# Stopping the gravy train

## 'Gravy train' heading for a collision

There has been an outcry from unions and civic organisations over the Melamet Commission salary recommendations.

**SACP wants Cabinet pay cut**

**Pay our MPs well, says union chief**

**Committee member speaks out**

SALB writer DEANNE COLLINS enters the debate about pay scales and values in the public sector – and in society in general.

### Introduction

The public furore around the salaries to be paid to public office bearers, as well as the steady exodus of staff from trade unions and other progressive organisations into government and business, emphasises the need for debate around salary packages generally and the basis on which these are determined. COSATU, NEHAWU, the SACP, SANCO and the ANC Youth League have come out strongly against the proposed salary packages for MP's and other public office bearers. The ANC itself has appointed its own investigation into the issue.

### What are the politicians earning?

Table 1 below shows some

of the salary packages recommended by the Melamet Committee on Remuneration of Politicians, which have been accepted by the Cabinet.

### Salaries are based on the private sector

One of the main criticisms which has been made of the salary packages is that they are

**Table 1**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Annual Salary Package</b>
President	<b>R784 350</b>
Deputy Presidents	<b>R681 600</b>
Regional Premiers, Cabinet Ministers	<b>R470 400</b>
Deputy Ministers	<b>R372 000</b>
MP's, National Assembly	<b>R193 200</b>
MP's, Provincial Legislatures	<b>R184 800</b>

based on salaries paid to executives in the private sector. COSATU points out that “South Africa is internationally notorious for the obscene gap which exists between workers and executives”.

A survey by the Labour Research Service of the average wages paid to directors of large South African companies shows that a “labourer” would have to work about 48 years to earn what most directors get in a year. Table 2 below shows the gap between directors pay and “labourers” wages at some South African companies.

While investigations are continuing, the members of government are receiving these amounts every month.

**How do the Unions Compare?**

Other articles in this issue of the SALB point to a virtual flood of all levels of staff out of the

**Table 2**

Company	Monthly Pay		Gap
	Directors	“Labourers”	
Engen	R 83 333	R1 846	45
ABSA	R108 333	R1 125	96
Anglo American	R 41 666	R 676	62
Murray & Roberts	R109 524	R 866	126

trade unions. Apart from those serving in government, many are going into the civil service. Still others are moving to agencies in the development or NGO sectors, while some are “crossing the line” to work for business.

One reason for this exodus is the perception that wages and working conditions in the unions are very poor.

One of the difficulties in assessing whether

**Table 3**

JOB CATEGORY	WAGE RANGE PER MONTH	
	UNION	NGO
General Secretary/Director	R1900 – R4100	R3152 – R12500
Head of Department	R1865 – R3395	R2406 – R 4705
Organiser/Fieldworker	R1300 – R2651	R2000 – R 4500
Administrator	R1231 – R2651	R1591 – R 2281

or not union conditions are in fact bad, is establishing which yardstick to measure them against.

Table 3 below shows the range of wages currently paid to different categories of union staff in a cross section of COSATU unions surveyed by SALB writer Zolile Mtshelwane. These are compared to comparable jobs in the NGO sector.

Most unions and NGO’s also offer additional benefits, the most common of which are medical and provident funds and transport or car allowances.

It is understood that salaries paid by parties such as the ANC and the SACP are close to those of union officials.

**A shift in Attitude**

There can be no doubt that the wages and conditions of union and party officials need to be reassessed. However, the terms of reference

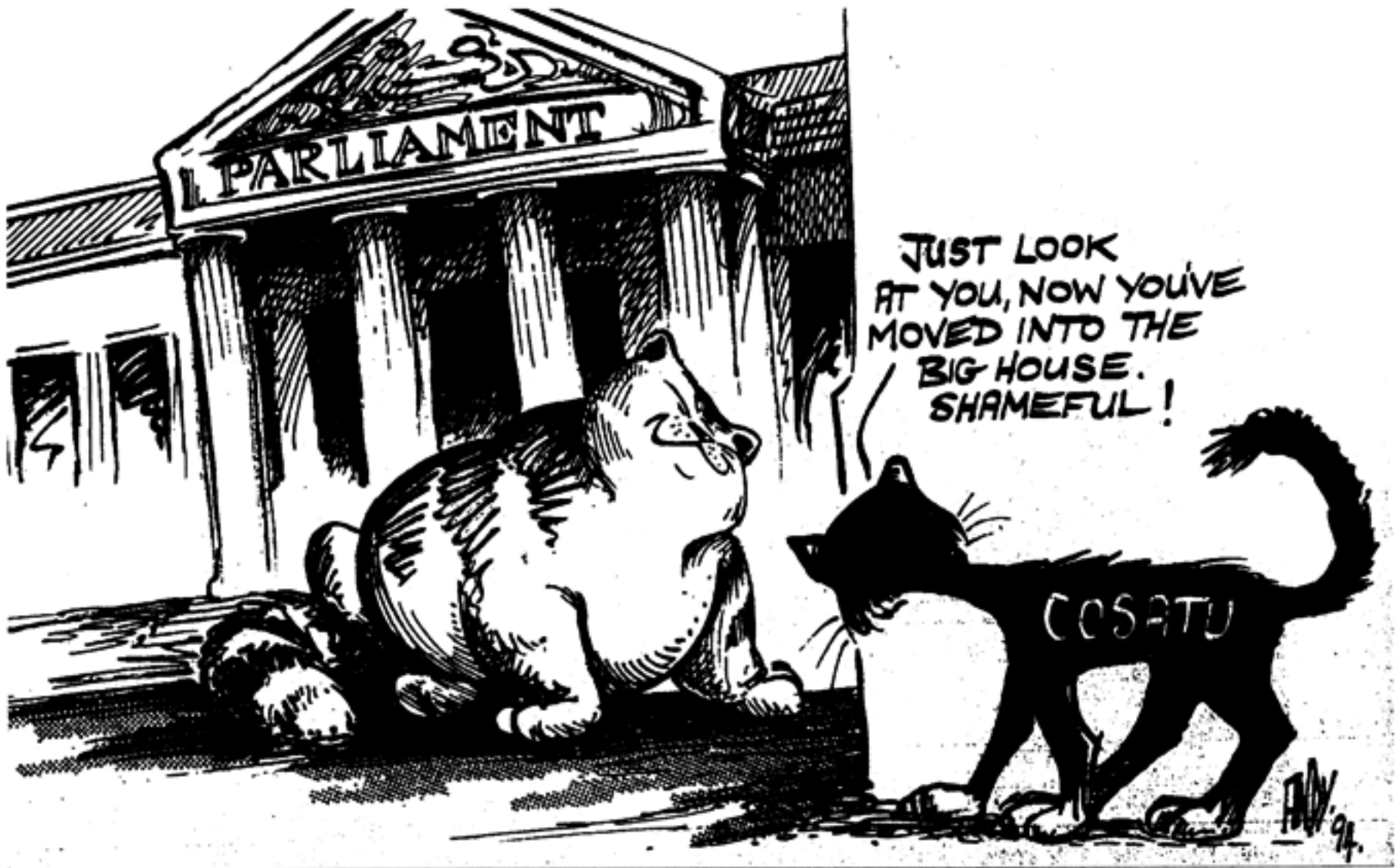
of this reassessment will be crucial.

There are disturbing indications that amongst certain sections of our society, which were formerly part of the

progressive movement, a significant shift in values is taking place, which the debate over politicians salaries reflects very accurately.

Condemnation of the proposed levels of pay for politicians has by no means been unanimous amongst progressive circles. The President of the NUM, who sat on the Committee which set the salaries, has publically disagreed with COSATU on the





issue, stating that his union accepts the recommended levels. It is known that a number of the ANC members of government concur.

### **Service or self-enrichment?**

If one looks at the salaries being offered in the private sector (though only, of course, to the select few) as well as the salaries for politicians, it is clear that union officials are comparatively worse off.

This should come as no surprise. It has always been accepted that working for the Union was an act of struggle. The reward for one's work was not monetary, but the contribution that one was making to the liberation of society.

It would appear that for some, since the struggle is now over, so too, is this value system. Many "comrades" are now demanding that their services be valued in terms of entirely different criteria.

The terms of the new value system which is emerging are not unfamiliar: service in and for itself no longer has value. Service to society is replaced by a notion of individual worth which is measured in terms of the "market value" of one's skills and work. The interests of the collective are replaced by the self-interest of the individual.

With the focus on the narrow interests of the individual, it is inevitable that there will be intense competition between individuals in the scramble to secure for themselves the best "deal", without regard to the fact that this approach will generate enormous gaps between the higher and the lower rungs of the pay "ladder". Nowhere is this point better illustrated than in the case of the salaries which directors of South African companies pay themselves. This is the final absurdity – but also the inevitable conclusion – of such a value system.

### **Stopping the Gravy Train**

In its press statement on politicians salaries, COSATU pointed out that "the main aim of public service is not self-enrichment" and called on public office bearers not to continue to ride the gravy train set in motion by their predecessors. But it is clear that the "gravy train" value system does not only operate in the public service: it can be found in all sectors of our economy.

Urgent debate is needed if we are to stop the gravy train approach from becoming the norm in our society. An essential part of this debate will be examining what kind of society we want South Africa to be and whether our struggle is, indeed, over. ☆

COVER FOCUS:

# The labour movement after the elections: taking stock

**T**his SPECIAL FOCUS of the *Labour Bulletin* picks up from the article by SAKHELA

BUHLUNGU in the previous edition (18.2, May 1994) which examined the weakening of COSATU in and around the elections process, and concluded:

“A number of unionists say that after the elections COSATU and its affiliates must go ‘**back to basics**’ and begin to address their organisational weaknesses. Usually this term is taken to mean going back to the strategies the unions used in the past to build their strength. This is a positive sign, except that it assumes that the context remains static. The reality is that the context in which unions organise has changed since the 27th of April.”

The 3 articles that follow consciously seek to relate unions to their changed contexts in the post election period in the 3 key areas of *People, Aims, and Structures*:

■ SAKHELA BUHLUNGU looks at the people who staff the unions, and what motivates them to remain at their posts or to seek “greener

pastures” elsewhere.

- DEANNE COLLINS focuses on Worker Control, the key guiding principle of South Africa’s “social movement” trade unions. She asks how strong this guiding spirit is today, and whether/how it can be revived in the post-Apartheid era.
- In his article on Restructuring, GEOFF SCHREINER looks at the need for Cosatu to scale down its aspirations to what it can actually do well, by keeping and attracting the right kind of staff, and by resolving the conflict between direct and representational forms of internal democracy which is inhibiting the federation’s development.

In the second SPECIAL FOCUS, which follows on immediately from the first, various BUILDING BLOCKS FOR THE NEW ERA are presented as rough-hewn solutions to some of the problem areas troubling unions at the present time. The intention of the authors is to spark debate, rather than to offer polished plans.

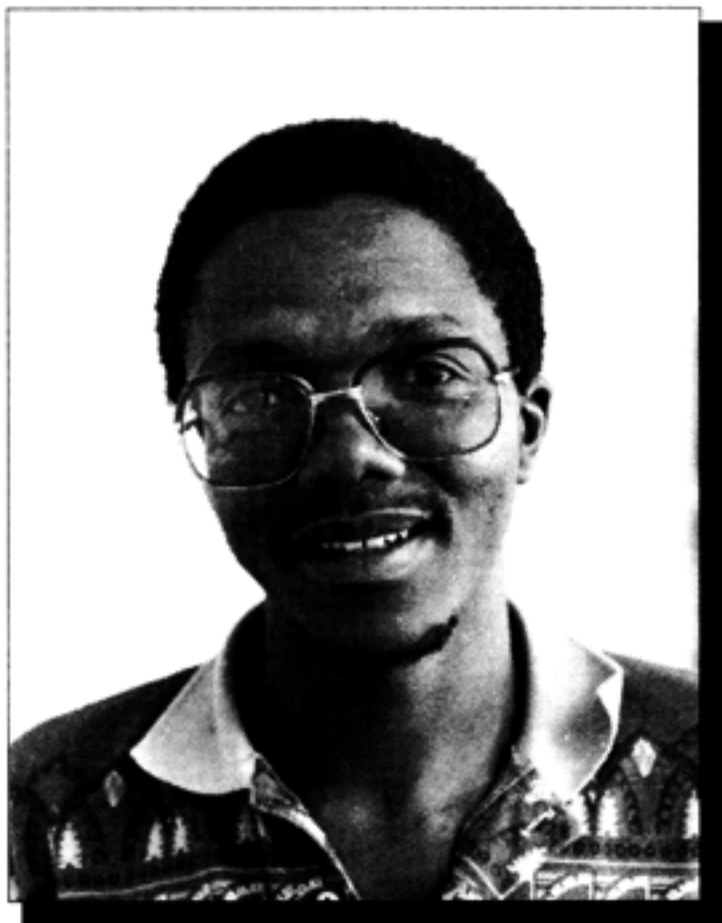


# The Big Brain Drain: *union officials in the 1990s*

SAKHELA BUHLUNGU writes about the personnel crisis facing unions as large numbers of experienced and skilled officials – for one reason or another – leave unions to seek employment elsewhere.



Mid-80's union meeting: fierce debates, strong commitments



**Sakhela Buhlungu\***

### **Introduction**

Early this year I met two comrades I knew from the time I was working for one of the unions affiliated to COSATU. The conversation soon turned into a discussion about the old days in the unions. "You were one of the leading workerists in COSATU," the one comrade said to the other. "And you were a populist," the other replied. We all joked about the seriousness which unionists used to attach to such labels in those days. Those labels and the debates that gave rise to them now belong, so it now seems, to the past. But also, for these two comrades, who used to work as full-time officials in COSATU unions, their involvement in the trade union movement belongs to the past. They left the trade union movement in the late 1980s to pursue other career options. Since then a number of other leading unionists have followed in the footsteps of these and other unionists who left the unions earlier. The seriousness of this exodus, as one unionist has called it, has not been acknowledged until recently when about 60 leading COSATU leaders left during the recent elections to become members of the national assembly and the various regional

\* Sakhela Buhlungu is with the Sociology of Work Project at WITS University. He is a former SALB writer and PPWAWU Assistant General Secretary

legislatures. The objective of this article is to discuss the reasons for the brain drain from the union movement, particularly COSATU, and to highlight its implications for unions as we go into a future full of opportunities, challenges and dangers for labour. The discussion focuses mainly on full-time union officials but also touches on shop stewards and other union leaders.

### **The problem**

While the problem has been highlighted by the departure of scores of union leaders to parliament, the brain drain has been happening for some years now. Since the late 1980s unions have been losing full time staff through resignations. In the 1990s this trend has accelerated as more opportunities open up in other areas. I would like to clarify at the outset that the problem is not that people leave unions to pursue other career options. Many of the people who have left the unions had very valid reasons. The problem is that unions continue losing experienced and skilled people and are finding it increasingly difficult to replace them with people of the same calibre. Thus, at a time when COSATU and its unions are talking about building their capacity to handle issues, they continue losing that capacity. NUMSA's general secretary, Enoch Godongwana, notes that a number of organisers and shop stewards are going into management. The concern is that his union has put "a lot of effort" into training these people.

The second problem is that very few people of similar experience and skill as those leaving are joining the labour movement. In 1991 one union had a number of key vacancies at its head office which they advertised in the press. They received numerous applications and most were from clearly unskilled and inexperienced school leavers while the rest came mainly from people whose skills were completely unsuitable for the union. While the school-leavers were prepared to work for anything, those with some skills were demanding better pay and conditions. Now that opportunities are opening up elsewhere for



people with some skills, one imagines that only school leavers, who have very little if anything to offer by way of skills and experience, will bother to apply.

The third problem is that it is difficult to have continuity in an organisation when there is a high turnover of staff. It is true that full-time officials are employees in a union and that decisions are taken by members. But full-time union officials have an ambiguous dual role as both leaders and employees in a union. It is in their capacity as leaders that they play a crucial role in decision-making and in ensuring continuity and consistency. Pointing to this problem, Muzi Buthelezi, acting general secretary of the CWIU, says, "In general terms people are leaving the unions and we are going to have a different labour movement after the 27 April. The quality of organisers has changed. Now they come to the unions to work. It is not a commitment any more."

All the above have very serious implications for the strength and strategic direction that unions, particularly COSATU are going to take in future. It means that we can no longer take it for granted that COSATU will remain the strong federation that it is or that its traditions, principles and strategic direction will remain what they are today. This is particularly important in view of the fact that a number of key leading shop stewards are also leaving the unions for a number of reasons.

## **Why are officials leaving unions?**

### **1. Greener pastures**

According to Buthelezi, many union officials leave to look for 'greener pastures'. It is common knowledge that union salaries and other conditions and benefits are poor and uncompetitive. CAWU's general secretary, Matthews Oliphant admits that low morale or lack of commitment in his union is, in part, due to low remuneration. Last year the highest paid official in his union was earning R1 600 per month before tax. COSATU and the bigger unions pay slightly better than this but they are hardly competitive salaries. In the early days of the

brain drain union officials would leave and join better paying unions or NGOs. (*For details on union salaries and conditions see article by Collins in this issue*). Competition has stiffened even further now with management, parliament and the new civil service offering much bigger packages which include better benefits, shorter hours of work and greater opportunities for upward mobility.

### **2. Greater family responsibilities**

Part of the reason why salaries and conditions have become more important in the unions is the fact that union officials are increasingly settling down to family life by getting married, buying houses and putting more emphasis on providing for the needs of their families. The family man or woman of the 1970s and '80s now has to prove to the family that the sacrifices that they have made over the years in the name of the struggle were worthwhile. On the other hand, the young single union activist of the 1980s has suddenly become a married man or woman with greater material needs. One young unionist I spoke to last year confessed that he was struggling to make ends meet with his union salary of about R1 900 per month before tax. He had to provide for his unemployed parents and his younger brothers and sisters, look after himself and was planning to get married. He said he was under a lot of pressure from his family to look for another job. Less than a month after I spoke to him he had joined management!

The problem has been worse with returned exiles who came back into the unions as full-time officials. Most of them have now left the unions and it is known that some of them left because they felt union salaries were too low to enable them to rebuild their lives. Many of them are now in better paying jobs elsewhere.

### **3. Management poaching**

In recent years management has gone on an all-out campaign to recruit union officials for personnel and human resource positions. CWIU's McVicar Dyasopu has had personal experiences of this:

"Management is poaching us openly. One

organiser in Natal is being harassed by management offering him the position of IR manager, a company car, a house and about R5 000 per month. He has turned the offer down. They also keep asking me out for lunch. I keep ducking and diving. They say they would like to talk to me as a friend, not a union official.”

But not all officials turn these offers down. Recently a TGWU official joined management and was offered a company car (a BMW), a salary of about R6 000 per month and other perks. Towards the end of November last year I interviewed a certain union official for a research project I am doing. In January I tried to contact him at the union office and I was told he no longer worked there. He was working for management in one of the companies he used to organise. PPWAWU is one of the unions most affected by ‘defections’ to management over the years. The union’s assistant general secretary, Themba Mfeka, admits that it is “very difficult for the union to compete with management in the labour market.”

#### **4. Loss of vision**

The movement of union officials to management is a new and interesting trend in South Africa. It is particularly interesting given that unions in COSATU have always regarded management as their ideological enemies. One union official who has since left the unions rationalised this development in the following terms: “The fact is that the country is in transition and we in the labour movement are not immune to the changes taking place in the country. My view therefore is that we cannot stop people from joining management.” Chris Bonner of CWIU’s education department argues that this shift is caused by uncertainty and a ‘loss of the fight’ in the labour movement. She argues further, “The staff is restless because the labour movement has lost a sense of direction. There is no consensus or united vision as we had at one stage. There is nothing that binds COSATU. There is no sense of purpose or mission that pulls people

together, like what campaigns do we have. We are not clear where we are going.”

#### **The fate of the ex-unionists**

At this stage little is known about the role of former unionists once they are part of management. What is known is that many of them have little or no management skills and are recruited solely for their ‘union backgrounds’. Snippets of information I have collected show that at least the earlier generation who joined management were recruited because they seemed to have credibility with the workers. But once that credibility was gone management would either fire them or make their positions untenable. In Durban a unionist-turned-personnel officer failed to win the support of the workers and was subsequently downgraded to an ordinary pay clerk and interpreter in union-management meetings. He ended up so frustrated that he quit the job. Another in the Eastern Cape, also a personnel officer, turned out to be such a union basher that the workers toyi-toyi-ed, demanding his dismissal. He was eventually fired after he was caught drunk at work. However, it now seems that recent recruits into management take on a wider range of responsibilities than just controlling the workers. In some cases they are taken through certain training programmes before they start working in their positions.

