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SOUTH AFRICAN

LABOUR BULLETIN

Nov/Dec 1992 Volume 16 Number 8

Women in COSATU
CORPORATE
Brazil
Violence



VIVA THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

FORWARD TO A WORKERS STATE

DOWN WITH TRIPARTISM

LONG LIVE THE ALLIANCE

STRIKE FOR A WORKERS CHARTER

THE FUTURE OF LABOUR

ITO MBOWENI * BERNIE FANAROFF
WELENZIMA VAVI * VANGUARD MKHOSANA
MANENE SAMELA * KARL VON HOLDT

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8th Floor
Medical Arts Building
220 Jeppe St
(cnr Troye St)
Johannesburg
2001 South Africa

P O Box 3851
Johannesburg
2000 South Africa

Telephone Nos:
(011) 337 8511

Fax No:
(011) 337 9207

Managing Editor
Karl von Holdt

Sub-editor
Muff Andersson

**Layout and
Production**
Morice Smithers

Co-ordination
Di Stuart

Research
Dot Keet

Writing
Snuki Zikalala

Distribution
Sipiwe Kambule

Subscriptions
Sally Fincham

Photographer
William Matlala

Vol 16 No 8 November/December 1992 Table of Contents

Editorial notes	1
Letters to the Bulletin	2
Broadly speaking	4
<i>RED EYE</i>	
Labour Action	
★ BCAWU blames CAWU for murder ★ SADTU gains recognition ★ Movement towards centralised bargaining ★ Bisho massacre protests ★ Strike report ★ NEHAWU workers re-employed ★ NUM accepts Harmony plan ★	6
Special Focus: The future of labour	
The future of wage bargaining	
<i>Interview with Bernie Fanaroff</i>	16
The role of the trade union movement in the future South Africa	
<i>Tito Mboweni</i>	24
What is the future of labour?	
<i>Karl von Holdt</i>	30
The name of the game is membership	
<i>Zwelinzima Vavi</i>	38
Preparing for the future	
<i>Vanguard Mkhosana</i>	43
ISCOR violence: union splits, shopstewards die	
<i>Snuki Zikalala</i>	47
No unity at plant level before a federation merger	
<i>Interview with Manene Samela</i>	53

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Front Cover:

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Graphic by Judy Seidman

Union profile: POTWA

Snuki Zikalala

57

Women workers: clearing the gender hurdles

Fiona Dove

63

International

The Brazilian labour movement: proposing alternatives

Karl von Holdt

69

Reviews

Two recent books on women workers

Reviewed by Debbie Budlender

79

Columns

Women in the unions

Connie September

82

On the shopfloor

Consol Glass shopstewards

84

Benjamin on Law

Obligations during industrial action

Paul Benjamin of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs)

86

Economic Notes

★ Union representatives on the CGF ★ Secret salary survey ★ Company profile: Malbak ★ Electrification: power to the people ★ Inflation ★

Labour Research Service

92

Profile

November Nkosi, president of NUFWSAW

Interview by Snuki Zikalala

93

The future of labour

1979 was a watershed year for the South African labour movement. The outlines of a new industrial relations system were emerging from the Wiehan Commission report, and labour had to develop a strategic response.

1992/93 is likewise a watershed. Again, a new industrial relations system is being born. But this time the changes are far bigger and more dramatic. They are also more complex.

The shift started in 1990, with De Klerk's political reforms at the beginning of the year, and the signing of the Laboria Minute between labour, employers and the Department of Manpower towards the end of the year. It was this that paved the way to labour participation in the National Manpower Commission. In some ways, it also opened up the struggle for the National Economic Forum.

The labour movement is starting to define for itself a new role in the new democratic South Africa. The trade unions, and COSATU in particular, have played a central role in the struggle against apartheid. Can they play an equally central role in the struggle to establish and build democracy? Can they play a central role in the struggle for economic reconstruction, for economic development?

Much depends on the relations between the ANC and the labour movement, and on the economic and social policies of the ANC. In this issue of *Labour Bulletin*, ANC economist, Tito Mboweni argues that the ANC, COSATU and other organisations of civil society should enter into a reconstruction accord, which could later be extended to include capital. This thinking is broadly

in tune with strategies being discussed in COSATU.