#### **Commitment or career**

Although low remuneration and poor working conditions are a major cause of the exodus, some unionists argue that there are a number of other factors that cause officials to leave. Gavin Hartford of NUMSA argues that part of the problem is that there are no career paths for union officials. He predicts that following the election the trend of people leaving unions will accelerate. “After the elections union officials will be in the market. There will be affirmative action and many people will be looking for clever guys with black faces.” “Some people have been around for too long,” Bonner points out. “Suddenly new



# COSATU - THE WORKERS' VOICE

<p><b>JOHNNY COPELYN</b></p>  <p>General Secretary SACTWU Southern Natal</p>	<p><b>PHILLIP DEXTER</b></p>  <p>General secretary NEHAWU Witwatersrand</p>	<p><b>ALEC ERWIN</b></p>  <p>Economist/educationalist NUMSA Southern Natal</p>	<p><b>SIPHO GCABASHE</b></p>  <p>Co-ordinator COSATU Peace Project Southern Natal</p>	<p><b>MARCEL GOLDING</b></p>  <p>Assistant general secretary NUM Witwatersrand</p>	<p><b>DONALD GUMEDE</b></p>  <p>Ex-president CWIU Southern Natal</p>
<p><b>ELIZABETH THABETHE</b></p>  <p>Gender co-ordinator CWIU Witwatersrand</p>	<p><b>ELIJAH BARAYI</b></p>  <p>Ex-president COSATU Witwatersrand</p>			<p><b>JAY NAIDOO</b></p>  <p>Ex-general secretary COSATU Witwatersrand</p>	<p><b>RANDALL V. D. HEEVER</b></p>  <p>General secretary SADTU Witwatersrand</p>
<p><b>SUSAN SHABANGU</b></p>  <p>Gender co-ordinator TGWU Witwatersrand</p>					<p><b>SERAKE LEEUW</b></p>  <p>Regional chairperson COSATU OFS/Northern Cape</p>
<p><b>DANNY OLIPHANT</b></p>  <p>Vice-president NUMSA Western Cape</p>					<p><b>JOYCE MABUDAFHASI</b></p>  <p>Treasurer NEHAWU Northern Transvaal</p>
<p><b>DUMA NKOSI</b></p>  <p>President SACCAWU Witwatersrand</p>	<p><b>CHRISTOPHER DLAMINI</b></p>  <p>Ex-president - FAWU Ex-vice president - COSATU Witwatersrand</p>	<p><b>GODFREY OLIPHANT</b></p>  <p>Ex-vice president COSATU OFS/Northern Cape</p>	<p><b>SALIE MANIE</b></p>  <p>Branch chairperson SAMWU Western Cape</p>		
<p><b>NKOSINATHI NHLEKO</b></p>  <p>Ex-general secretary TGWU Northern Natal</p>	<p><b>THABA MUFAMADI</b></p>  <p>Vice-president POTWA Northern Transvaal</p>	<p><b>THAMI MSELEKU</b></p>  <p>Assistant regional secretary SADTU Midlands</p>	<p><b>KGABISI MOSUNKUTU</b></p>  <p>President POTWA Witwatersrand</p>	<p><b>SHEPHERD MDLADLANE</b></p>  <p>President SADTU Witwatersrand</p>	<p><b>MOSES MAYEKISO</b></p>  <p>General secretary NUMSA Witwatersrand</p>

# ANC - THE WORKERS' CHOICE

For COSATU: A great human resources loss, but only the tip of the iceberg

opportunities, new avenues have appeared.” This is a particularly important issue which points to a more general point about the impact of transition in a society which is moving away from racism and minority rule. Unions were one of the few areas of employment which fell outside the control of the enemy - the apartheid state and management - where people could feel proud of their work. Many of those who chose to work in unions did not do so because it was a career choice but because it was ‘the struggle’. Now that there is democratisation and deracialisation of society and some affirmative action in management levels many people in unions are now beginning to think of careers, jobs in which they can rise and prosper so that they can be in a position to provide for their families. At this stage, for a number of unionists unions do not offer many opportunities as a career option.

NUMSA is one of the unions hardest hit by the exodus. Apart from top leaders who were lost to parliament, the union head office has been virtually denuded of leadership.

It is too early to give figures of union officials who are joining or will join the new civil service. However, it is clear that the civil service has now become a legitimate structure in the eyes of all activists and those who are offered key jobs in the service will accept them readily. Already there are reports of head-hunting of COSATU officials for key civil service jobs like directors, personal assistants, secretaries, etc, and there are indications

---

**“The quality of organisers has changed”**

---

that some union officials, including administrators, are following their leaders into government. In one case a union official went for an interview on a Wednesday, got the job and was at his desk in the new job the following Monday. He is a PA to one of the former COSATU leaders who now occupies a senior position in one of the new

regions. At this stage most full-time officials are being absorbed by the department of labour, the RDP office and those departments headed by former COSATU leaders, but there may be others who will be asked to work in other departments. It is now an open secret that the new minister of labour, Tito Mboweni has been spending his first few weeks in office scouting for information and profiles of ‘prominent unionists’. What is not clear at this stage is what positions he has for them.

There is another category of union official who leave unions. These are people who leave to improve their educational qualifications. These are mainly people who already had matric or other post-matric qualifications when they joined the labour movement. It is not clear where some of these people go once they complete their studies. What is certain is that very few of them go back to the labour movement. One of these former unionists that I spoke to said he was still considering a number of options but the labour movement was not one of them. Interestingly, the one option he seemed to favour was ‘going into industry’, which could be interpreted to mean a human resources or personnel department position in one of the companies.

A new development is that of officials who are doing part-time or correspondence courses while working in the union. What is interesting is that people have suddenly realised the need to improve themselves and the likelihood is that once they complete those courses some may begin looking for employment where these newly acquired skills will be recognised and rewarded.

**The shop stewards**

The brain drain is not only at the level of full-time union officials. There is also a clear trend of shop stewards leaving their union positions or leaving the unions altogether to take up higher positions, particularly managerial positions in personnel and human resource departments, but also as supervisors



and production technicians. The advent of affirmative action has made the issue of shop stewards leaving unions even more serious. In many cases shop stewards come from the ranks of the better educated among the workforce. This was confirmed by the CASE/SWOP survey conducted in 1991. The implication of this is that most shop stewards are the most eligible candidates for affirmative action in the workplace.

This is a dilemma that the unions have been facing for a long time but have not been able to resolve. On the one hand it is important for people who have risen through the ranks of unions to occupy key positions in the workplaces and in companies generally. These people could play a crucial role in providing the unions with important information regarding the operation of companies and production in workplaces. Those who argue in favour of taking promotions maintain it is one way of empowerment for workers and it would be ill-advised for unions to reject them. However, those who argue against promotions maintain that the promotions seldom occur in consultation with the unions and management usually insist that the people who get the promotion should resign from the union. In other instances once a person goes up the hierarchy they simply go above the union's bargaining unit and therefore cease to be union members. It is also argued that in the majority of cases, once shop stewards get promotion they begin to identify with management and become aloof from the union - in short, they get co-opted.

The ambivalence of the unions on this issue has meant that no solution has been found and unions continue losing leadership in which they have invested a lot of resources through grooming and training. The significance of this trend for the purposes of this article is that it exacerbates the brain drain and weakens the union movement.

### **How are the unions responding?**

In the past the usual response of the unions and their leadership was to condemn those

who leave because it was felt they lacked commitment to the labour movement. Those who joined management, shop stewards and full-time officials, were regarded as sell-outs. To some extent this view still informs union responses to the brain drain, particularly to those who join management.

PPWAWU's president, Pasco Dyani, says the union is "perturbed that officials are going to management. They use the unions as waiting rooms, take union skills and use them against the workers".

But union leaders now acknowledge that union salaries and conditions are poor and that this is a major contributory factor to the brain drain. Many unions have started grappling with this problem by trying to improve conditions by increasing salaries, introducing benefits like provident funds and medical aid, setting up car schemes and introducing salary grades (as opposed to a flat salary structure). However, most unions are constrained by limited resources.

However, the biggest problem appears to be the fact that most unions do not see staffing issues as a priority despite the fact that the unions employ scores and even hundreds of officials each. (For example, at the end of November 1993 NUMSA had 341 full time officials). Staffing planning and staff development occur in a haphazard fashion and unions respond to problems and crises as they occur. One of the ideas that has been discussed before in the unions is that recruitment should give preference to shop stewards from within the union because outsiders, particularly those with no workplace experience are unreliable. But in practice recruitment is still a haphazard process and does not reflect this thinking.

One of the responses one gets when speaking to unionists about the brain drain, particularly the latest wave, is that unions must build leadership and draw on what is generally known as 'second layer leadership'. However, this does not address

---

**"We are not sure  
where we are going"**

---

the specific situation of full-time officials and key shop stewards. It also does not address the fact that most of the replacements will have less experience and little understanding of the principles and traditions that have been the hallmark of COSATU. In many respects the latest wave of the brain drain has left a number of unions paralysed. There are very few ideas coming through and as long as uncertainty continues about who is leaving and who is not, the unions will remain paralysed.

### Conclusions

In this article I have discussed one of the issues facing the unions, COSATU unions in particular. The objective is not to pass judgements on the subject or the people mentioned but to start debate, and hopefully, some in the labour movement will want to debate some of the issues raised here. Facts and material for this article was collected over a period of time while working for PPWAWU and while doing work for The Shopsteward, SA Labour Bulletin and the Sociology of Work Project at Wits.

In conclusion I would like to make a few points. The first one is that unions must now accept that full time officials will come and go and they will make these decisions on the basis of whether working for the union is a good career option or not. This happens to companies, the civil service and other institutions. Unions need to take staffing as one the priorities in building their capacities, and in doing so they need to plan staffing on an ongoing basis and continually review and improve conditions so as to make trade unionism a good career option. It is only in this way that they will be able to attract and keep skilled and committed officials. This does not mean paying the same salary as management or even the civil service. The important thing is people must feel they are getting decent remuneration. There are many people who work for other institutions who pay less than the civil service or management but they still see their jobs as a good career

option.

Secondly, the tradition in COSATU unions is that officials do not negotiate what salaries and benefits they get. Also, in a number of cases the skills people have are not taken into account when their remuneration is worked out. Though the situation is changing in some unions and officials are asked to indicate what they would like to get, there is still insufficient discussion where people could voice out their opinions on the issue. Increasingly better skilled people will resent the fact that their skills or qualifications are not taken account of. Thus some will decide to vote with their feet.

Thirdly, the issue of shop stewards leaving the union to join management needs to be addressed urgently, and this does not necessarily mean stopping it. Unions can no longer afford skirting around the issue because it is central to capacity building.

Fourthly, the system of the full-time shop steward has not been used to its full potential by the unions. New and creative ways should be found to ensure that full time shop stewards take on some of the roles of the full-time official, but not in an ad hoc and chaotic way as happens now with a number of full time stewards. Surely, there are examples elsewhere in the world of how this can be done.

Finally, COSATU and the other federations need to explore the possibility of getting higher institutions of learning like universities to run fully recognised certificate or diploma courses in labour and labour studies to prepare unionists and other people in society generally to understand trade unionism as a career option. For too long these institutions have prepared and continue to train people for management. This may not necessarily translate into scores of people joining unions as officials, but it would produce a number of intellectuals whose area of interest is labour. Some of them may decide to work in the union movement. After all, a number of the key leaders of the labour movement who have just left had intellectual backgrounds. ☆



# Worker control

by SALB writer DEANNE COLLINS



This article traces the political and organisational origins of the “Worker Control” practice and theory in the South African labour movement from the early 1970’s, finds that it is under serious threat of extinction in the 90’s, and makes a number of proposals towards reviving and sustaining the policy under current conditions.

In South Africa, the principle of worker control has very specific theoretical and organisational roots. The re-emergence of militant trade unions in the 1970’s was linked to a radical ferment amongst left academics and students who consciously advocated a more participatory notion of socialism than had been previously put into practice in other countries.

## “Laboratories for Democracy”

For these activists, the trade unions were, in the words of Alec Erwin, to become “laboratories for democracy,” in which workers would be trained and empowered to take control, not only of their workplaces, but, ultimately, of every aspect of their lives. Control of their unions was the first step towards a society in which workers would resist anybody – government, employers, political activists, and even their own leaders – who tried to make decisions for them.

For the emerging unions, the principle of worker control had, of course, a practical as well as an ideological component. The new unions were confronted by a hostile state and equally hostile employers. Denied legal recognition, and with recognition by employers for many years practically unachievable, there was little chance of the unions developing into bureaucratic organisations. Unions existed outside the factory gates, with victimisation and dismissal a constant threat to members. Money and other resources were extremely limited. The issues confronting workers and their unions were very stark: starvation wages, racism on the shop floor, unfair dismissals, the right to bargain.

### **After 1973**

The 1973 strikes created the beginnings of a new workers' movement in South Africa. Some material gains were made and a new spirit of confidence emerged amongst workers. As 1973 receded, however, so, too, did membership of the fledgling unions that emerged from the strikes. Unionists realised that the key to the survival of the unions was more intensive and structured organisation.

While the position was not uncontested, the majority view was that the only way to survive was to concentrate on organising factory by factory. The unions stressed the need for workers in each plant to elect their own leaders. The emphasis was placed on building "worker leadership" rather than relying on union officials. Shop steward elections became a priority, with workers gathering in the union offices to elect shop steward committees who were often forced to work clandestinely or via the "front" of the works and liaison committees provided for in law at that time. Once shop stewards were in place, the unions began to organise around issues which they had a chance of winning. Through these battles shop stewards began to get a sense of their power- and their need to act on mandates from those who had elected them.

Worker education was a vital tool in the bid to build factory leadership. Although it required a protracted struggle over control, by the mid-1970's the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) was running shop stewards and organisers courses under the direction of the new unions.

### **FOSATU**

In April 1979 the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) was formed. One of the founding principles of FOSATU was direct worker control. Worker delegates constituted a majority of all structures of the Federation. FOSATU also developed and adopted the idea of Union Branch Executive Committees being composed of delegates from each

workplace, rather than being elected at an Annual General Meeting. Other key FOSATU principles included shopfloor organisation and a stress on developing shop stewards.

Throughout the early 1980's, while union membership grew apace, FOSATU concentrated not only on mobilising, but also on consolidating membership. A comprehensive shop steward education programme was set in place. Unlike the IIE courses, which due to a lack of time and resources and because of the extremely tight "security" surveillance from the state, restricted themselves to imparting basic skills to workers, FOSATU broadened education to include courses which would increase the ability of workers to lead both in the factories and outside them. This was to play a key role in building independent worker political leadership.

### **Setting up the Locals**

FOSATU also began establishing locals or shop steward councils in certain regions. By the end of 1984, there were 22 area-based locals in place. The locals brought together workers from a particular township or industrial area. Workers in the locals provided support to comrades taking up struggles in neighbouring factories and organised the unorganised plants. They also began to take up issues outside of the workplace. "The local was a vibrant centre for worker education and activity and could not be ignored in the formulation of national union policy" (Marie, SALB 16.5).

Friedman describes the situation in the mid-80's as follows :

" (By 1985)... there were up to 150 union meetings taking place throughout the country on most week nights. At all of these, workers were debating not only their factory goals, but political ones too. ...while a few years before workers only listened as the intellectuals held forth, now they placed their own stamp on the debate. ... the dialogue created a worker leadership which had thought through its aims and

strategies and was better able to shape workers' political future." (Friedman, p 497)

### Problems in the 80's

Even by the mid-1980's, however, certain trends had emerged which were to have significant impact on the trade union movement. In a survey on "the state of the unions" published in the SALB in 1985, Lewis and Randall noted some very positive trends. There had been a massive growth in union membership, accompanied by increasing organisational depth. In the sample of 23 of the largest industrial unions, there were 12,462 shop stewards, with 1,443 shop steward councils in place.

There were over 400 recognition agreements, and unions were increasingly challenging management prerogatives and shifting the frontiers of control on the shop floor.

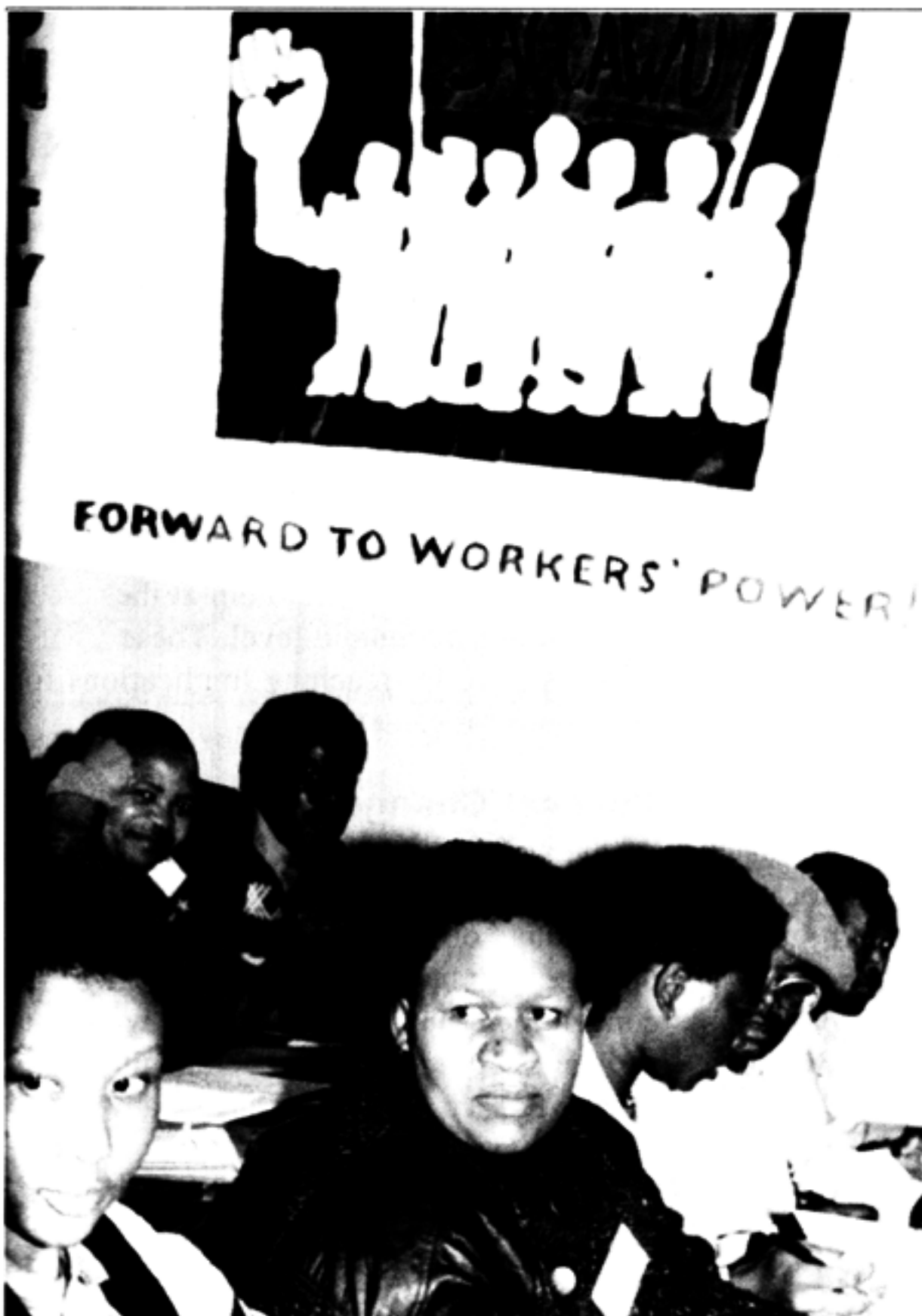
There were also, however, negative indicators : recession had resulted in wholesale dismissals, declining living standards and an increase in retrenchments and unemployment. The unions were forced to consolidate organisation and to explore new strategies to cope with these conditions.

A number of the unions adopted the strategy of greater involvement in the industrial relations machinery. Some joined industrial councils. More use was

made of conciliation, arbitration and the Industrial Court. With the emergence of national political organisations like the UDF during this period, the Unions also began to more openly debate their role in the wider political struggle. The all-important issue of trade union unity was next on the agenda.

### Unity Talks

The issue of worker control became a much-debated issue during the unity talks, which culminated in the launch of COSATU in November 1985. During the talks there was lively debate on organising methods and the relationship between organisation and mobilisation. FOSATU argued strongly that workers on the shop floor should dominate all union structures and



"Workers... should control union officials..."



control union officials and insisted on mandates, report-backs and worker control. (Baskin p31)

### **COSATU**

In the end, the constitution adopted at COSATU's launching congress ensured that all structures would contain a majority of worker delegates. In addition, large worker-controlled meetings and congresses were seen as central to ensuring mass participation in decision making. Much emphasis was placed on the role of the locals, which were seen as the base unit of organisation. (Baskin p58). These structures have remained largely unchanged to the present day.

A massive strike wave followed COSATU's birth. Union membership increased at an enormous rate. Apart from the organisational pressures which this created, COSATU also suffered the brunt of state repression, following on successive declarations of states of emergency. There can be no doubt that the emphasis on building structures at shop floor level, and on not relying on union offices and officials, were largely responsible for the survival of the Federation at this time. In particular the role of the shop stewards councils was crucial. They assisted in organisational work and developed ordinary worker leadership. The locals confronted the political issues of the day and developed resistance in practice.

### **Challenges of the late 80's**

To have simply survived this period was an

---

**“Much emphasis was placed on the role of the locals, which were seen as the base unit of organisation”**

---

achievement for COSATU. At the same time, however, a number of problems emerged during the late 1980's which contain the roots of the problems being faced by the Federation today. At the end of 1987 the COSATU National

Office Bearers conducted an assessment of COSATU. This revealed a number of weaknesses : local structures were weak and the COSATU regions were, with few exceptions, not functioning. The Federation had failed to build the Living Wage Campaign, arguably the most important of its campaigns. This was linked to the failure to achieve centralised bargaining in most sectors. In addition, COSATU's education programme, so crucial to the development of worker leadership, was also not functioning properly.

### **Political Differences**

The Office Bearers' assessment also noted that political differences within and amongst the affiliates were weakening the Federation. In at least one affiliate (CCAWUSA), these were to result in a split. The focus of the differences, which has been characterised as the “populist/workerist” debate, was around the role of the unions and where they should be concentrating their energies : on mobilising on the broader liberation front, or on developing the unions per se.

### **COSATU in the 1990's**

The 1990's have seen a number of critical changes in South Africa, both at the political and economic level. These changes have far-reaching implications for the labour movement.

### **Political Changes**

At the political level, the changes ushered in in 1990 confronted COSATU with a fresh range of challenges. COSATU and its predecessors have served both as a conventional union movement as well as a resistance front (Marie). The opening up of political space after 1990 has meant that the unions are now in a position to directly extend their influence beyond industry to the national economy. The strategy adopted by COSATU with regard to this involvement as well as its determination to “influence” the policies of the ANC in



Worker control has been a defining feature of COSATU: the 1989 congress at NASREC

particular, has resulted in the Federation becoming involved in a wide range of policy issues.

### **Collective Bargaining**

At the same time, the collective bargaining scenario has also undergone major changes. Basic worker rights are now guaranteed in law for most workers. Prolonged recession, coupled with the need to service an ever-growing membership, has further entrenched the move from plant level to centralised bargaining. The restructuring initiatives of state and capital have put new, more complex issues on the agenda. The shift in management style to "participative management" also creates

new challenges.

It is clear that some of the strategies adopted in response to these challenges have resulted in major problems for the unions, and that the result has been a steady erosion of worker control.

### **Policy Making**

At the level of policy, COSATU adopted a number of strategies. The first was to intervene in policy making, particularly on macro-economic issues. This necessitated using the services of a number of groupings outside of the labour movement. The MERG and ISP are obvious examples, but the Federation and a number of the affiliates themselves have brought in



“experts” on a wide range of policy issues. Some have even been directly employed. Whilst many of these groupings and individuals have provided valuable services to the unions, it cannot be denied that the effect has been to move policy making further away from the union structures. Rank and file members and even the majority of worker leaders are only marginally involved in the process. As Marie points out it is not easy to send down the structures for debate complex issues that take researchers six to twelve months to formulate in national planning and research groups. Instead, what often happens is that the “policy/workshop/conference” approach is adopted, where selected regional representatives attend a workshop on key policy issues before taking these down to local structures. (Marie, SALB). As one unionist put it, policy has now become “received wisdom” and the result is that the structures are simply “transmission belts” for discussion from above.

While there have been some attempts to use participatory research methods to reverse this trend (the NUMSA research groups and COSATU’s PRP Project come to mind) these have, at best, empowered only a handful of individuals, and the wider problems remain.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme is an obvious example of this process. While the title of the programme may be known to many, workers at grass roots level do not have a clear understanding of the complexities of the RDP.

### **Negotiating Forums**

Having formulated policy, the second prong of the strategy is to get this policy accepted by other forces. Such has been the eagerness to achieve this, that COSATU and its affiliates became involved in “every negotiating forum under the sun.” An enormous amount of time and energy has been devoted to this process and, as in the area of policy

formulation, it has had severe consequences for the unions. Key union officials and worker leaders have been all but removed from their organisations while they participate in the fora. Furthermore, it is clear that these representatives often go to the negotiations without clear mandates either from the Federation or their unions and that in many instances they are merely there in their individual capacities. Where report backs are given at the local level, they are often presented as top-down reports with little room for debate. They are often not discussed at all, in favour of dealing with more local issues.

Similar trends may be discerned at the level of negotiations with management. Centralised bargaining arrangements mitigate against the direct process of mandating and report back practised in the past. Moreover, as in the negotiating fora, the focus has shifted away from the bread and butter issues to which workers can easily relate. Complex negotiations around grading, training schemes and re-organisation of production impact significantly on the ability of members on the ground to participate.

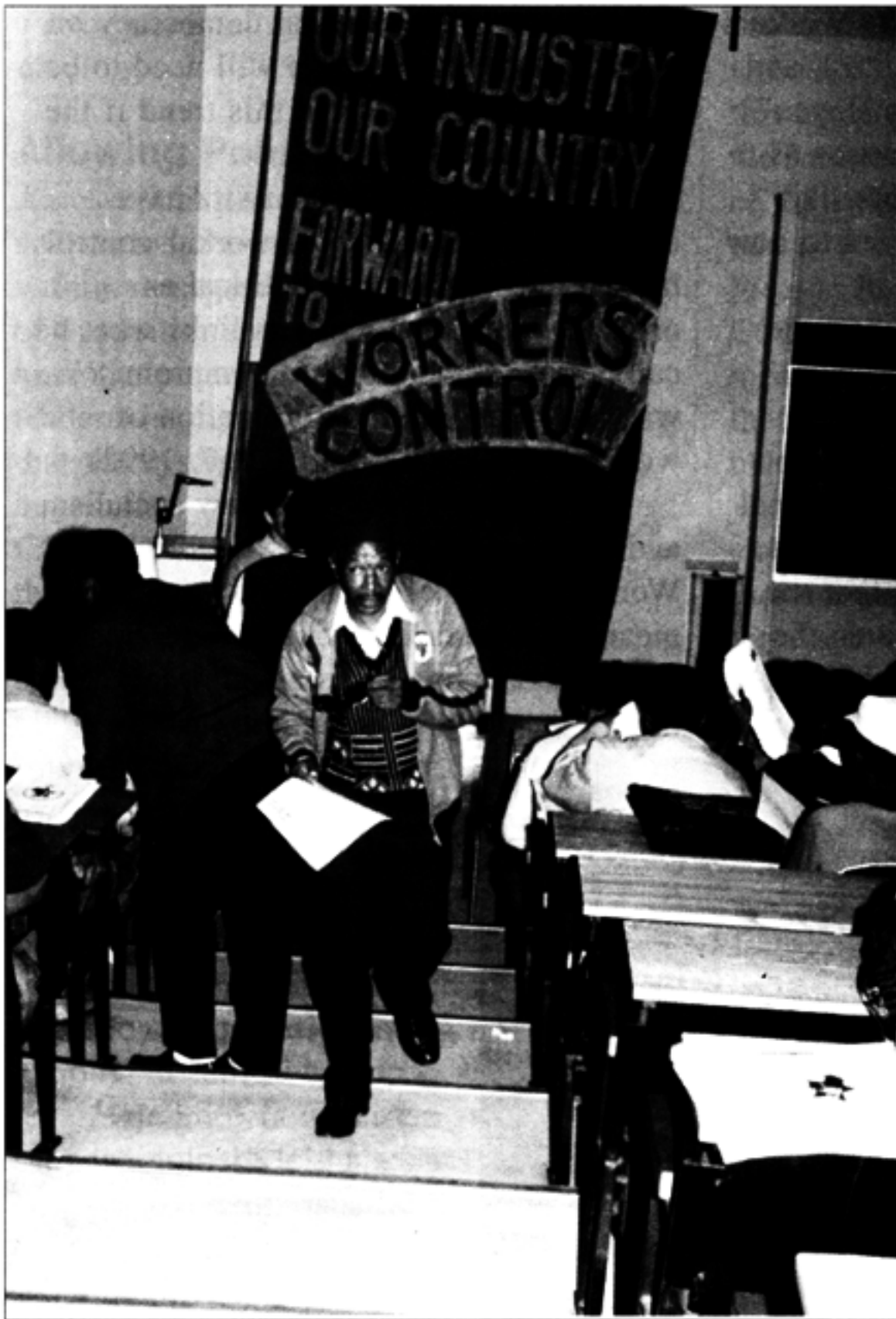
### **A Weakening of Worker Control**

The impact of these trends on worker control became apparent some time ago. An SALB survey conducted in 1992 found a “general trend towards the weakening of workers control.” Workers and officials interviewed at the time pinpointed a number of factors which contributed to this :

A major issue was the lack of education and training for shop stewards. Whilst COSATU itself has spent much time and resources in developing training programmes, relatively few shop stewards have access to these. Education in the affiliates is very uneven, and in some cases seems to have gone backwards rather than forwards, as Education Officers and worker educators are pulled into other areas of union work.

Bureaucratic tendencies have become





1990: Involvement of shop stewards in centralised bargaining

evident both at COSATU and affiliate level. These tendencies are not restricted to officials, but extend to worker leaders as well. As Marie points out, this results from “the inability to find solutions to the tensions between national decisions and local initiative, between efficiency and participation”

The survey also pointed to the dominance of union officials and to the fact that many officials coming into the trade unions in the 1990’s have a very different attitude towards the movement compared with officials of the past. There is a tendency to see union work as a “job” rather than a commitment. Furthermore, with the weakening of shop steward

structures, it is easier for ambitious officials to build a power base. A number of shop stewards complained about organisers, who have no experience of working in a factory or other workplace, “controlling us instead of us controlling them.” (SALB 16,5)

### **COSATU Reflects**

A more recent analysis by COSATU general secretary, Sam Shilowa, notes the following:

- ❑ In COSATU Constitutional meetings, very little time is given to discussion of trade union work. Affiliates come to these structures without proper briefing or mandates, and are as a result “often surprised by the outcome of meetings.” There is very little report back to members from these meetings.
- ❑ Workers are complaining about the lack of service and involvement in decision-making.

❑ General meetings, a hard-won right, are, in many cases no longer being held at the workplace.

- ❑ In most areas locals either do not exist or are not being attended by shop stewards and officials

He concludes that, by and large, union members have become “spectators in the organisation.”

The observations made by Shilowa are not new. In the main part, they repeat observations made by the COSATU office bearers in 1987. The fact that they have to be repeated points to the urgency for solutions to be found to the problems.

### **Only a Slogan?**

In the course of the SALB survey, a

national union leader commented “Workers are losing and losing workers control, and it is in danger of becoming just a slogan” (SALB 16,5) The question then arises as to whether worker control will, rather like socialism, remain a slogan, referred to now and again when it is convenient, or whether the unions have the will and the capacity to change the situation.

To abandon worker control is to abandon union democracy, and to accept that bourgeois democracy – that is, formal democracy empty of any ongoing, direct control by members – is the best that the trade union movement can do, given the conditions in South Africa in the 1990’s. Given that there is a strong tendency for

this to be the only form of democracy on offer in our society, there will need to be a strong movement against this trend if the situation is to change.

Rob Rees and Alan Horwitz have argued that the erosion of worker control has as much to do with political as organisational factors. Rees links what he calls the “politics of class compromise” with a decline in the participation of workers in unions. (SALB 16,7, 1992)

In the 1970’s, unionists saw socialism and worker control as inextricably bound. Worker control of unions was seen as a means to worker control of production and society as a whole. It is a significant irony that in the 1990’s, the unions are

struggling to return to worker control of their own organisations, with control of production and society an ever receding possibility. A recommitment to worker control will thus of necessity also involve substantial ideological soul-searching.

Assuming the will, what are the ways in which the Unions need to change in order to ensure a return to worker control?

### **Countering Bureaucratisation**

There are some who argue that bureaucratisation is an inevitable tendency in organisations, and that trade unions are no exception to this rule. An impressive body of theory exists on this subject. The same theorists point out that one of the ways in which this “law” could be checked is by an acknowledgement of bureaucratic tendencies and



“... Fashionable to portray workers as a privileged elite”



a strong commitment to democracy as an ideology.

### **Allowing Political Differences**

An essential part of this commitment is the acknowledgement of differing opinions within an organisation, and the existence of opposition groupings which at least have the potential to overthrow existing leadership. Jeremy Baskin has pointed out that the system of "majoritarian hegemony" currently practised by COSATU and its affiliates places limits on the democratic process and needs to be reconsidered. There has been an increasing tendency to actively discourage opposition views within the unions and to stifle any form of real debate.

### **Full-time Worker Leaders?**

Given the growing tendency for union officials to dominate, there have been suggestions that there should be more full-time worker leaders, ranging from the national office-bearer to the shop steward level. While there may be merits in this suggestion, it should also be treated with caution. Experience has shown that full-time shop stewards can become removed from shop floor issues, and reproduce the bureaucratic and anti-democratic tendencies exhibited by some union officials. This is a particular danger where there are long, or unlimited terms of office. If this course is to be followed, there would need to be careful consideration of measures that ensure that worker leaders are linked directly into their constituencies.

### **Back to Basics**

The problem cannot be solved solely at leadership level. For real workers control to be implemented steps have to be taken to ensure that ordinary workers once again become intimately involved in their organisations, and that these organisations accurately reflect the real needs and concerns of their members.

COSATU is attempting to address the

problems it has identified through a "back to basics" campaign. While the details of this are not yet clear, it involves "pursuing the interests of working people, regardless of the twists and turns which government takes" (Coleman, quoted in *Finance Week*). The question of strengthening COSATU structures and servicing members have now been put at the top of the agenda of COSATU constitutional meetings.

It has become fashionable in certain circles to portray workers as privileged individuals, who are far better off than large sections of our society. Be that as it may, there are workers in many sectors of our economy who are working and living under extremely poor conditions. Minimum wages on the mines, the farms and in the public and service sectors are well below poverty levels. South Africa has an appalling health and safety record. Moreover, employed workers bear the direct consequences of high unemployment, with most workers supporting unemployed family members.

### **Campaigns on the Ground**

Retrenchments, child care, parental leave and social benefits are all issues which beg for attention. "Back to basics" should involve major campaigns around concrete, popular issues, to be determined by workers at the local level. An open, democratic atmosphere needs to be established in local union structures, with the involvement of active workers, not only formally elected representatives, being encouraged. If this is achieved, then the rebuilding of union structures, and the revitalisation of the locals – which are crucial indicators of worker control – should almost automatically follow.

Current realities mean that many of these issues may well still be negotiated at central level. Centralised bargaining does not of itself, however, necessarily mean that workers cannot be involved. NUMSA has managed, in varying degrees, to continue to receive mandates and give



reportbacks at the local level, while bargaining at the Industrial Councils. Ways of ensuring that this process continues need to be explored by all the affiliates. National agreements should open up scope for workplace and regional bargaining.

Negotiations on policy issues at central level will continue. COSATU has already announced its intention to limit its participation in forums, but methods will have to be found to ensure that the participation that does take place reflects the opinions of ordinary union members. In this regard, education and communication are areas which require urgent attention.

### Education

The education programmes of COSATU and the affiliates need to be reassessed and strengthened. Substantial resources need to be devoted to staff training.

### Communication

A great deal of attention needs to be given to communication skills and to the process of rendering issues more understandable to workers. Although much of the technological capacity exists, in many

---

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following comrades for sharing ideas and experiences : Mike Murphy (SALB), Salim Vally (ex-SACCAWU National Educator), Jeremy Daphne (SACCAWU Campaigns Co-ordinator), Jayendra Naidoo (COSATU Negotiations Co-Ordinator), Roger Etkind (National organiser in the NUMSA Education Department).

### References :

**Jeremy Baskin**, *Striking Back : A History of COSATU*, 1991  
**Neil Coleman** "Frankness in COSATU", *Finance Week*, May 5-11, 1994  
**J.E.T. Eldridge**, "Trade Unions and Bureaucratic Control" in **Tom Clarke and Laurie Clements** (eds), *Trade Unions under Capitalism*, 1977  
**Steven Friedman**, *Building Tomorrow Today : African Workers in Trade Unions 1970-1984*, 1987  
**Alan Horwitz**, "Supping with SACOLA",

instances the way in which the technology is used is in itself hampering the process of communication. Before the advent of faxes, a general secretary would write a short report on a negotiation, for widespread dissemination

amongst members. Now, the tendency is simply to fax the verbatim agreement to the regional office, where it tends to go no further. Organisers communicate with shop stewards by fax and visit the workplaces less and less often. Affiliate and COSATU CEC's have become endless paper chases, with most delegates spending much of their time trying to find the document on the issue at hand amongst the 300 or so pages they have been issued.

### Democratisation

Finally, there needs to be a careful examination and debate of current structures and representation at all levels of the unions and the Federation. As Baskin points out "developing union structures which deepen democracy, give direct power to ordinary members and maintain organisational vibrancy is one of the key challenges COSATU faces." (p460). ☆

---

*SALB*, 16,7, September/October 1992

**Dot Keet** "Shop Stewards and Worker Control" *SALB*, 16,5, May/June 1992

**Jon Lewis and Estelle Randall**, "Survey: the State of the Unions", *SALB* 11,2,

October/December 1985

**Bobby Marie**, "COSATU faces Crisis",

*SALB*, 16,5, May/June 1992

**Rob Rees**, "More Workers Control

Needed", *SALB*, 16,7, September/October

1992

**Sam Shilowa**, "Towards Developing a Long

Term Strategy for COSATU: A discussion

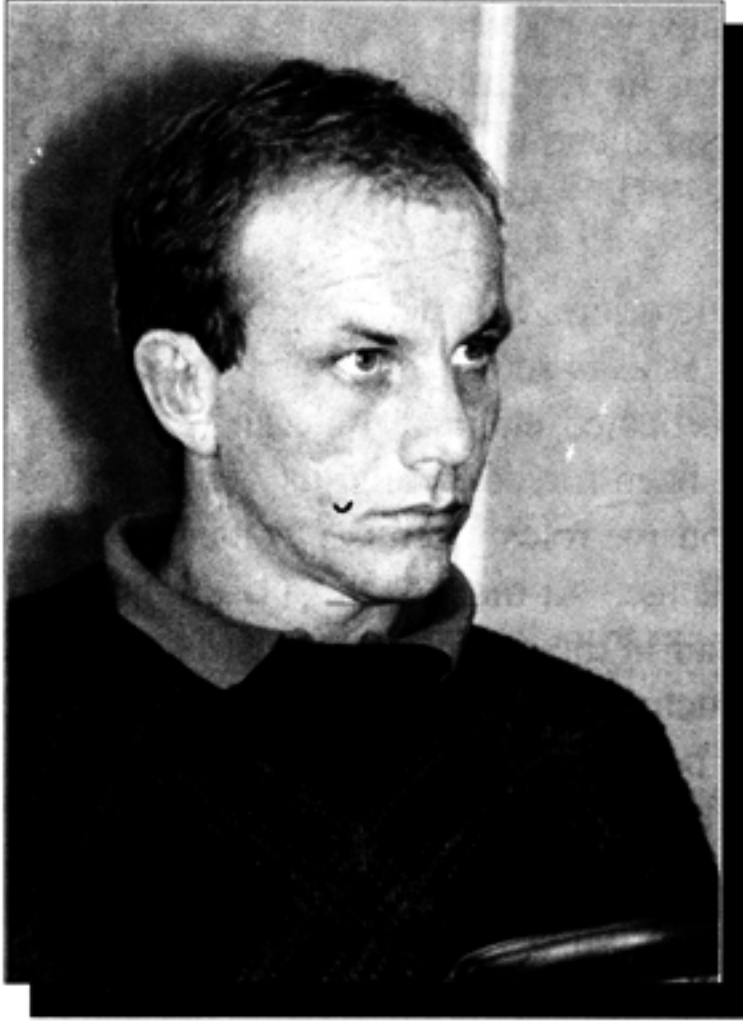
Paper" 1994

---

**"Current representation at all levels needs to be carefully examined"**

---

# *Restructuring the labour movement after apartheid*



**GEOFF SCHREINER\*** examines the capacity and trajectory of Cosatu after the elections, and argues for a far leaner, more professional organisation, which – while loyal to its heritage of participatory democracy – is able to make the adjustments necessary for its meaningful survival in the face of new economic, political and social realities.

## **Introduction**

The labour movement and COSATU in particular has played a massively important role in bringing about an end to apartheid in South Africa. It has also had a major input into the process of drawing up a vision for the country after its first democratic elections, much of which is captured in the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

Many commentators and trade union activists in particular expect that COSATU will continue to play a major role in formation of socio-economic policy and in seeing to the implementation of the RDP in the years to

come. Some expect COSATU to "lead" this process.

These views are, I would suggest, basically unrealistic. On the one hand they fail to take into account government pressures which will act upon the Federation to focus its energies on industrial relations matters – productivity, wages, working conditions and so on. More likely therefore is a government-union pact wherein the former promises to deliver on social wage issues and the latter on industrial stability. A pact of this kind may well be expanded to include the business sector which the government clearly recognises as its central partner in delivering the RDP. Left opposition to a social contract of this kind, given the current balance of forces, is unlikely to meet with much success.

\* Geoff Schreiner is a former NUMSA National Organiser and COSATU NMC representative, and currently heads the Natal/ KwaZulu Peace Secretariat's Socio-Economic Research and Development unit.

On the other hand it is questionable whether COSATU has the capacity to lead any reconstruction and development processes given its current situation. Levels of service to members are sorely wanting. Union leadership has tended to apply short-term solutions which have had little impact on the problems at hand. Members have had expectations dashed on many occasions – often in the name of broader anti-apartheid initiatives. In the current period there is likely to be less tolerance of the failure to meet such expectations, and in order to survive unions will have to prioritise the realisation of shop floor bread-and-butter demands.

If COSATU is to adapt to a much narrower role within the industrial relations sphere and if serving its membership is to be made a genuine priority then there is a range of changes which the Federation and its affiliates will need to confront urgently.

### **(i) New Economic Realities**

Much of the economic thinking within COSATU and its affiliates has been drawn from a tradition which has revealed serious limitations. Radical transformations of the kind prophesied not long ago are not about to occur in South Africa, and even their desirability in the long term is now the subject of much debate.

There is now a greater awareness of the complexities of modern-day economies, of the value of markets as mechanisms of exchange, and even of the usefulness of private enterprise as a vehicle for economic growth. The difficulty of building/maintaining political democracy in the context of a centrally planned economy is now apparent. Short of the Socialist Utopia, it would seem that economic pluralism is as important as its political counterpart.

South Africa faces a new economic regime which will bind our economy much more closely into the global economic network. Short of the “Albanian option” there is little choice about this. Local companies will have to become more competitive without the benefit of tariff protection. New forms of work organisation and new

technologies will have to be introduced.

COSATU and the labour movement cannot successfully resist these new economic realities without fundamentally jeopardising the entire base of more than two decades of careful and painstaking organisation. The question really is one of how to embrace these realities in a way which impacts least negatively on, or put more positively, “advances” the interest of the constituency which it represents.

It is however not only a dropping of bygone economic rhetoric that is required. COSATU also has to be much more modest about its role in the process of industrial restructuring. It is not going to “lead” this process as is so often claimed – even highly sophisticated national trade union centres have been forced into largely reactive and responsive roles when confronted with this challenge. At most COSATU might be a partner in the process of industrial restructuring and if it plays its cards correctly may be able to secure an important range of concessions for its members.

If the South African economy is to grow at the rates required and if a vibrant export-orientated manufacturing sector is to be developed it will require the ongoing co-operation of business and labour, a co-operation built on mutual respect and acknowledgement of interdependence. Thorny issues of flexible working arrangements, increased productivity, labour-absorbing technology, deregulation and so on will have to be imaginatively tackled with a view to finding “win-win” solutions rather than by recourse to much of the current sterile, narrow, conflict-riddled approaches which characterise the current period.

### **(ii) Union Personnel Resources**

One of the abiding strengths of the labour movement in South Africa has been its fusion of intellectual capacity with the skills of experienced shop floor leadership. This combination was able to develop highly sophisticated strategies and ensure that these were put into practice on the shop floor.

In the current period the situation is very





....“greater awareness of the value of markets as exchange mechanisms...”

different. Both COSATU and its affiliates have simply not been able to provide sufficient incentives to retain many of those who have developed immense organizational, intellectual and strategic abilities. Hence the haemorrhaging (both formal and informal) which is now occurring, particularly to the political realm. These developments coupled with COSATU's inability to find appropriate personnel to fill these gaps should not be underestimated in terms of its cost to the Federation.

This problem has been exacerbated by the failure of COSATU and its affiliates to develop any meaningful long-term training for shop-steward leadership and local organisers. The effects are that levels of service to members are often very poor, campaigns cannot be properly carried out, and frustration becomes the norm.

A consequence for senior worker leadership is that advancement through a company's ranks often becomes a far more exciting alternative than soldiering on in the union world where a sense of achievement becomes increasingly rare. Similar dynamics

within unions mean that senior vacancies cannot be filled.

The measures adopted to address these problems will of necessity be widely defined and quite complex and as such go beyond the scope of this paper. However some comments may be pertinent. Firstly, COSATU and its affiliates will have to get used to the idea that human resource managers and personnel officers who have the time and the capacity to develop proper training programmes and to focus on career path development (yes, within unions!) are essential.

Secondly, conditions will have to be made sufficiently attractive to retain, and perhaps regain, highly skilled staff who have now ventured off into other arenas. Nor only does the Federation have to aim at those with intellectual and organisational capacities, but if it wishes to play a role in restructuring it also has to aim at those with real technical skills derived from practical and theoretical sources. Quite simply this means paying market-related salaries (or at least being in this league) and offering terms and conditions

of service which are sufficiently flexible so as to accommodate the needs of the individuals concerned.

Thirdly the “anti-intellectual” currents which run in some parts of the movement (quite often merely thinly-disguised racial antagonisms) will have to be stemmed and environments created where all feel valued and fully recognised for their respective contributions.

### **(iii) New Organisational Forms**

Many commentators have remarked that despite the very rapid growth of unions in South Africa during the 1990’s – the fastest in the world – relatively few changes have been made structurally and organisationally to adjust to this radically altered membership base.

The issue can also be viewed from the perspective of the lack of responsiveness on the part of unions to the changing way in which workers are being organised at their places of work. On their way out are large-scale Fordist production techniques and increasingly we are witnessing moves towards various forms of flexible specialisation: small teams, multi-skilling, labour as a resource, sourcing-out and so on.

Huge industrial unions made organisational sense in the blue collar Fordist era. There was a symmetry between the way in which work was organised and the defence against exploitation (i.e. the form of union organisation). Flexible specialisation with its heavy focus on the team and ultimately the individual has little resonance with the massive industrial unions (amongst the biggest in the world) that we witness in South Africa today.

The bottom line however is that unions whose membership will be affected by radically new forms of workplace organisation will increasingly prioritise individual service over industry-wide industrial activities. For the main part members will (and already are) wanting assistance on their own career paths and on their “own” terms and condition of service, or where to get the best medical aid and so on.

If these services are not on offer, if there are no other professional services, if there are no serious benefit and insurance packages many members will eventually leave.

At the level of COSATU dramatic changes are required. With the suggested waning of its traditional political role, the Federation ought to focus its energies on, on the one hand, providing services to its affiliates on organisational and industrial issues (principally) and on the other, on providing an organised mouthpiece for labour to input in the process of policy formulation at national and regional levels.

To carry out these functions effectively, and increasingly to start to live on internal (rather than external) resources, COSATU will have to slim down very dramatically at all levels. If it is to retain and perhaps more importantly gain in capacity this will mean employing a small number of very highly experienced staff on terms competitive with what, as has been suggested, would be available in the private and independent sectors.

Finally more thought has to be given to the restructuring of the institutions within the labour market. Industrial councils, for example, with roots back to the 1920 – 30’s have changed very little over the years. Instead of addressing the issue of updating or transcending the councils, the unions have been trapped into a sterile “for and against” debate regarding their continued existence. Far more fruitful would, within the current economic realities, be to establish some consensus on the nature and extent of industry bargaining and set about tailoring these archaic institutions to begin addressing these priorities.

The same line of approach could apply to productivity committees, workers councils, shop-steward structures through to the “highest echelons” of the National Manpower Commission (which seems to have become stuck at the first stage of its restructuring process). The tasks involved are not beyond those within the labour and business communities but, as will be suggested, require careful long-term planning and above all the



capacity to follow through the implementation phase in an ongoing and consistent manner.

#### **(iv) Rethinking Participatory Democracy**

Participatory democracy has been the heart of the organisational design and practice within the non-racial trade union movement in South Africa. Strongly held views on this principle infused the fabric of the anti-apartheid opposition during the 1980's and these organisations were increasingly pressurised to pay some homage to reliance on mandates, report backs and elaborate consultation processes.

The importance of this tradition cannot be underestimated. It stood opposed to the secret, bureaucratic, hierarchical and so often corrupt practices of the apartheid regime. It has laid the basis for demands around transparency and accountability and its survival is necessary to rein in the ever present pressures on political actors to act in high-handed and undemocratic ways.

However the labour movement will have

to become more realistic about the limits to participatory democracy in a context where unions are now many hundreds of thousands of members strong. Many unions have already concluded that not all decisions can be made at grass roots level – those that have not and claim the contrary, generally tend to be the most undemocratic in reality. In these cases the contradiction between stated goals and organisational practices are thoroughly disempowering and disillusioning experiences for union members.

Beyond the recognition that different kinds of decisions have to be made at various levels of the organisation is the need to accept more fully that as issues become more complex substantial decision making will have to end up in the hands of individuals rather than structures of any kind. This of course is the point where representative and participatory democracy meet. The argument, however, is not that participatory practices should give way to those of a representative kind. Rather it is being suggested that the labour movement needs to find a new balance



"...alternatives needed to current, sterile approaches..."



between these two “systems” which on the other hand ensures accountability and transparency and on the other promotes efficiency and individual initiative.

In gearing different levels of the union to make different kinds of decisions – and these limits and possibilities should be clearly spelt out – the focus should increasingly be placed on developing a system of broadly based mandates for the staff, office bearers and appointed experts/consultants to work on behalf of the organisation in a range of different spheres.

The task of the union secretariat then becomes that of management of the required reports from these representatives, ensuring that major policy issues are discussed in the structures, co-ordinating and linking the activities of representatives, providing guidance and support. The bottom line thus is that union secretariats have to become efficient managers of information if the proper balance between democracy and efficiency is to be found. Perhaps therefore the traditional requirement for such posts as public prominence, shopfloor popularity, “hard-core rhetoric” etc. need to be more carefully weighed.

### **(v) New alliances**

It is widely accepted that nearly 50% of South Africans are now unemployed and that a very large percentage of those in employment are in low wage, high insecurity, service sectors such as domestic work, agriculture, cleaning, security and so on.

The incoming government of national unity may change this picture to some extent, but even the most optimistic of the expectations do not expect a fundamentally different scenario in the short-medium term.

As its role gradually shifts to a more narrowly-constructed labour movement there will be a great deal of pressure on COSATU to prioritise and champion the cause of the most privileged sections of the working class – those who have stable, formal sector employment, relatively high wages and those who dominate the leadership echelons of the movement. COSATU cannot afford not to

address the fears, hopes and concerns of this section of the working class for if it fails in this regard opposition unions and federations will fill the gap. These are however real choices to be made about how to address these interests in ways which do not compromise the interest and concerns of the poorest and most marginalised sectors of society.

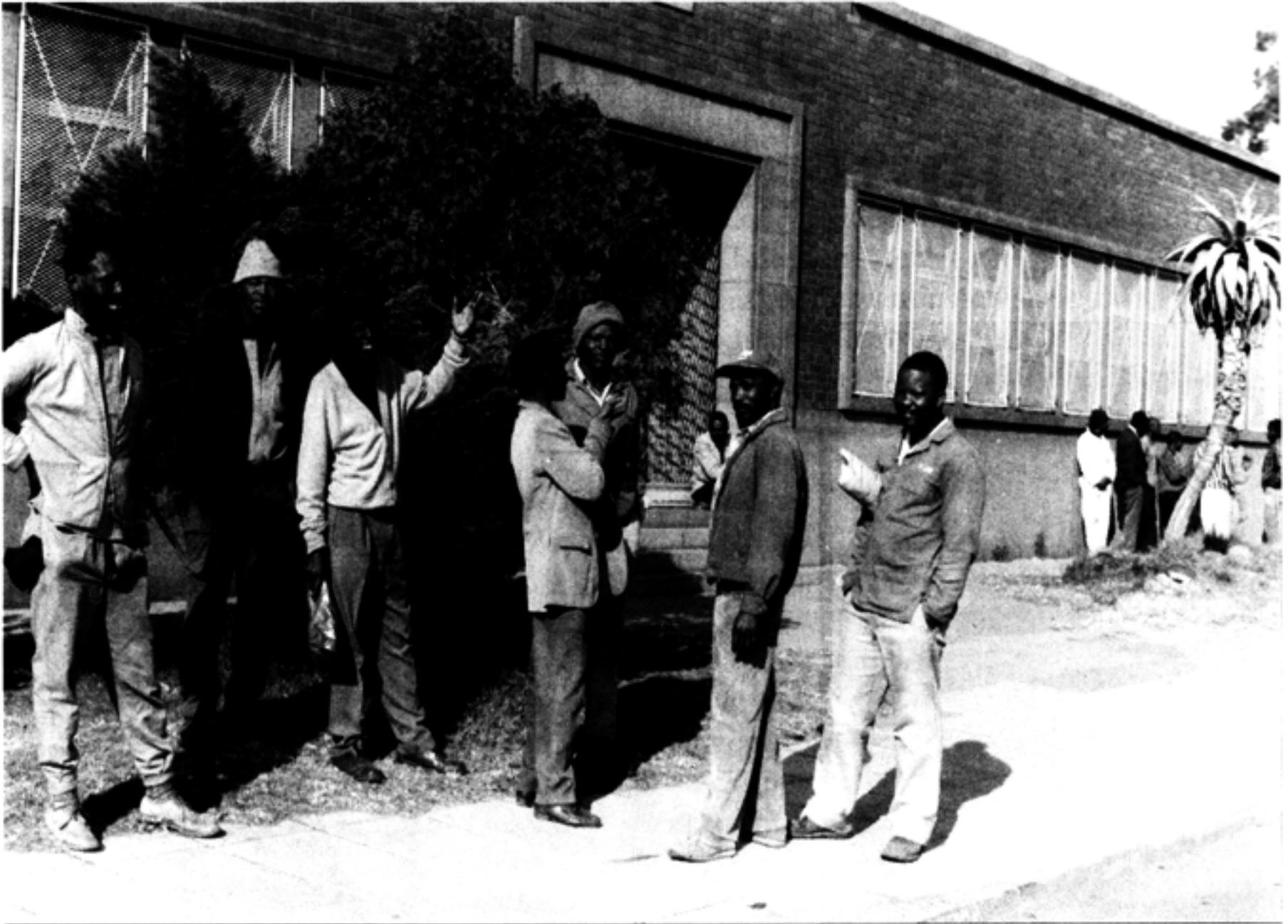
Classical notions of class interest and solidarity which fitted more easily with a far less economically complex bygone era are unhelpful here. Class divisions are often not the most important cleavages in any social formation at a given point in time, while divisions *within* classes may be of greater significance than divisions *between* classes. This reality demands of sectionally-constructed organisations that they recognise the need to support and encourage other organisations which seek to represent the interest of other parts of the working class.

At one level this support might rather take the form of providing material resources to such organisations. It may also involve assisting to create a climate in which such organisations can flourish and grow. Elsewhere it has been argued that COSATU should take a far stronger stand in seeking to support the institutionalisation of broadly inclusive advisory forums within key sectors and at different levels of government. These forums could as suggested provide an organisational focus for the many marginalised groups in society to have their voices heard in the process of public policy formulations.

### **(vi) Forward to strategic planning**

Much of the foregoing points to the need for more competent strategic planning (and execution) within COSATU and its affiliates. At present most union officials are heavily overloaded workwise and crisis management has become the norm.

Planning does occur but usually it is ad hoc and “on the hoof”. Coupled with this is the reality that the bigger, fewer and more exciting challenges get priority while the boring, more intractable and all too often



“50% of South Africans are now unemployed” – Workseekers gather outside a Reef factory

more fundamental problems get left to swell and fester.

It has been suggested that the scale of the problem has increased dramatically in the recent period and the problems attached to the “bit solutions” of the earlier period are multiplied many times over in the current circumstances. Proper union management has to be systematic, it cannot make do with the occasional comforting bosberaad. It requires open leadership and not those who will not admit mistakes, who operate on the basis of whim and who make a virtue of the necessity to be seen to be in control.

Open strategic planning can build a culture of systematic, openness, and accountability.

Union leadership generally has immense organisational capacity and the task of developing proper systems for organisational development is largely within their capacity. However there is a range of skills borne by professionals in the field which can be drawn on to design processes which are genuinely

inclusive and empowering. Above all unions have to recognise the need to locate staff in and around their organisations whose *exclusive* tasks are to monitor and ensure that plans and programmes are fully implemented in a sustained and ongoing way.

### Conclusion

That the union movement will change over the next few years is surely unquestionable. The key question is will it have change forced upon it or will it have the strength to recognise the need for major change itself and take steps in this direction in the near future.

This is the challenge faced by COSATU and unions more broadly. It demands a course of action which threatens those who have developed vested interest in the status quo and those who have acquired positions of privilege and power. COSATU has however faced and overcome massive hurdles in its past. There is no immediate reason to conclude that it will falter at this stage. ☆

# The role of “intellectuals” in trade unions



## *A discussion between JABU GWALA\* and MIKE MURPHY\*\**

**\* JABU GWALA:**

Recently elected general secretary of SACTWU, Jabu started his working life in the garden of a white homeowner (who called Jabu “Jakob”), before getting a job at Frame Textiles where he became a shopsteward. After being fired in a strike, he became a union official and rose up the ranks from there.

**\*\* MIKE MURPHY:**

Active as a student in a Wages Commission from 1971, Mike became a founder organiser of the Durban-based TUACC unions which merged into FOSATU, then COSATU. Banned in 1976, Mike returned from 12 years exile and worked for 4 years alongside Jabu Gwala in ACTWUSA/SACTWU.



**M**ike Murphy: This discussion arose out of the chance remark that you made to me after various union leaders were nominated by COSATU to stand for election to Parliament. You said that the departure of “intellectuals” to Parliament – or for other reasons – would bring about a decline in the union movement. Why do you think this is so? And what *is* an “intellectual” anyway?

**Jabu Gwala:** There will be a decline, but not a collapse. “Intellectuals” have played a very important role in the unions. Look at my situation: As general secretary I have now to take on tasks previously done by intellectuals in my union. I now have to instruct other intellectuals (eg lawyers) as to what to do, by exercising my discretion across a range of factors: If a course of action is taken, will the union gain or lose, will it establish a precedent, will it undermine the relationship with the employer? The professional intellectuals I instruct do not have to exercise the same discretion, and they can disagree with me on the course of action I recommend.

**MM:** I see a distinction between the intellectual as professional, and the intellectual as strategist. The union can hire intellectual skills for a limited area: accounting, legal advice, etc. What your union has gained from in the past, however, is the input of intellectuals as leaders, strategisers, planners: for example Halton Cheadle early on, John Copelyn later. Although some people have argued that such individuals have held back those around them, “dominated” them, made it impossible for them to develop. What was your experience?

**JG:** I was never held back myself. My history explains itself. I grew from a shopfloor worker, to worker leader, to organiser, and on from there. I founded a region of the union ‘the Eastern Cape’ and built it from scratch. I was there for six

years. I think John Copelyn – the union general secretary at the time – came there twice during the whole time. I felt I had the whole world in my hands. I never felt held back. I have learned a lot from John. He always made himself available to talk when needed. And it was not only me that he pushed forward: At various stages there was June-Rose Nala, Obed Zuma, Isaac Ndlovu, Elias Banda; more recently Lionel October. In my experience, we worked as a team in my union. It was not a big team, but it was a team.

**MM:** In my view the key intellectual capacity we are talking about here, is the ability to see the big picture, to weigh up a broad range of factors, and to plan and strategise from there. Although it *helps* to have gone to university and to have picked up technical skills (accounting, law, etc), it is not essential. Unions can hire people with these skills, and obviously it will help you to supervise them if you have these skills yourself, but it is not essential. What is essential in my view is a practice, gained through experience, of thinking broadly and systematically about matters, weighing up pros and cons, and making rational decisions as a consequence. But if you have worked in a team that *follows* this practice, then you *become* an “intellectual” (in my sense of the word) over time.

**JG:** Agreed.

**MM:** If we look back over the 70’s and 80’s it is noticeable that the “intellectuals” who involved themselves in the union movement were, firstly, mostly whites, then later many Indians and Coloureds became involved. This input was sparked to a large extent by the “Wages Commissions” on the white university campuses. The student activists argued that intellectuals should get out of their “ivory towers” and seek to make their intellectual work and skills available to ordinary people, especially the most disadvantaged among them.



Miss Pat Horn.



Mr. Chris Albertyn.



Mr. Mike Murphy.



Mr. John Copeland.



Mrs. Jeanette Marohv.

# State ban on 8 'fear of jobless'

The state didn't like "intellectuals", & trade unions either

But where were the African intellectuals at that time? Where are they now?

**JG:** The answer lies in the structure of politics in South Africa. African "intellectuals" opted for popular politics. In fact most of those who (mostly later on) came into unions came with a political "ticket" i.e they came in to recruit the unions to a particular political position.

But there were also whites and Indians who came in on the same basis. Some were recruited to a political course *after* they had already involved themselves in the unions.

**MM:** It's interesting to compare this process with the different political/labour interactions in other countries. The classic counterpoint is the British/German comparison: in Britain the unions started the labour party, in Germany the labour party started the unions.

In South Africa the absence (through banning) of organisations like the ANC and SACP, made space for other ideologies, like Black Consciousness. In the 1970s the BC people were highly critical of "whites'" involvement with "black" workers. Yet hardly any of these black intellectuals made any consistent input in the field of labour organisation. Why do you think this happened?



**JG:** The BC criticism of white intellectuals was based on their black vs white vision. They mistrusted whites in unions, thinking that whites were there to get more power over blacks.

BC didn't really move much into unions, it moved more towards popular politics. When I worked in Eastern Cape, there was still lots of BC stuff going on, lots of anti-white stuff. I heard for example Bernie Fanaroff criticised by people *in* MAWU/NUMSA for "dominating", as if he was someone *outside* MAWU/NUMSA.

When I first came to the Eastern Cape, I was called to a meeting and "scrutinised" to see if I was a "workerist". The line against so-called workerists was that they "took people away from the liberation struggle."

**MM:** Was there any intellectual content to this?

**JG:** There were slogans. I tried to get people to think, not just repeat the slogans against each other. There was the East London Youth Congress and the East London Youth Organisation, both in my area. One was pro SAAWU, the other pro COSATU. I tried to mediate between the factions. But I was not really trusted. Most Eastern Cape unions around that time adopted the freedom charter – mine did not. We always had a rather sophisticated and controversial position. We did not just follow slogans.

But if I go back to the early 70's and try to place the "white intellectuals" and the Wages Commissions in their context, I would say their input was valuable. The formation of unions at that time was very important in renewing the spirit of resistance.

**MM:** We are witnessing a rapid "Africanisation" of union leadership at senior level. How do you see this? Is it a form of "Affirmative Action" and does it mean that non-Africans should not stand for senior office in unions at this time?

**JG:** It is not "Africanisation", it is coming

to reality. One can't avoid this. Africans are the vast majority of organised labour. In my view the issue now is of commitment, not colour. Some intellectuals who were in unions are now out marketing

themselves and their skills as in a business. It is not appropriate for such people to be in a high position in a union.

Other "professionals" are approaching the unions in search of a living. They have no commitments, they are pursuing their careers. These people would resign and leave a union which is having problems. They won't challenge what they see as being wrong, they won't seek power.

**MM:** Many unions – in South Africa and elsewhere – are today led by people who came into the unions as a "professional" (for example as a lawyer) and stayed on, gained experience and finally became general secretaries, etc. Do you accept that this could now take place in COSATU unions?

**JG:** The issue is commitment. A leader does not have to have been a worker on a shopfloor. I see no problem with this.

**MM:** What is the boundary line between commitment and career? One of the tests of commitment in the unions in the past was money. Pay was always low, and skilled people working for low pay were assumed to be committed. But with the changes in government, many people are saying that they can no longer ask their families to go on making the enormous sacrifices they made for "the struggle". If unions keep to a poverty wage system, they may lose all staff except either a handful of very committed people, or people who simply cannot find jobs





anywhere else!

**JG:** I adopt the position that my commitment to my work should not force my family to suffer. There should be reasonable compensation. But I accept that some union officials will have much higher expectations regarding salary.

**MM:** How will salaries be determined? By negotiation? Do you accept that union staff should be unionised, like in Britain, to negotiate their wages?

**JG:** I have less of a problem with this idea where it concerns the union employees in “blue collar” or clerical grades. Where it comes to the more senior officials, a more sophisticated system of payment, measured in terms of factors such as motivation and commitment, is needed.

**MM:** So two bargaining units perhaps, a junior and senior?

**JG:** Perhaps. We have to think carefully what to do. Intellectuals have to be attracted to work in unions. We need economic analysis, analysis of union government relations, tripartism etc. We do not want a situation to develop where the government merely *consults* with unions and then goes off and does what it wants quite irrespective of what unions want. We want to make the government *listen*. We need new goals, new strategies. All this requires intellectual input.

**MM:** Unions will never be able to match private sector pay, but intellectuals set a high value on interesting and meaningful work, and will work for moderate pay if they like their jobs. But intellectuals also get easily frustrated. If they feel their best efforts are being undermined by arbitrary executive decisions, they will soon leave.

Intellectuals will need a clear mandate from unions and leadership to cover a certain (broad) area, and then be allowed to be creative and resourceful in that field. This demands a clearly-demarcated relationship between professionals and leadership.

**JG:** Agreed. We must open up scope where intellectuals can work with pride in what they do. We must think about how they report back. It may be inappropriate to report on some matters – I’m thinking of highly technical issues – directly to the (worker) executive. For example, if I have to make a report to my executive on an issue like tariffs, I first have to teach them all about that subject before they can take decisions appropriately. But you can’t expect an executive to spend all their time in an ongoing seminar being taught about such issues. We have to develop new systems of accountability and allow the leadership to run the union, and to allow skilled staff freedom to handle the many complex technical matters without being delayed by their reports never being read, decisions being endlessly deferred, and so on.

**MM:** The danger would be that elected leadership loses control of their organisation to the professionals/intellectuals who have greater access to information. But, interestingly, there is an area in a number of COSATU unions where intellectuals in a key position of influence have remained subordinate to elected leadership. I am thinking of union education departments, often staffed by intellectuals with quite different “leftish” politics from that of the union leadership, who have done a responsible job within their mandate. There has been no case, as far as I am aware, of any attempted “subversion”.

**JG:** Or, looked at another way, union leadership has been successful at keeping such people within the framework of their professional mandate. ☆

# Intellectual input into trade unions – 1994

*DEANNE COLLINS speaks to  
JEREMY BASKIN, Director of NALEDI.*

**T**he National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), the research institute sponsored by COSATU, opened its doors in January this year.

The establishment of NALEDI is the culmination of a process started as far back as 1991, when the COSATU Congress identified the need to increase the Federation's research and policy development capacity.

## Services Offered:

The NALEDI team of researchers offers COSATU and its affiliates six basic services:

- ❑ Research reports. These are in-depth reports on particular issues. For example, the Institute has just completed a comprehensive report on centralised bargaining.
- ❑ Policy memos, which are short policy reports, written from a labour perspective, which advise leadership on key issues of the day. An example here is the recent memo on the IMF loan.
- ❑ Workshops, where unionists and experts in a particular field are

brought together. A workshop on social security was held recently.

- ❑ Face-to-face briefings on particular topics.
- ❑ A fortnightly discussion forum where unionists give input on a particular topic and there is opportunity for discussion and debate. Subjects which have been covered include the role of the "COSATU MP's", Worker Control and the tasks of COSATU under a democratic government.
- ❑ Library Reports. NALEDI has set up a resource centre where a variety of publications are kept. The Resource Centre is also linked into local and international databases. Monthly reports on acquisitions are sent to the General Secretaries of all affiliates.

## Current Projects

Currently, NALEDI is working in four major areas. These are :

- ❑ A project on trade and industry. The function of this project is to support the Federations's Trade and Industry Working Group. In the longer term, NALEDI will be looking at the future of industry, covering such topics as industrial restructuring.
- ❑ Economic Policy. This project provides support to the macro-economic working group of the NEF, as well as advising on broader economic issues such as fiscal and investment policy, minimum wages etc.
- ❑ Labour Relations, linking into the COSATU team at the NMC.
- ❑ A project on public sector labour relations in co-operation with the public sector unions.

## Demand-Driven:

NALEDI's research programme is demand-driven, with requests being received either via COSATU Head Office or the Head Offices of the affiliates. While policy on this issue is not yet firm, the institute is not in principle opposed to



NALEDI research and resource centre staff

making its expertise available to government or to business.

### **Funding**

NALEDI was initially funded by a grant raised by COSATU from Dutch and Scandinavian funders. The application was for funding for three years, but it appears that funding for the second and

third years is not guaranteed.

It is clear that the Institute will also need to look elsewhere for funding.

Attempts are being made to generate money internally, with users being charged for

NALEDI's services. At the moment, charges to the Unions are open to negotiation, because, as Baskin points out, the Unions themselves face financial constraints. Should business and government use the institute, they will also be expected to pay.

NALEDI recently made application to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC – a quasi state research body) for funding. Baskin says that “the state has a duty to assist the labour movement, as a key player, to enhance its research capacity”.

### **Accountability and Building Capacity**

Where NALEDI undertakes research for an affiliate, it sets up a “reference group” within the affiliate which will be involved in the project. This has the dual function of providing for accountability as well as

---

**“We won't change a report to reflect an official ‘line’ COSATU is free to accept our advice or not”**

---



building capacity for research within the union. These structures would only be set up for longer term projects.

### Relative Autonomy

NALEDI is registered as a “non-profit making” company. While it is “owned” by COSATU, it operates at arm’s length under the guidance of a 15 person Board. All decisions are made by the Board, which has on it people from COSATU and the affiliates, as well as people from the broader research community.

Baskin points out that the function of NALEDI is not simply to “go out and prove COSATU policy...we’re allowed to say what we want to say”. There have

been occasions where a NALEDI researcher has been told to change a report to reflect the official “line”. Baskin says that they will not do this : “They (COSATU and the affiliates) are free to accept our advice or not”.

### Relationship to other research bodies

During the last decade a number of organisations have emerged to service the labour movement. In addition to these “service organisations”, as they are known, there are various progressive individuals and groupings based at universities which link into COSATU.

Baskin says that there is no intention for NALEDI to replace these groupings. Instead, he sees NALEDI serving as an “interface between the labour movement and the wider research community”. NALEDI will commission work from outside groups and individuals where appropriate.

### The Role of Intellectuals

One of the criticisms that has been levelled at the research community is that it has often either neglected the needs of the labour movement, or, when it has engaged, has produced work which is not informed by the needs of the union movement and is inaccessible to the large majority of union members.

Baskin notes that because of NALEDI’s close relationship with COSATU, it does not have to prove its bona fides in the same way as other groupings do, and he does not see these difficulties arising. He notes that “our battle is for our autonomy rather than for our accountability”. ☆



Jeremy Baskin, NALEDI director

# Unions for unions?

## *The case of MSF in Britain*

COLIN ADKIN and BRIAN HARRIS work as union research officers in the London Head Office of MSF, Britain's biggest union for "white collar" workers (or, as MSF puts it, "for skilled and professional people").

But Colin and Brian not only carry out their union duties for the union's 300 000 members, they are also elected Shopstewards for the staff that the union employs, representing them for pay and grievance issues against the union as their employer.

The idea of union staff being unionised is novel in the South African context, with some union leaders in South Africa having gone on record to the effect that unionisation amongst union staff suggests either serious staff disloyalty and lack of commitment, or, worse, is subversive of the goals of trade unionism.

Here, Adkin and Harris explain how the practice works in their own union.



**Collin Adkin**



**Brian Harris**

### **Bargaining units**

MSF has a total staff of about 380 or 390, divided up amongst two head office sites based in London, and two regional offices scattered around Britain.

These employees are divided, for bargaining purposes, into two groups: "staff" (as we call them) numbering about 260 and the "officers" numbering 120 to 130. The "staff" are organised into the white collar section of GMBATU (general, municipal, boilermakers and Allied Trade Union), called Apex (Association of Professional and Executive staff).

GMBATU-Apex is recognised by the union that employs the staff, MSF, and there is a status of full recognition for GMB-Apex, under a Collective bargaining and Procedural Agreement.

The “staff” comprise the clerical and secretarial staff, as well as the more professional employees (legal officers, bookkeepers etc) and Heads of Department. The “officers”, who are *not* covered by the GMB-Apex/MSF agreement, comprise the union officials who negotiate on behalf of the union with management at national and regional level. They are in fact members of the MSF (a situation arising from the fact that most of them started off in the union as MSF workplace members) and their own pay and conditions are determined in negotiations between them and the MSF Executive Committee.

### **The bargaining process**

The GMB-APEX members elect their reps into a committee (called the NJC – National Joint Committee) which meets 5 times with MSF union management annually. The staff side of this committee is an eight-person body made up of four persons from MSF regional sites and four from the two Head Offices. There is also a regional rep at each regional site to handle the day-to-day issues.

For bargaining purposes, the MSF Executive appoints four Executive members to assist the Assistant General secretary in negotiations with the unionised staff on the NJC. This negotiating team is in close contact with the MSF Finance and General Purposes committee who are, obviously, best informed about the union’s finances, the ability to meet staff wage demands, etc.

Although the staff bargains annually just before the officers, there is no relationship between the two units. Last year, for example, the two groups got completely different increases.

The bargaining is serious business. The principle of trade unions is to apply pressure to advance their members interests, and we do this. We have the right to strike

and in practice we are free to use that right. The agreement recognises our common goals however, and we are committed to refrain from striking until all procedures have been exhausted.

### **Disputes**

The dispute procedure is rather cumbersome. In the case of an individual grievance, for example, the immediate manager of the employee aggrieved is approached. Failure to reach satisfaction means the matter goes on to the next superior in line (for example the Head of Department), then on to the AGS, then on to the NJC. If we still cannot get resolution we call in the GMB- Apex full time official who comes to represent the member before the NJC too. It is a faulty procedure because the same people end up talking to each other more than once, but the slowness of the procedure affects both sides equally: our member can’t get his/her complaint fixed quickly but at the same time the union management can’t get quick-fix discipline enforced against our member either.

On matters both of right and interest the next step is to go to ACAS (A UK-government conciliation and Arbitration Service) if both sides agree to that. Otherwise we ballot members and can then go on strike if members choose. There is no formal strike right in Britain, of course, and in practice there have in our union only been two strikes in the past 15 years. The most recent one was in 19eightfour when the union management withdrew the inflation proofing. The strike went on for two weeks, and the union conference had to be postponed. But we lost the strike eventually and had to return to work without winning our demand.

### **Factors affecting bargaining**

Bargaining over salaries often comes down to arguments over what the union’s priorities should be. We always know perfectly well what the state of our employer’s finances are, so “disclosure of



# *MSF & APEX Agreements*

Terms and Conditions of Employment

Procedure Agreement

Sexual Harassment and Equal Opportunities

Safety Policy

Introduction of New Technology - Consultation Procedures

Selection and Use of VDUs

Cervical Smear Testing

Work Related Upper Limb Disorders



information” is never an issue. Typically we’d argue, as staff reps, that the unions should be diverting resources spent currently on expensive executive meetings into better staff conditions instead. Typically, such suggestions end up in a sub-committee and never seem to get resolved, while the MSF – Executive’s demands to retrench staff are somehow always given priority!

Our union (MSF), like many in Britain, is in a state of “managed decline”, involving staff cuts, and we have joint committees with union management to ensure this is done fairly. Because of membership losses, subscriptions have been raised steadily (by more than inflation rate) for several years now, and the staff are thus in a position of knowing that they cannot win big wage increases. We tend to argue for increases on the basis of comparability with wages paid in the industry. Obviously the union has to pay competitive rates\*, or it will soon lose staff, and the MSF management recognises this. In general staff conditions are not bad, compared with the business world: Hours of work are 3four hours per week, and overtime is 1 1/two x normal. Senior staff at offices do not get paid for overtime, though – they get time off in lieu. Everyone is covered, under the agreement, by a clause stipulating that they are required to work “as needed”. We are trying currently to work towards a flexi-time arrangement to move away from the traditional 9 – 5, “us-and-them” staff/management relationship.

### **Handling the us-and-them problem**

The “us-and-them” problem *is* a problem. Some of the union Executive Committee members seem to pick up the typical authoritarian attitudes of their own workplace managers and import these attitudes into the way they deal with their own union staff. It gets everyone’s backs up, and it is unnecessary: We are pushing for a much more co-operative ethos with a

better team spirit. A lot of union resources go into the staff employment/management area: The AGS used to spend 50% or more of his time on personnel matters until recently, when the union hired a personnel manager. And about 50% of the union’s funds go on employees’ salaries etc. So there is a general debate going on (see next article. Ed.) about how to get the most out of the enormous allocation of resources. There is not much training going on for example, and we as the staff union reps are pushing that there be much more of it and much more systematically applied. Currently it’s too ad hoc – the occasional word processing drive, for example.

We also participate, as the staff union, in the debates about how the union (i.e our employer, MSF) could better meet its members needs. There’s the beginning of a monitoring system re membership satisfaction with their union. Interestingly enough, a recent independent survey by a university research team discovered that – contrary to conventional wisdom – the members join the union less for material benefits (insurances, discounts etc) and more for the basics of trade unionism: legal protection at work, protection against victimization, unfair retrenchment etc.

In general, there is nothing to justify the “union-staff should not be unionised” argument in Britain. The reputation of unionised union staff speaks for itself – everyone knows strikes hardly ever happen amongst union staff because they are motivated people working for organisations that they support in principle.

Despite this, there are some unions that hold out against union rights for their own staff. USDAW, (Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers) for example. But there is a dispute going on there now, with staff demanding union recognition and bargaining rights. ☆

---

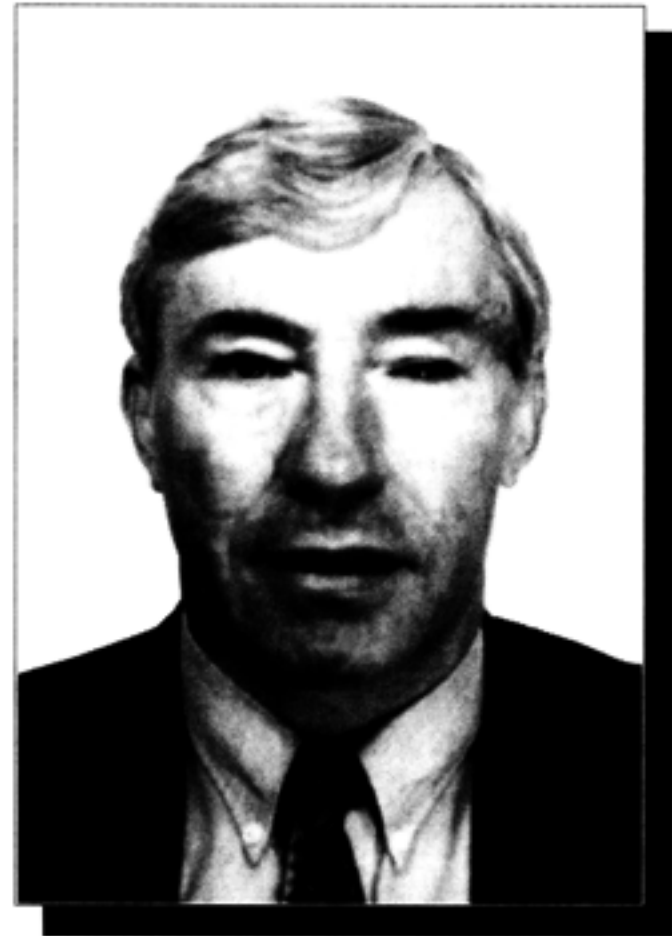
The pay differentials between semi-skilled/skilled and professional rates are very much narrower in Britain than in South Africa:Editor.

# Teambuilding in unions

In the previous article two staffers at the London Head Office of a large British Trade Union (MSF) described how union employees handle conflicts between themselves and their employer, the union: In a nutshell, the traditional trade union approach is followed – the employees negotiate with their employer to resolve the inherent conflict in the employer/employee relationship.

The following article looks at the *same* union, but now examines how the union is seeking to resolve different *kinds* of conflicts: conflicts *not* arising from inherent antagonisms but from the pressures of employees working together in stressful situations.

**JOHN FISHER**, an experienced MSF regional officer, (ie organiser/negotiator) describes an experimental approach recently introduced into the union which is designed to improve working relations amongst the union staff.



## Introduction

Our union, MSF, was formed as the result of a merger a few years ago. When our current general secretary was elected to his present position about 2 years back, he instituted a series of seminars with senior officials in groups of about 8 or 10, and encouraged them to speak freely about their problems in their jobs, and to put forward ideas on how to improve the union. A consistent theme that arose in these discussions was how isolated union officials feel in their work, and how much a feeling of team work was missing. So there was agreement about the need to develop team work in the union, but no clarity on how to do this. I personally was very interested in this challenge because I had a background in the field of counselling, and I felt that some of the techniques used in that field could fruitfully be adapted and applied to the problems of union staff. After talking to a number of colleagues in the union, it was agreed that I should start to develop step by step, by trial and error, a team building exercise amongst union staff



and executives. So far, despite the fact that we have been feeling our way, results have been very encouraging. Union staff involved in the exercise have been very positive about the process.

What we do is we get a group of union officers together – (about 6 up to 8) at a time. You can't have too many or it doesn't work. The group is made out of officers who have, in their normal work, to work together in some way, ie they are **supposed** to be a team in one way or another. The objective of the exercise, then, is to build a closer relationship between the team members.

### Step 1

We sit down and take a suitable topic as focus, for example "the current (internal) situation in the union" and try to listen to each others views. We try to acquire listening skills. It requires concentration and practice. I give everyone equal time to have his/her say – perhaps 10 minutes each. No interruptions are allowed. I tell everyone: "Do not worry what you are going to say, you'll get your turn. Just listen." This stops people jumping in. It is a technique called "Approving attention". You are suppose to try and figure out where the person speaking is "coming from". The principle is that everybody has got a reason for their point of view (even a fascist!). It is surprising how much common ground you can discover if you listen properly in this way. You start to understand *why* people are saying what they are saying. The structure of the exercise means you cannot jump in and stop them as soon as they open their mouths!

### Step 2

After everyone has had their say, I try to get people to make proposals that will improve the situation which group members have given their views about. No criticism is allowed. Proposals have to be positive. If you don't like someone's else's proposal, you may not criticise it, you must make a better one. This approach is essential. As union officials, we spend our lives being "trashed". Management trashes us, we trash

our members, we trash each other, and we end up trashing ourselves. I ask people: "can you remember a time when you were criticised and it did you any good?" Usually the answer is "No!". When criticised, we tend to freeze, then react. There are *ways* of not agreeing which are more constructive: "I liked what you said about X, however, there is another way of looking at Y," etc. It's in many ways a question of style, but it is *important*. I tell officials that they must not go into a box when they get criticised on the job (for example, by the shopstewards). They must turn a situation around. Say to the shopstewards: "Okay, maybe I am not doing great, but can't you see I am doing my best? So don't shout me down. I need your *help*."

### Rules

Of course all of this is quite different from the normal way we go about dealing with our co-workers. For the team groups to work, there has to be a conscious decision to develop trust. It's essential to establish Rules/Procedures to achieve this:

- Listen
- Don't interrupt
- Value each other
- Be open.

Confidentiality is very important. I tell the group: "Nothing goes out of this room." (except with a speaker's permission).

Another rule is "Be positive". I ask people: "What's *good* about your work in the union? (People resist this. They want to say all the bad things first. You've got to stop them and push them.) For example, I say: "Say *anything* good, small or big. Like, you got here today without having a crash." People will always find *something* positive, even if it is a joke (eg "the personnel manager died.") But you've established the correct approach.

After you get around to the problem areas, the rule is to develop a positive response to the problem. I asked: "Okay. That's your problem area. What are you going to *do* about it? Do not tell me what

Continued on page 66

# IRISH REGION ECI WEEKEND SCHOOL

## Teambuilding 16th-17th April, 1994

### SATURDAY:

**11.00am**

#### **Welcome and introduction to weekend**

- ☆ thanks to participants for giving up a weekend, clearly shows a commitment to improving the situation
- ☆ no pre-set agenda: but a number of guiding principles to assist you as a group to work together more effectively
- ☆ we will be working in pairs/small groups as well as all together to ensure as individuals you get think-time and the fullest time to contribute

**11.15 am**

#### **Introductions**

Find a partner that you don't know very well or don't talk to often. Take five minutes each to talk about yourself. After which individually you will be invited to introduce yourself to the rest of the group along the following lines:

- ☆ name
- ☆ where you come from
- ☆ union position/workplace
- ☆ one thing you would like to achieve over the weekend
- ☆ one thing about yourself that no one would know by looking at you

#### **Grounds Rules**

How would you like people to behave over the weekend to ensure your fullest participation? eg, listening, no interruption, valuing each contribution, honesty, no criticism, confidentiality, respect.

#### **ACTIVITY**

In pairs:

- 1) What do you enjoy most about being an ECI member?
- 2) What keeps you participating in the ECI?
- 3) What difficulties do you have?

(Reports taken from each individual, one question at a time. All items identified listed on a flipchart).

**2.00 pm**

**Key issues facing the ECI in order of priority.**

In small group, identify the three most important issues that need to be tackled:

Group as a whole agree to top three issues that need to be tackled:

**3.45 pm**

**In three groups – each group taking one of the issues, identify:**

- 1) the current situation as you see it
- 2) practical proposals to improve the situation
- 3) difficulties you can anticipate in implementing those proposals
- 4) practical proposals to tackle the difficulties

Each group to relay these findings on a flipchart.

**SUNDAY:**

**11.00 am**

**Barriers to effectively working together: tackling divisions.**

Group agreement/discussion

☆ listening with respect

☆ no criticism

☆ asking interesting questions

-a technique to increase your knowledge of another group

**11.15 am**

**Groups of 3**

In 10 minutes identify the key divisions operating in the ECI and put them in order of priority.

**ACTIVITY: DIVISIONS**

- 1) What difficulties do the divisions cause?
- 2) What are your proposals to overcome these difficulties?

**APPRECIATION**

- 1) What did you like best about how you have contributed?
- 2) What did you like best about the way in which -----contributed to the weekend?

**FINALLY**

One thing you would do differently that would help improve the way in which the ECI is working.



Continued from page 63

other people must do. What are *you* going to do?" The principle is to contradict people's stated powerlessness by pushing them to *action*. Regional officials moan: "I can't get anything out of the Head Office when I want it." They must be pushed to act, to *go* to the Head Office, send a memo, have a fight with the AGS. Whatever. If they *felt*, it was important they *would* sort it out.

### Concluding

After people have set out their proposals, they must also think (1) what's going to get in the way of achieving their goal. Then (2) they must specify what *support* (from the other group members) they will need to overcome the obstacles.

Obviously, not all goals are achievable, but at the follow-up meeting, which is arranged for a specified date, we review the goals and how we got on with them. The

essential point is to stop the exercise of that highly developed union officials' skill of "passing the buck".

Variations of these techniques are applicable in all sorts of cases.

For example, where staff relations in an office are bad, you've got to get the group to state what they *like*, about a person. Not what they *don't* like! The follow up is: "What do *you* have to do to improve your relationship with that person?" Too often people complain that the other person doesn't treat them with respect. That's too passive. It puts the blame onto the *other* person. That's not good enough. People have to start taking *personal* responsibility for their work relationships.

Other situations where I'm using these techniques are eg in places where racism or sexism is an issue. Or where shopstewards are complaining about their officials letting them down.

### Skills

Naturally, being a facilitator of group processes like this is an acquired skill. I can't get it right overnight. So I have to be open with the group I am working with. If something is not going well I get the group to discuss the problem, to *help* me in what I'm trying to do. Sometimes when there's deep division in a group. I have to split it, and let the "opposing" factions go off and discuss how to resolve the problem of the conflict and come back with proposals to the reconvened group.

It helps to have more than one facilitator in these group activities.

The facilitator observing can figure out how his/her partner can be helped out of a hole he/she has got into. But most importantly, I've got to trust the *process* I'm involved in. I have to have the confidence to "get it wrong". With careful planning, once you get to know a group, you can pick the group members who will help you, and they can

be brought into the planning process. But it's the facilitator's job to *lead* the process, and to ask for help when that's needed. I say to myself: If it feels like I'm going wrong, it doesn't mean I *am* going wrong! In practice, if I'm just one minute ahead of the group that I'm facilitating, then I reckon I'm doing well. You've got to think on your feet.

The whole operation is to get people to work together better. The following agenda (for our Regional Executive members in our union's Irish Region) gives a good idea of what ground we would try to cover on a weekend school.

The process *works* because it brings problems out in the open but in a manner that is constructive, not destructive. The plan in our union is to carry out this teambuilding exercise broadly in the union, and then assess our progress after about a year and plan our next steps from there. ☆



# Organisational Development: *A Technique for Union Building?*

By GINO GOVENDER\*



\* Gino was until recently with Cosatu's Education Department and is now the Head of the NUM Education Unit. This article is written in his personal capacity.

## Introduction

Writing in the SALB two years ago, Bobbie Marie of NUMSA noted that : " There have been significant changes recently in the context in which unions organise in SA, as well as within union organisation itself. These changes have brought to the fore organisational contradictions which challenge the traditions of militancy and democratic participation." ( Marie, SALB. vol.16 no. 5, 1992 )

No-one has felt the increasing pressure of these challenges more than union staff and in particular, organisers and administrators in our unions.

Other contributions to this issue of the SALB outline the new and complex issues facing the trade union movement in the current period. Union staff are more often than not ill-equipped to deal with these issues. Yet they are called upon to take part in various negotiating fora where they come up against state and employer representatives who have at their disposal resources which tip the debates in their favour. The result is that union officials are experiencing a feeling of disempowerment and this in part is the reason for them leaving the union movement.

One gets a general impression that organisers, who are said to be the engine of our struggle, have become disaffected by the policy development processes and remain on the periphery of these processes. At the Cosatu National and Regional Schools (for middle-rank union officials) we find participants raising problems and concerns about existing policy development processes during debating competitions or in class. Important policy documents, normally not readily available to them, are grabbed and treated like gold. In fact, most learn about substantive policy issues in Cosatu and in their own union for the first time during such schools.

## Building Staff Capacity

Such problems are not insurmountable. What is required is a strategy which enables organisers, administrators and branch

leadership to play an active role in union development. We all talk of building capacity. In the absence of any perfected plan, if effort and resources in training and building the capacity of our people at grassroots level were prioritised, it would contribute to resolving our capacity problems at regional and national levels. The advantage would be that resources and attention are initially devoted to the biggest component of union staff and elected office-bearers who operate at the frontline and who could play a more meaningful role in the total life of the union.

### Untangling the Knot

What is required is an organisation-building and development strategy. "Organisational Development" (OD) has become the new pet subject in the NGO sector and justifiably so. It is an area that we in the labour movement have too easily taken for granted. The bulk of our daily life is spent putting out fires and

in managing one crisis after another. There is a view which says that this will not change because it's the only union life we know. This is the view expressed right from the general secretary to local officials. However, there is another view which says that through having a proper OD plan we can minimise the time we, especially senior leadership, spend on crisis management.

### What is "Organisational Development"?

OD is basically a set of systems, mechanisms and policies that are put in place through a *co-ordinated* effort by all within the organisation to promote and ensure efficient and cost effective methods of achieving stated goals as set out in our constitutions.

It is probably easiest to understand OD by looking at how it came to exist in the first place:

From the late 1970s and early 1980s, most particularly in the United States, OD



COSATU summer school: In-house education is vital but it must form part of an overall development process





Worker college: Student groups from various unions. External Education units can assist internal education efforts

emerged as a new technique for helping troubled companies to handle problems that they were finding impossible to solve through traditional management mechanisms.

Traditionally, the manager of a troubled company would sit down, assess his or her company, and decide on a course of action to set the company right. Bigger companies would make such decisions after holding meetings with a team of senior managers. But the realisation grew that this method failed as often as it succeeded. And if you have tried it a few times and failed each time, what must you do? Must you give up and declare insolvency?

Companies began calling in outside consultants to help them.

The outsiders were not familiar with the *business* as such (i.e. they were not experts on textile production, or in building bridges). What the outsiders brought to bear

on the problem was

1. An *outside* view (more "objective")
2. They looked at the *whole* picture: the people, their aims, the structures for achieving such aims, etc.
3. They focussed on how the different people inter-related, and how the people inter-related with the other parts of the system. Sometimes the outsiders would have to do no more than break a logjam. They would interview various managers and "reflect back" to them what other managers had said to them - things they would never normally say to each other. After this, the company was able to "fix itself".

At another extreme, the outsiders would have to come in and force certain necessary decisions through: i.e. *tell* the management to do X, Y, or Z - something they had put off doing for all sorts of reasons.

Out of the exercise of these practical outside interventions a "school" of OD

theory developed. There were various approaches but what all had in common was the focus of getting organisations to come out of crisis situations and enter into necessary change processes by means of an integrated plan covering all the components of the organisation, by making sure they all worked together in the *same* direction.

At one level this all sounds simple and obvious, and it is.

But the failure to “put it all together” is behind most organisational failure. As we all know, we tend to hide from our crises, pretend that we are fine. And “the boss” in any organisation is no different. He or she can see any criticism of the organisation, or any mention of failure, as a personal attack on him or her. Many organisations have had to collapse because “the boss” will not admit there’s a problem.

**How would OD apply to the labour movement?**

It is not a new concept for our organisations. We have always spoken about the need to “build and strengthen our structures” in different contexts. Countless workshops and meetings have been held where recommendations have been made to achieve this. In fact, when embarking on a campaign, we have as one of our main objectives, the need to use that particular campaign to build and strengthen our organisation.

The issue is whether there is the commitment, a supportive environment and the necessary resources to implement them

and follow-up action to consolidate gains made.

OD is not a bourgeois management strategy but a neutral and necessary tool for strong and vibrant democratic organisations.

**The changing nature of the organisation**

A number of articles in previous issues of the SALB have covered the changing role and nature of the labour movement.

Unions have restructured themselves into departments, hired specialist staff and the emphasis today is on skills, unlike years ago when one’s political ideology was the main and sometimes the only consideration when taking on new staff. Union structure has become somewhat complicated. The components are typically divided into:

- The Secretariat
- Administration
- Legal
- Media and Communication
- Organising
- Education
- Gender
- Research
- Regions, Branches and Locals

In a session in Cosatu’s Organisation Skills Course the union is compared to a company. Whilst there are stark differences between the union and the company, there are also interesting similarities.

Participants are asked to compare the structure of a public company to the union and the similarities go like this:

<b>COMPANY</b>	<b>UNION</b>
<b>Shareholders/Stakeholders</b>	<b>Members</b>
<b>Shareholders Meetings</b>	<b>National Congresses</b>
<b>Board of Directors</b>	<b>Executive Committees</b>
<b>Managing Director</b>	<b>General Secretary</b>
<b>Board Chairperson</b>	<b>National President</b>
<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Organisers, Administrators etc.</b>
<b>Product</b>	<b>Protection, Bargaining, Education</b>

And the comparisons go on. Union Organisers are seen as sales representatives, National Organisers are compared to Operations Managers, depot and regional sales offices are compared to our own regional, branch and local offices.

Of course, the purpose and aims of the two organisations are founded on the interests of the two opposing classes they represent but we must never be afraid or shy to look for new and better methods of organisation building.

It is primarily the task of senior leadership and education officers to identify new strategies and proven ones in other organisations that could be adapted for our purposes so that we could develop our own internal efficiency and effectiveness.

There certainly are a number of existing practices that we are regularly exposed to in our contact with others e.g. organising efficient meetings from advance notice, good time keeping, dealing with matters arising, running of the meetings and sending out minutes soon thereafter, and following up on decisions.

This does not mean that by copying or adopting a more professional approach the ideological flavour of the labour movement must change. Rather that, if we rid ourselves of these inefficiencies, we will be able to operate properly and provide better services to staff and members.

We have to remember that the words “effective and efficient” are ideologically

neutral until the different classes give their own meaning to them through different practices.

In most organisations there are three main components: people, aims and structures. In the union context it looks like the table below.

The success of an organisational development strategy, in simple terms, is to ensure that our people and structures are harnessed, prepared and supported in our attempts to achieve whatever our “people” aims are at any one given time. The OD “trick” is to link all the pieces/parts/ components together into an *integrated* set of actions.

**Whose responsibility is it for the development and maintenance of a good OD plan ?**

There should be no doubt that elected senior officials (workers and full-time) must carry the responsibility of ensuring such systems, mechanisms and policies are in place. The survival of unions depends on a pro - active leadership strategy. The appointment of other specialist and technical staff arose out of the need to delegate certain areas of work (education, research, media etc.) to others. Primary accountability to constitutional structures rests with elected officials and this must be supported by non – elected officials.

**What is to be done ?**

The first essential step is accepting that there is a problem. Then we have to take a quantum leap to enable us to solve the

PEOPLE	AIMS	STRUCTURES
Members	As agreed at our congresses/meetings	Constitutional meetings
Leadership	as set out in our constitutions, to	Sub-committees
Staff	provide a good service to members and	Staff meetings
Employers	working class	Bargaining structures
Unorganised workers		



problem.

Senior leadership must be bold enough to accept that our organisations need to undergo radical transformation in seeing us through the 21st century. An open and honest leadership approach must be adopted. Leadership must be seen to be leading and giving direction. Systems or a lack thereof must come under close scrutiny. This process must be as open and inclusive as possible, in order that the rank and file participate in identifying loopholes and weaknesses in our operations. The outcomes of such processes must be accepted, for inclusivity is futile if people taking part in the process believe that changes can be vetoed from the top.

### **Re – orienting the Organisation**

It is clear that our organising role and responsibilities as well as the people responsible for these processes must become central in our unions. Our organising function has to become the centre of our organisations. The entire union and its resources must be re-oriented towards strengthening our organising capacity.

Our education programmes, administration systems, budgets, executive meetings, research etc must be geared and redirected towards providing support and back-up to our organising programme. For example, we must not train for the sake of training but make sure that such training is clearly linked to a development strategy.

The various functions and departments must be balanced in a strategic and considered way so as to support the overall mission of the union.

For our unions to become more effective we need to focus on the following components that will form part of an OD

---

**“Inclusivity is futile if people believe that changes can be vetoed from the top”**

---

plan :

### **Building Internal Capacity**

Unions need to set up proper systems of staff recruitment. Detailed job descriptions need to be drawn up for all staff members. Staff conditions of service, including disciplinary and grievance procedures, must be written down and made accessible to all officials.

It is also essential that “management” systems are set in place and that efficient office systems, with reliable administrative back-up, are established. Efficient management will involve effective communication systems, include external, internal, verbal, print and electronic communication.

Meetings, both constitutional and otherwise, are an integral part of ensuring democratic participation. Systems of planning and running meetings must be established to ensure that such meetings achieve the purpose for which they are held.

A union based (“in-house”) training programme that supports, upgrades and updates staff on a regular basis will provide back-up to these systems. Unions also need to develop a proper human resource development strategy which produces competent and trained cadres in order to sustain efficient organisation.

### **Building External Capacity**

Unions need to project a positive public image, to members and the broader society. It is essential that unions be seen to be providing a service that members feel happy to pay for. To do this, unions must provide effective representation and advance the interests of our constituency in various negotiating structures. Our positions must be advanced in external forums at national regional and local level. We must contribute to Cosatu’s programmes, meetings and campaigns and ensure that we remain a powerful movement and play a serious role in the implementation of the RDP. ☆

REGIONAL FOCUS:

# Trade union strategies in an integrated Southern Africa:

*From policy declarations to organisational strategies ... and political and economic policies?*

With a democratic South Africa now part of the Southern African Development Community, and South African business poised to move into a dominating role in the African sub-continent, trade unions in Southern Africa are faced with the simultaneous challenges of working out effective strategies towards government, business – and each other – in an integrated Southern African economy. DOT KEET<sup>2</sup> reports.



**T**he ANC/national unity government's involving of South Africa in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), may be largely a formal political gesture, while its main concern is getting on with the 'more pressing' tasks of national reconciliation and reconstruction within South Africa. In this situation, the potential for the SADC countries to negotiate optimal mutual development co-operation and integration may well be postponed ... or weakened.

However, the process of *de facto* Southern African economic 'integration' already under way will proceed apace through the extension of the existing imbalanced trade relations, overwhelmingly in South Africa's favour, and an increasing involvement by South African business throughout Southern Africa. Such *laissez*

\* Dot Keet, formally writer/researcher on SA Labour Bulletin, and researcher for the COSATU/ANC sponsored Macro Economic Group (MERG), is now senior research Fellow at the centre for Southern African studies at the University of the Western Cape

*faire* processes will revive and perpetuate South Africa's economic domination of the whole subcontinental region, reinforce the grossly uneven development between South Africa and the other countries of Southern Africa, and could also carry negative effects and divisive implications for labour.

South African trade unionists say they are not opposed *per se* to South African business operating in other countries in the Southern African region but, as FAWU Assistant General Secretary Ernest Buthelezi says, "it should not be at the expense of workers on either side". On the South African side, this means that the trade union rights, wages and conditions that have been achieved so far, as well as jobs, should not be threatened by the regional operations of South African business. This is particularly marked when relocation from South Africa to neighbouring countries is undertaken expressly because, as South African managers often tell their workers, "we will not be hampered by troublesome unionists like you". On the 'other side', in Southern Africa, it means that business should not be able to take advantage of the wide differences in (or absence of) trade union and worker rights, and sharp disparities in wage levels and employment conditions to engage in "social dumping" – moving around the region exploiting such inequalities and inequities, in the name of "the operation of market forces", for business profit.

It was within such perspectives that the "Social Charter on the Fundamental Rights of Workers in Southern Africa" was drawn up in 1990-91 by the two major South African trade union federations, COSATU and NACTU, and the ten national trade union organisations united in the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Committee (SATUCC). This workers charter demands

- ❑ firm guarantees on the rights of workers and the "upward harmonisation" of conditions of employment throughout the region;
- ❑ full and unfettered trade union rights and

far-reaching broader social, economic and political roles for trade unions;

- ❑ obligations on business, especially on information disclosure, in both national and regional operations; and
- ❑ elements of regional tripartism between organised labour, business and governments, mainly through the Southern Africa Labour Commission (SALC).

At the same time, repeated references are made to the rights of workers to organise, associate and form trade unions "independent from the state and employers", and for trade unions to conduct their work "without state interference". This is in clear reference to the difficult experiences of trade unionists in recent years throughout Southern Africa with the highly interventionist role of governments in labour and trade union affairs. Yet, the SATUCC workers charter also concludes that "the onus" for the implementation of the charter's objectives "must lie with national governments and existing regional structures as they carry responsibility for adopting social legislation, preventing social dumping and promote equitable growth."

### **The role of national governments**

As with their formal endorsement of many OAU declarations and resolutions, most of the SADC governments have done little to translate the SATUCC charter's terms into enforceable national laws and regulations. In fact, many governments in the region are looking towards a *deregulation* of labour relations under IMF (or 'home grown') structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). This is most clearly evident in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia, but also in Botswana, without a formal SAP, and has even been posed in South Africa in recent years under 'creeping' structural adjustment measures.

Such deregulation is being promoted as part of broader drives towards the liberalisation of the economies of Southern Africa, including the creation of free trade



or export processing zones (EPZs) with 'favourable' labour conditions. It is such government inducements to foreign investment, and reluctance to pass legislation protecting labour, that lie behind the SATUCC charter's reference to "unscrupulous governments" as well as employers exploiting lower labour standards and rights.

These trends have been encouraged by South African business and the South African government which have – for political as well as economic reasons – been moving rapidly, especially since 1990, through new openings into the neighbouring countries and further afield into Africa. For their part, too, Southern African governments, driven by pressing economic, social and political needs have been energetically seeking trade and investment deals with South African government and business. These include offers of joint ventures with both their private sectors and state enterprises in mining, manufacturing, agriculture, commerce and tourism. Such bilateral deals between South African enterprises and the burgeoning private and parastatal entrepreneurs in Southern Africa – with close links into their respective political, bureaucratic and managerial elites – could create powerful vested interests in a very different kind of 'regional co-operation' than labour needs in Southern Africa.

Organised labour is clearly aiming for a regulatory labour law regime across Southern Africa that will remove the inequalities in worker and trade union rights and reduce the disparities in conditions of employment – even if it is not yet feasible to reduce the huge wage disparities. Such regulations will eliminate at least part of the basis for divisive and exploitative business operations between South Africa and the rest of the region.

However, on the record of most governments in the region there are few indications of a willingness to pass legislation to empower trade unions nationally and regionally, and even less so

in the far-reaching ways proposed in the SATUCC charter. Thus the trade unions' commitment at the end of the charter to "struggle side by side" for its full implementation will probably prove to be necessary. The question is whether existing trade union organisations have the will and capacity for such joint struggles for a harmonised and just labour regime across Southern Africa.

### **Regional and national trade union organisation**

So far, SATUCC has hardly been an effective "vehicle for strengthening the union movement in the subcontinent" as anticipated at COSATU's Fourth Congress in 1991. According to Zimbabwean trade union leader Morgan Tsvangirai, SATUCC has merely been a centralised bureaucratic structure of top trade union officials meeting periodically for formal exchanges and official agreements that few have any intention or means to implement. As such it has been uncomfortably similar to the SADC government structures with which it has been too closely identified and upon which it has been too much focused, as SACCAWU general secretary Papi Kganare observed. However, as Muzi Buthelezi acting General Secretary of the South African Chemical Workers Industrial Union says, SATUCC's top-down approach, lack of independent dynamism and active leadership is also largely a reflection of the weaknesses in the national trade union organisations of which it is composed.

The national trade union centres in Southern Africa reflect – and are themselves also partly responsible for – similar weaknesses in most of their member unions. Trade unions are seldom firmly work-place based, lack active membership participation and do little to service their members. They are weak in organisational and financial skills, and financial and other

---

**"Regional unions are seldom firmly work-place based"**

---

resources.

The 'trade union unity' achieved in the past by legislation creating single national trade union centres is now being eroded by the combined effects of labour deregulation, the newly introduced political pluralism and freedom of association. Disunity is also being deliberately encouraged by some government labour departments, and aggravated by the power plays of self-serving trade union bureaucrats. In Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Mozambique the official trade union centres are faced with the disaffiliation of some unions – and the creation of new unaffiliated unions.

As trade unions in Southern Africa struggle to come to terms with their changing legal status, their traditional role is also being challenged by structural adjustment programmes. SAPs are hitting trade unions in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe through growing unemployment. Furthermore, the socio-economic impact of SAPs upon working people is also demanding of trade unions all over the region an unaccustomed broader social role, with other mass organisations, for which they are ill-prepared.

The unions in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, and in Mozambique and Angola especially; but also in Malawi, Lesotho and Swaziland for different reasons are emerging from subordinate relationships to their ruling parties in the past. They are having to learn almost from scratch the very basics of independent collective bargaining unionism – as well as the demands of campaigning 'social movement' unionism in situations of serious economic crises.

These problems are leading to the emergence of new multi-faceted organisational strategies amongst trade unions in the subcontinent going beyond the broad policy approach of the SATUCC workers charter.

### **'New trade union organisational strategies**

Following decisions on regional trade

union relations at their 1991 congress, more active interactions by COSATU and its affiliates

with trade unions in Southern Africa have rapidly taken the COSATU unions beyond their over-optimistic earlier expectations of SATUCC. By the end of 1992, proposals at a COSATU workshop on international relations noted that SATUCC, as it has functioned hitherto, "cannot play its important role" and recommended that "all SATUCC structures should be completely overhauled".

### **Developing SATUCC**

This was the message, too, of SATUCC's new acting general secretary, Zimbabwe's Morgan Tsvangirai, when he opened a SATUCC "leadership planning forum" in Johannesburg in November 1992. The three day forum agreed on proposals to strengthen SATUCC itself and develop its role, starting with a campaign to popularise the workers charter with trade unionists throughout Southern Africa. This was to be accompanied by investigations by national labour centres on progress by their governments in legislating the terms of the charter. They reported on the findings to the meeting of the tripartite Southern African Labour Commission (SALC) in the first quarter of 1994 and agreed to expose resistant governments through regional and international information and other campaigns.

The November 1993 SATUCC leaders meeting also agreed on a plan of action to set up regional industrial committees, undertake a priority data collection and research programme and assist national centres with their organisational needs and their democratic development. There will also be educational programmes, drawing on the resources and experiences of other trade unions within Southern Africa and beyond.

---

**"... power plays of self-serving trade union bureaucrats..."**

---



### **Democratising national federations**

However, the restructuring of SATUCC to play an effective role in developing a strong trade union movement in Southern Africa depends, itself, upon the development of the bureaucratic trade union 'centres' into independent and democratic national trade union organisations in each of the countries of the region.

The lack of trade union dynamism and unity, and the active disaffection of some unions, has undoubtedly partly been the result of the lack of democratic accountability and responsiveness to their members' needs by the established national trade union centres. However, making national trade union leaderships more active and responsive will depend upon the development of the industrial/sectoral unions on the ground into more active components (or creators) of democratised national federations.

### **Strengthening sister unions**

It was within a growing awareness of such problems that a COSATU seminar on international relations in October 1992 reinforced the 1991 Fourth Congress recommendation that COSATU itself should strengthen its relations with Southern African (and African) national labour centres. It also urged that "all [COSATU] affiliates should twin with their sister unions" organising in the same sectors in order to share experiences, exchange information, combine in training workshops and other programmes and plan joint research projects and so on.

Another COSATU congress resolution in 1991 declared that regional solidarity "should not be based only on relations between unions and national centres. We need to encourage worker-to-worker contact aimed at promoting unity in action".

Furthermore, "decentralised, horizontal, flexible and informal" worker-to-worker relations – for example through study tours by trade unionists from the rest of Africa to South Africa – will be useful to introduce them to COSATU's model of socially

engaged democratic unionism.

The most effective and cost-effective forms of interaction, co-operation and mutual strengthening of the diverse Southern African trade unions is on the common terrain of their day to day engagement: the sectors in which they organise and the companies with which they deal. Thus such bilateral relations between unions organising in the same sectors in Southern Africa are being extended through multi-lateral exchanges into regional industrial co-operation. Furthermore, with the 'regionalisation' of business, industry-based regional co-operation is an appropriate organisational response by Southern African trade unions.

### **Creating regional industrial federations**

The Southern African Mineworkers Federation (SAMF) is the longest established and most effective of such regional industrial co-operation amongst sister unions – which, in part, reflects that they organise within the most highly developed and integrated economic sector in Southern Africa. Organising not only in the same sector but even largely in the same few companies, the miners unions in Southern Africa can, through their regional federation, more effectively share research and information – especially on South African MNCs; co-operate in education and training – particularly of union organisers and shaft stewards; and exchange experiences in improving conditions of work – especially in health and safety.

There is also a new strategic approach emerging to organise regional/company shaft steward councils and to co-ordinate collective bargaining within the same companies across the region – as with the powerful De Beers company. Such joint union negotiation strategising would mirror the mutual consultation and strategic planning of the subsidiaries of the same company operating in the various countries of Southern Africa. Furthermore,





Zimbabwe 1992: Police called in to crush the Railway workers strike,

*“... the highly interventionist role of the government in labour and trade union affairs”*

as NUM former assistant general secretary Marcel Golding pointed out at the time, joint bargaining can embrace not only standardisation of recognition agreements and harmonisation of employment conditions but even take up the issue of common (or, at least, converging) wage rates.

The COSATU international relations seminar towards the end of 1992 recommended SAMF as a model for other unions to follow in the region. Southern African construction workers unions have had a Southern African Federation of Building Workers since 1985, but seriously limited resources keep them largely dependent on regional meetings of their International Trade Secretariat, the IFBWW, for their face-to-face exchanges and co-operation. Metal workers and commercial workers unions are developing regional industrial co-operation using the regional structures of their respective ITSs, the International Metalworkers Federation and Afro-FIET. COSATU recommends

that “industrial unions affiliated to the same ITS should work closely” with and within them for “access to sister unions in the region with a view to establishing sectoral unity.” Some COSATU affiliates, such as FAWU and PPWAWU have attempted to take independent initiatives to build up contacts between union counterparts in Southern Africa with a view to establishing regional organisations across their respective industrial sectors. (see box page 82)

### **Convergent needs and divergent interests**

Such organisational endeavours carry significant potential for the regional co-operation and the strengthening of the Southern African trade union movement appropriate to the emerging regional economy in which they find themselves. However, active trade union co-operation in Southern Africa will have to be created within the crisscrossing lines of both convergent needs and divergent interests

amongst union leaders and amongst workers in Southern Africa.

There is enormous unevenness in organisational power and effectiveness amongst the various trade unions in Southern Africa and above all between the COSATU unions and almost all the others. Furthermore, the other unions will be looking to COSATU as an important source of strength – as many have in the past – at a time when the resources of all the COSATU unions are already seriously over-stretched by the demands of their involvements within South Africa.

At the same time, COSATU is so much stronger than any of the other union organisations in Southern Africa that its regional strategy has had to be consciously framed to avoid dominating the whole process. However, not all COSATU affiliates have acted with the necessary tactical sensitivity – as in the unilateral decision by SACTWU to transform itself into the *Southern African Textile Workers Union*, or the reported recruitment of members by SACCAWU in neighbouring countries.

Workers in Southern Africa may ignore national boundaries in their search for work and in their choice of unions to protect their rights, but union leaders in neighbouring countries are sensitive about encroachments on 'their' spheres by South African unions. To some extent it is correct to argue that regional trade union co-operation and regional industrial federations cannot be a substitute for national trade union organisation. The great majority of workers will continue to be employed by their governments, or by national parastatals or private companies whose operations are not regional in scope. Millions of workers are not yet unionised at all. National unions do have a role to play in differing national terrains, and vis-a-vis national governments and they must be strengthened for that role by regional trade union co-operation.

However defence by union leaders of national turf can also be a mere

opportunistic defence of political power bases ... and their own livelihoods. Furthermore, incumbent trade union leaders may also come to feel threatened by the effects of a new more active and democratic unionism that will develop with the kind of worker-to-worker and direct union to union relations being developed in the region. Further recourse to 'non-interference in national affairs' may well be utilised to fend off pressures on bureaucratic power and privilege.

Such political opportunism is particularly dangerous because, simultaneously with common worker interests, there *are* different – and potentially divisive – effects of the operations of South African and international capital across the region. What will be job losses in some sectors in South Africa will be welcomed as job gains for workers and deprived communities in neighbouring countries.

There are similarly divergent effects of a regionalised economy upon labour within South Africa. While some plants especially in labour-intensive manufacturing sectors will be relocated from South Africa to exploit neighbouring workers; the extension of the operations of other enterprises, such as mining, construction and engineering, commerce and transport, could actually be of indirect (if marginal) benefit to their employees back in South Africa.

However, what labour everywhere face in common – in an integrated Southern African economy, as in an integrated global economy – is the capacity of capital to move rapidly from area to area. Critical choices face all the trade unions in Southern Africa as to whether they are going to follow traditional trade union strategies of co-operation, mutual support and solidarity to present a united face and push standards up for all their respective members in the longer run; or to go along with the logic of 'the market' – with national competition for South African or international investment creating



downward pressures on wages throughout the region.

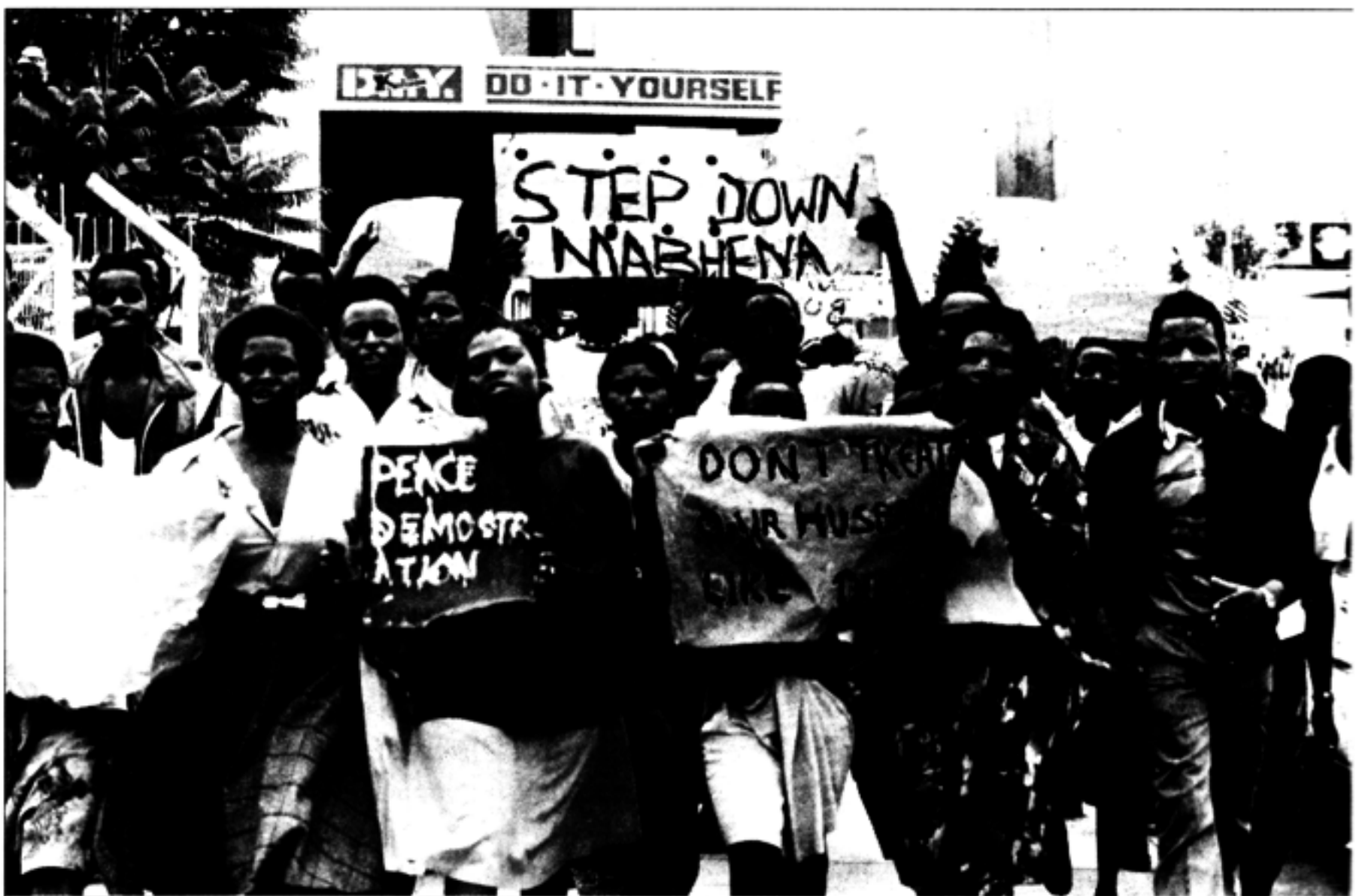
Southern African metalworkers at a regional seminar in April 1992 agreed that where companies claim that their movement from one country to another creates jobs, unions "should co-operate to prevent companies playing off workers in different countries against one another". Where "jobs are lost in one country to create jobs in another", the unionists stressed that the respective trade unions should still "discuss openly ways to protect all workers". One suggestion was that the national federations in all the countries of Southern Africa should strive for foreign investment codes that incorporate minimum conditions of employment, which all companies would have to respect throughout Southern Africa.

### **Worker co-operation or national competition**

It is by no means certain that the separate national governments in Southern Africa

have the will, or capacity to create such co-ordinated investment codes. Nor is it certain that it will be such far-sighted co-operation that all current union leaderships will opt for. As CAWU general secretary Mathew Olifant put it, there are many union leaders in Southern Africa who are "more linked to their governments than they are to other unions in the region".

What is more, some trade unionists, and others, in South Africa itself may make similar narrow nationalist choices within 'national reconstruction programmes' - short-sightedly believing that it is possible for South Africa to resolve its own internal problems ignoring the related and even worse problems in neighbouring countries which will inevitably overflow into South Africa - especially in the shape of economic refugees. Faced with the crisis of unemployment in South Africa, a democratic government may adopt a much less open position on migrant labour and on work seekers' rights of immigration into South



Zimbabwe '92: Arrested Railway workers' wives march to demand their release

---

*"Incumbant trade union leaders in the region may also come to feel threatened by a more active and democratic unionism"*

---



Africa than what is envisaged in the SATUCC charter's call for "freedom of movement, residence and employment throughout the region".

The SATUCC charter recognises the moral right of workers throughout Southern Africa to benefit from a regional economy dominated by the South African economy which their migrant labour from/throughout Southern Africa helped to create. The more far-sighted union leaders are also aware of the strategic importance of combatting different rights and divisive solutions amongst workers and of building common worker identities and alliances with firm programmatic and organisational bases.

The SATUCC workers' charter includes a prohibition on any discrimination in employment, including on the grounds of nationality. It also demands the extension of the same trade union rights and employment conditions to all migrant as national workers. This includes the rights of migrant workers to join trade unions whatever their countries of employment; to receive housing allowances and the right to have their families with them at their places/countries of employment; and to maintain accumulated benefits when they return to their countries of origin.

However, whatever is done to improve migrant labour as a formal contract labour system, and whatever related legislation is passed, the migration – legal or illegal – of workers in search of jobs will continue to grow as long as there are huge economic differences between South Africa and the other countries of the region. Conscious of the dangers of competition and conflict between 'national' and 'foreign' workers, under conditions of vast unemployment and poverty, trade unionists such as CWIU's Muzi Buthelezi, stress that the most fundamental solution lies in more balanced regional economic development and employment opportunities being created in all the countries of Southern Africa. As NUMSA education officer Tony Ruiters put it, "we need a job creation

strategy not only in South Africa but for the whole region." These are important indications of a broadening economic response within the trade unions in South Africa to the challenges posed to labour by the regionalised economy that will – either by design or *de facto* – emerge in Southern Africa.

### **Political – and economical – strategies**

The trade unions in Southern Africa seem to be developing multi-sided – organisational and political strategies.

1. The first aspect has been to work out a common trade union position on fundamental trade union and workers rights across the region and to get this confirmed in law. This will require joint trade union campaigning and even pressure to ensure that governments' formal political commitment to the SATUCC workers charter is actually acted upon.
2. However, governments in Southern Africa are part of the problem as well as necessary to the solution. One response adopted by trade unions is to *change* their governments – as the Zambian unions attempted in putting the MMD into power. But even to play a role in changing government *policies*, trade unions need to be stronger and more independent and this is what regional co-operation seems to be designed to achieve.
3. At the same time, trade union regional strategies are not focused only on winning governments to their side for the regulation of labour and business relations in Southern Africa. The unions seem to be 'hedging their bets' by moving towards improving conditions and wages directly through bilateral or multilateral, and regional as well as national collective bargaining with their common employers.
4. This carries similar advantages to national collective bargaining. However, to have fullest effects in

combatting 'social dumping' on a regional scale, the gains achieved will have to be extended to entire regional industrial sectors, and beyond unionised workers to the broader working populations of these countries. These are the same questions arising from national collective bargaining – 'writ large' on a regional scale. This too points to the need for labour to achieve a democratically controlling regulatory role vis a vis governments on the regional plane as on the national stage.

However, on the regional plane, as on the national, trade unions are going to have to take a more active and informed role in the development of appropriate regional economic strategies. Organised labour has a powerful interest in ensuring that regional co-operation does not remain at the formal/rhetorical political level – either in SATUCC or in the governmental structures of SADC. If it does, a regionalised economy will continue to be created by, and in the interests of, business – with the co-operation of weak and accommodating, separate and competing national governments – to the detriment of workers throughout the region.

The SATUCC workers charter calls for the right of trade unions to "participate in the social, economic and political decision-making process at all levels" in Southern Africa. The major challenge to them lies in assuming a more active role in making Southern Africa more than just a routine item tacked on at the end of policy declarations. Organised labour has to recognise and make Southern African co-operation a live issue, democratise the debates and make its own effective inputs towards negotiated Southern African economic co-operation and integration for combined, balanced and mutually beneficial development. ☆

## **Southern and Northern relations**

Another set of challenges for Southern African – and Northern – trade unions relates to the existing central role of ITSs in organising, and largely setting the agendas of industry-based meetings in Southern Africa. Resource-strapped African unions need to be able to benefit from the experience, skills and solidarity of their Northern counterparts, and to use such meetings to consolidate their own essential South-South relations. COSATU recommends that "industrial unions affiliated to the same ITS should work closely together". Similarly, "proper working relations" should be developed between SATUCC and ITS structures in Southern/Africa, as well as the ICFTU's Southern African Co-ordinating Committee and the AFL-CIO's African-American Labour Centre.

There is, however, a conviction amongst unionists in Southern Africa that some ITS regional structures, and the ICFTU's Southern African Co-ordinating Committee, see themselves as being the sufficient organisational base for Southern African trade union co-operation. In such a situation, the agenda of Southern African regional co-operation could remain confined to the more narrowly focused traditional collective bargaining unionism of most of the Northern ITS members. Such skills are a necessary but insufficient basis for trade unions to play their necessary roles in the particular situations of southern Africa. Agendas set and controlled by the ITSs could constrict innovative trade union developments appropriate to the situation in Southern Africa – and the South in general.



MOZAMBIQUE:

# The establishment of O.T.M. and recent industrial trends

By ALFRED MAFULEKA\*

**T**he Mozambican Workers Organisation (OTM) was an umbrella trade union established by Frelimo as part of the "organs of the masses". The union was officially launched in 1983. Its mandate was "to organise all Mozambican workers in production, services and public sectors, improve conditions for higher production, more active participation in planning and control and a better environment at work". OTM acknowledged that it was established by Frelimo "at a time when there existed a project to construct a socialist society under the leadership of the Party". For the next six years OTM had to exist under the leadership and shadow of the party.

The Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) came in 1989, and the austerity measures adopted ate into the workers' meagre wages. The union movement remained almost dormant throughout. The decline in workers' standard of living and other social ills brought about by the World Bank measures found expression in a wave of wildcat strikes in January 1990.

At the time of OTM's foundation in 1983, 14 National Industrial unions were denominated (see block on page 89). However these demarcations indicated a general intention rather than any expression of organisational reality on the ground.

The National Workers Union of the Commerce, Bank and Insurance Industry, has since split into two independent unions: (a) National Union of Banks (SNEB), and

(b) National Union of Commerce, Insurance and Services (SINECOSSE)

SINTEVEC has broken down into four divisional unions, still affiliated to OTM, they are: Leather, Clothing, Textile and Shoe manufacturing unions.

The changes taking place in the country as a whole after the introduction of the new constitution in 1990, prompted a "new realism" in OTM. At its 2nd National Congress in 1990, the federation took the following far-reaching decisions:

- ❑ "to become an independent organisation from the state, political parties, employers and all associations of a non-trade union nature.
- ❑ to transform itself into a Trade Union National Centre which embodied the national trade unions.
- ❑ to create new structures and programmes geared to defending workers interests whose living standards have been eroded by the structural economic adjustment".

The advent of political pluralism and the easing of the military situation in the country has provided further problems and challenges to the trade union movement. The union mentions the "pluralism of ideas" which developed within the trade union movement which led to administrative and relationship problems. That ended up with a breakaway of the three unions, SINTICIM, SINTIHOTS and SINTRAT from OTM.

Under the new trade union legislation, affiliated and non-affiliated unions have to register. This entitles a registered union to a status of judicial persona, financial, administrative autonomy.

\* Alfred Mafuleka is a Researcher at the Trade Union Research Project at the University of Natal - Durban





1990: Striking Maputo workers listen as their employer explains wage scales

***“The SAP led to a wave of wildcat strikes – 1990”***

To consolidate its new-found profile, the OTM Executive Committee undertook the following measures:

- ❑ The suspension of some clauses in the OTM-CS statutes which contradicted the present circumstances.
- ❑ Decentralising the system of collecting and management of membership subscriptions.

Constructive dialogue and communications have developed between OTM and its affiliates. The convening of the Third Session of the Trade Union Central Council to analyse the circumstances and challenges facing the union movement enjoyed the full agreement and participation of all the trade unions.

OTM council policy states that it defends “trade union unity” and independence, so that unions can be strong and better able to protect workers’ interests effectively.

OTM claims that it realises the challenges posed by the *market economy* conditions and the need to readjust its

strategies. However it is aware of its inexperience in this regard. It also plans to launch a National Public Workers Union in Mozambique.

OTM operates under the terms of the 1990 Mozambican Constitution which contains provisions affecting workers directly.

Under the section on “Economic and Social Rights and Duties”, the following articles guarantee workers’ rights thus:

***Article 88***

- (3) Forced labour shall be forbidden, with the exception of work performance in the context of penal law.

***Article 90***

- (1) All employees shall have the freedom to organise professional associations or trade unions
- (20) The law shall limit the right to strike in essential services and activities, in the interest of the overriding needs of the society.
- (30) Lockouts shall be prohibited. ☆

# Interview with OTM central leadership

ALFRED MAFULEKA from TURP interviews\* the General Secretary of OTM, together with other senior leaders.

**Q** *uestion: Can you briefly give the history and background of trade unions in Mozambique?*

**A** *nswer:* We can say that the history of the trade union movement in Mozambique is divided into two periods: the first belongs to the colonial period and the second period is that after independence.

The first period is characterised by the Trade Union Corporations, organised according to the professions (each profession or craft corresponded to one union). Because of that, in the same factory there were different trade unions. This type of trade union organisation was encouraged by the colonial government and the leaders were appointed by it. It is important to mention that because of their nature, these trade unions attended only to the government interests and did not realise any effective trade union action.

- The second era, after independence is characterised by the emergence of trade unions based on industry demarcation and preoccupied in defending workers' interests.

**Q:** *When were the first unions formed in Mozambique?*

**A:** According to available documentation, the first Trade Union Corporation emerged in Mozambique in 1933 and it was The Corporation for Commerce and Industry Employees. After some time, there appeared the Office Employees Trade Union, The Drivers' Trade Union, Metal Mechanic and Correlatives Trade Union, Civil Building Professional Trade Union, Bank Clerks Trade Union and many others during the period before the 1950's.

**Q:** *What were the strategies followed to organise workers into unions and how do they differ from today's?*

**A:** An important aspect which characterised those trade unions is the absence of any trade union bases (organisations). There were not any strategies for organising the workers in factories or enterprises, or for developing any kind of trade union activity. They had what we could call "super-structure", which were general assemblies and controls at central and sometimes regional level. At factory level, nothing. This is the main difference between the present trade union movement in which the basic structure, the Trade Union Committee, constitutes the support of the entire trade union movement since it is basically in the enterprise where the struggle for defence of workers' interests takes place. Presently the trade unions are organised in the enterprises and factories, at provincial level and central level through deliberative organs and executive structures defined in respective statutes. Different trade unions are in turn affiliated to OTM-CS, which is the centre for co-ordinating and defining general and common actions and policies.

\* The interview was conducted through an interpreter and this may have affected the language of the Mozambican participants as reproduced here.

**Q: Were non-Portuguese workers allowed to organise themselves into unions?**

**A:** Corporative Trade Unions, because of their own nature of being conceived to serve the colonial power, had affiliation mechanisms based on discrimination. For instance only workers with a certain level of education and some professional skill training could join those Trade Unions Corporations. During the same period workers were required to assimilate (ie. to undergo Portuguese formal education and adopt their habits and lifestyle at the expense of African habits and traditions). Given the high level of illiteracy in those days, we can understand easily that the majority of Mozambican workers did not have any possibility of belonging to a trade union corporation. On the other hand the colonial government prohibited any other kind of trade union not based on (its) Corporation Organisation, any one which could defend the workers. So, we can say that Mozambican workers did not have the chance to organise themselves in a genuine trade union movement which could identify with their legitimate desires.

**Q: How did the struggle for independence affect the workers at shopfloor level, who were not fighting in the bush?**

**A:** The struggle for independence continued to elevate the workers' consciousness about their condition of being oppressed and the violation of their elementary rights. This is why most workers joined Frelimo and fought against the Portuguese colonialism. On the other hand, the development of the struggle allowed insurrections and demands for better labour and living conditions, as occurred in Harbours and Railways.

**Q: What were worker organisations like after independence in 1975?**

**A:** The Production Councils (PC's) created



in 1976, were the first way of organising the workers in our country. The PC's whose structures were democratically elected by the workers, had as principal functions organisation of workers in collective patterns for the struggle against economic sabotage that was taking place after independence

amongst the disaffected colonialists.

Their structures were first created in Maputo City and later extended to the other points of the country, having as basis the working centres and structures in districts and central level. After the creation of PC's, there began the first experiences of workers organising by "branch of activity" (industry). These resulted in the creation of eight sections which later became twenty two branches of activity, which formed the basis of the 15 national trade unions still in existence today.

**Q: How did OTM come into existence?**

**A:** The Production Councils constituted the embryonic form of the Trade Union movement in Mozambique. Through their active defence of workers' rights and interests and at the same time strengthening its organisation, the PC's grew qualitatively and assumed characteristics of syndical (trade union) nature. The Constitutive Conference that took place in 1983, created OTM from PC structures.

**Q: What was the (political) relationship between Frelimo and OTM at the time when it started? And now?**

**A:** The OTM was created under the Frelimo Party intervention. At that time the single party was both the state and the society leader. And so there was a political influence of Frelimo concerning the trade union policy of OTM.

With the deep political and socio-



economic changes that took place in Mozambique, the introduction of multipartyism, the implementation of a Structural Readjustment Programme (SRP) introducing the market economy, the organisational conditions and functioning changed. Thus OTM-CS decided in its second National Conference in 1990, to introduce profound changes in the trade union movement, namely:

- ❑ The transformation of OTM into a Central Union to affiliate National trade unions on a free and democratic basis.
- ❑ OTM independence from the state, the employers, the political parties and any other association of a non-trade union kind.
- ❑ The definition of new tasks and strategies for more adequate functioning according to the present reality especially that which is concerned with market economy conditions. In this way, the OTM fundamentally undertook to directly defend the workers' interests.

In this context, the present reality of OTM-CS is that it is not subordinate or affiliated to Frelimo Party or any other party.

***Q: Who were the first leaders of OTM and what were their positions in the Frelimo party?***

**A:** The OTM always promoted the principle of open eligibility for leadership. So the first leaders of OTM were elected by their respective electorate and among them, there were some who were Frelimo members and some who were not. At the 2nd National Conference of OTM, the democratic principle of eligibility of leaders grew even deeper with the introduction of a secret vote and diversification of the candidature system.

The candidate's party affiliation does not have any influence on the electoral process in union matters today. That is confirmed by the fact that the union staff and leadership belong to various political parties.

***Q: What were the reasons for a change in relationships between the Frelimo party and the OTM?***

**A:** Mainly political and socio-economic changes of the Mozambican society. We are speaking about the evolution of the "monopartyism" situation to a pluralist system, in a market economy, and the necessity of ensuring that the trade union movement conducts its efforts in a manner that defend the workers' interests. This presupposed a strong, independent and autonomous trade union movement's existence.

On the other hand, workers of different political persuasions participate in the trade union movement, united by the common interest which is the struggle for the improvement of their socio-professional conditions. Thus, the independence of the trade union from political parties constitutes a condition to preserve unity in the trade union movement.

***Q: Have the structural adjustment policies, (SAP) and Economic Rehabilitation Programme (PRE) affected workers wages? And what was their response?***

**A:** Effectively all workers, especially those who belong to the "ill-favoured strata", suffer the most negative effects of the Structural Adjustment Policies:

- ❑ increasing inflation which results in prices going up and reduction of workers' wages buying power;
- ❑ mass dismissals in which reorganisation of enterprises is used as an excuse. The minimum salary is incompatible with the present cost of living and there is a lack of relevant means to protect the workers' rights and against salary levels which oblige them to live under extreme poverty conditions. This situation deserves a special conference where it can be addressed properly.

Under these circumstances workers organised themselves into their respective

trade unions and developed strategies to defend their rights and interests (either through collective bargaining with employers or through demanding their right to strike if the chances of peaceful settlement are not possible).

On the other hand OTM-CS is still negotiating with the government, looking for any solution which can improve the workers' situation, for instance by increasing the minimum salary and other ways. Recently a process of Tripartite Social Agreements began, and we hope it could contribute to the debate and the search for solutions to workers' problems.

So, we can say that the majority of workers are not satisfied with the present conditions of life, and we will carry on with the dynamic improvement of the struggle for union unity and independence.

**Q: Was OTM consulted before the above economic measures were introduced?**

**A:** No! The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was conceived by the government. And its practical implementation involved all sections of the Mozambican society. Nevertheless, we have warned the government of the negative consequences and taken some necessary measures to defend workers' interests.

**Q: Were there some workers who left the union because of the above economic measures? If so any approximation?**

**A:** Joining and not joining a trade union is a free choice (constitutionally). We do not know of any worker who left the union because of the SAP measures. But it was just the opposite, what is happening is that workers are joining trade unions to organise themselves in order to fight and defend their rights and socio-professional interests.

**Q: In this new era in Mozambique does the OTM have any alternative Socialist vision?**

**A:** We do not advocate any political

system. We think that is political parties' business. It is not in our plans to object against the implementation of the market economy. However, we defend energetically that which can harm the legitimate workers' interests. These are the socio-professional conditions, education, health, social and labour justice. We are fighting for a democratic society in which human rights and workers' union rights, worthy conditions of life and work are respected.

**Q: Some analysts say that the 1990 wave of countrywide strikes were a sign that OTM was "completely out of touch with the Mozambican labour". Is this analysis true? If so, what were the factors that led to the existence of the gap in the first place?**

**A:** In our point of view OTM always had the workers' interests at heart. When the strikes and general unrest emerged in 1990, OTM-CS had already warned the government structures about the biggest problems which the workers were faced with, the existing risks and about the necessity of taking measures to solve them. All this did not happen.

Trade unions started and controlled the strikes according to the general policies of OTM-CS. They assumed the organisation, direction and defence of the struggle for worker's rights and interests.

**Q: What are the worker rights provided for in the new constitution adopted in November 1990?**

**A:** As we see, the new Constitution (1990) goes deeply into fundamental citizens' rights in general and in workers' rights in particular.

We can refer in particular to the right to a job, to free association and to meet freely, the right to constitute trade unions and professional organisations, the right to sanitary work conditions, the right to strike, social and labour justice.

These rights are now expressed in different laws after they were adopted by



the Parliament, such as a trade union law, the law for freedom of association and assembly, and the Minister's Counsel Decree about collective negotiations etc.

**Q: What are the critical issues presently facing the OTM?**

**A:** The main preoccupation is the consolidation of the structures, the defence of worker unity and the preparation for the coming Congress, which will take place at a time of changing processes within the trade union movement. The main preoccupation is the workers' conditions concerning the high costs of living, the wages' lower buying power, mass retrenchments, and the questions relating to the labour conditions and the violation of workers' rights as enshrined in the labour legislation.

Thus, both the National trade unions or OTM-CS direct their efforts at defending workers' rights and interests.

**Q: There is reportedly a break-up of OTM presently taking place, why?**

**A:** There is no secession within the OTM-CS in our point of view. We do not consider the disaffiliation of one or more trade unions from OTM-CS as secession. On the other hand we regard the disaffiliation from OTM-CS of the three unions in particular, as the phenomenon which resulted from the transformation process which is not only taking place in this country but in other countries as well.

If you want to know why the three trade unions disaffiliated from OTM-CS, we can say that they rushed the changing process and considered OTM-CS as being slow and consequently were dissatisfied with some articles contained in the OTM-CS statutes. Presently there are contacts being established with these trade unions to seek ways of maintaining worker unity.

**Q: What would OTM or any worker organisation see as an alternative for the Mozambican economy, as opposed to the SAP's or as against the measures Frelimo**

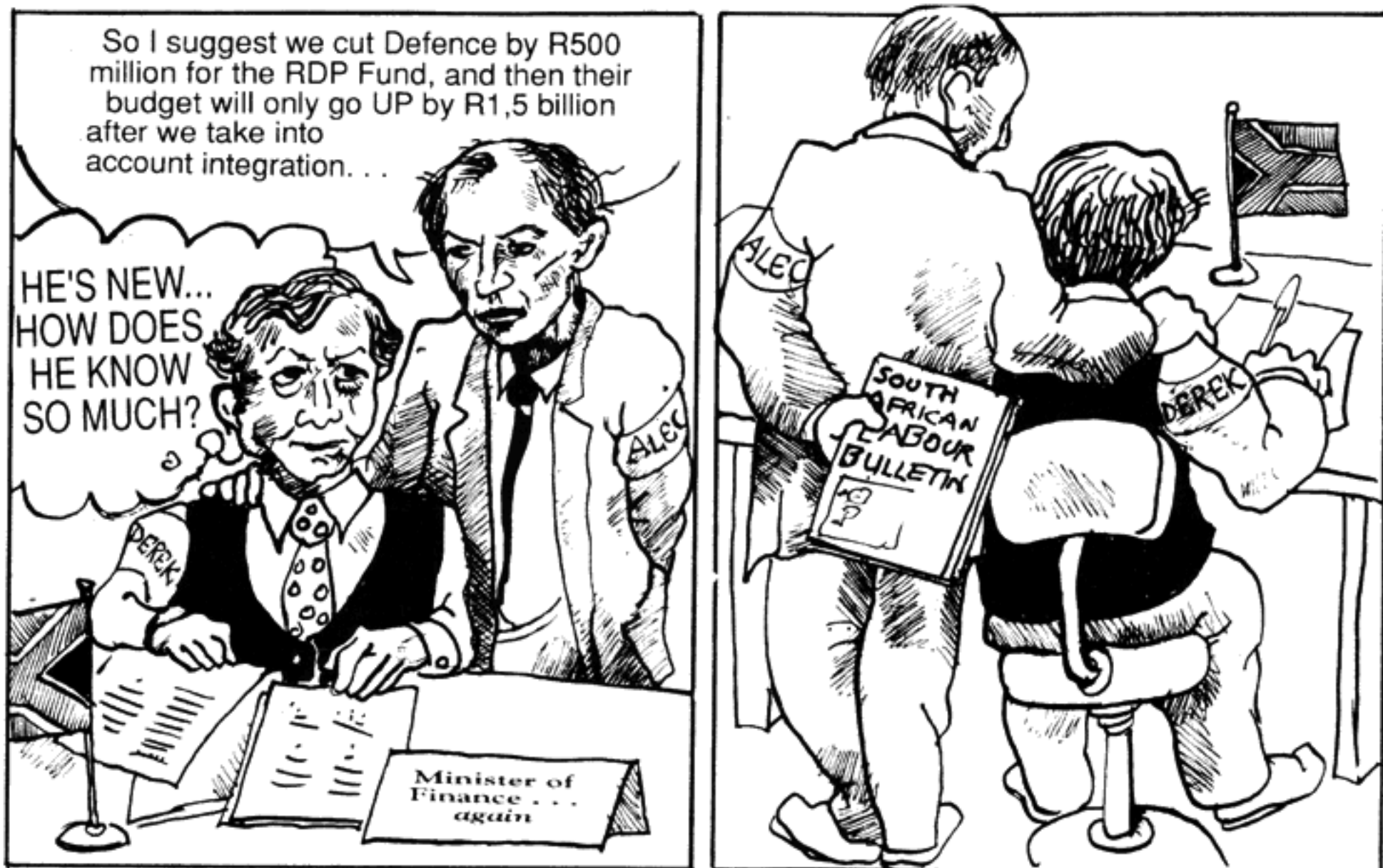
**government adopted since 1987 to boost the economy? Does OTM have any Economic Policy of its own?**

**A:** OTM-CS never presented to the government any suggestion of an alternative political or economical policy framework against the market economy already implemented. OTM-CS has requested, within the current economic policy framework, that the government take measures that will improve the workers' socio-economic situation and protect the right to a job to be entrenched in the Constitution, including the right to health, education, social and labour justice and a worthy life. ☆

**Immediately after OTM was founded fourteen national trade unions were denominated as follows:**

- SINPOCAF (Docks and Railways)
- SINTEVEC (Textile, Garment, Leather and Footwear)
- SINTAIB (Food and Beverage)
- SINTRAT (Road Transport and Technical Assistance)
- SINTIA (Sugar Industry)
- SINTAC (Civil, Aviation, Communications and Post)
- SINTICIM (Civil Construction, Timber and Mining)
- SINTIME (Metallurgical and Energy Industry)
- SINTIQUIGRA (Chemistry, Graphic and Paper Industry)
- SINTMAP (Mercantile, Marine and Fishery Industry)
- SINTIHOTS (Hotels, Tourism and Allied Industry)
- SINTAF (Agriculture, Forestry and Plantations Workers)
- SINTCOBASE (Commerce, Bank and Insurance Industry)
- SINTIC (Cashew Nuts Industry)





Go to the source ...

... subscribe now to the  
*South African Labour Bulletin*

See inside for details