But what will the ANC do when the crunch comes? As Bernie Fanaroff points out, the major capitalist corporations in South Africa are enormously powerful. Any labour driven agenda for economic reconstruction and development would have to curb, regulate or break up the power of these conglomerates. Does the ANC have the political nerve and commitment to the working class to take the necessary action?

SACWU's Manene Samela is outrightly dismissive of this possibility. Many COSATU unionists are, if less hostile, increasingly sceptical of ANC intentions as well. These developments in themselves may increase the possibilities of co-operation between NACTU and COSATU.

Their views may be prematurely pessimistic. At any rate, it is clear that the next few years will be marked by crucial debate, contestation and struggle over policy issues. The arena for these struggles will be within the ANC itself, between the ANC and the labour movement, and in society at large.

It is absolutely clear that the prospects for a labour driven project of democratisation and development will be determined by the capacity, unity and strategic coherence of the labour movement as a whole. The various contributors to this issue of *Labour Bulletin* raise a series of extremely serious questions and problems about the way ahead. We hope this issue contributes towards what must be the most important project in South Africa today: the development by labour of a coherent vision for the future. ☆

Karl von Holdt

Next issue:**Focus on racial divisions in the trade union movement in South Africa**

Dear REDEYE

We decided to respond to your plea for help (Vol 16 No 7) by forwarding our London address.

It is our duty to try to address your ignorance concerning our operations. *Permanent Revolution* is not "imported", but manufactured locally. In fact, our head office is right under your nose. As we explain in our publications, we still operate clandestinely as we do not harbour any illusions in the democratic intentions of the regime, or of the Stalinist SACP and the nationalist ANC. Your jibe, "Who says imports are declining?", is totally out of place.

Let us add that we are by now used to the customary cynical swipes taken at what are regarded as "extreme left" groups. We, in fact, look forward to it and find it very amusing. We sincerely hope that REDEYE is different, and that you will at least familiarise yourselves, even though it would prove time-consuming, with the work, operations and views of "extreme left" groups. Looking forward to your next column. Revolutionary Marxist greetings
Workers International

Dear Editor

Many factors contributed to the NEHAWU strike:

- 1 The absence of a Labour Relations Act in the Public Service Commission.
- 2 A blind strike that lacked leadership and political



education for the workers.

3 Health professionals were not sufficiently organised and prepared for the consequences.

4 No code of conduct or ethical framework exists to guide health workers to respond effectively to such situations.

5 Health workers not on strike were ethically bound to keep the services going or lose their jobs. They are in the business of saving lives and not destroying lives.

6 There was fear, hysteria, paranoia, uncertainty and intimidation in all forms, ie written, verbal and in the form of violence and abuse.

7 Patients did suffer. The services collapsed and the TPA were slow and ineffective in responding. In fact they compounded the problems by playing the professionals up against the workers. Clearly there was political intolerance.

8 With a hierarchy and organisational structure that is white and male dominated, it was clear that they did not identify with the needs and

aspirations of black health workers.

9 Nurses and nurse administrators were disunited in their responses to the dismissed workers.

10 This led to the violence and tension that extended to the workers and families of health workers.

Nursing is grounded in an ethos of altruism, devotion and dedication and service.

The common thread that runs through this ethos is professionalism and a constant battle to maintain their independence from the medical profession.

NEHAWU as a health workers union is attempting to organise nurses and attract them to the unions. It is, however, apparent that nurses were faced with their professional ethics and accountability to their patients. The health worker concept firmly upholds respect and dignity for all human beings. They felt antagonised and badly treated by the shopstewards. The shopstewards in turn felt that nurses were against them. Hence the conflict. Nurses are not disregarding unions, but feel that the behaviour of certain shopstewards and workers have alienated them from the struggle for better working conditions. They are reluctant to join a union that disregards the lives of people.

Clearly, it has not been a victory for NEHAWU in mobilising health workers. It must be recognised, however, that nurses and other health

workers are more unionised than before.

The nature of our lives and society breeds violence, conflict and confusion. We need to challenge these evils and put mechanisms in place that will build a nation of unity.

My own feeling is that organisations with a long history of labour politics should attempt to research the dynamics of labour relations in the health sector and include health workers in their workshops.

Nurses in particular need to be more politicised and conscientised to the prevailing nature of labour politics in the health sector. The main focus should be the transition and consequent transformation of health and health care in a post-apartheid SA.

Progressive health worker

Dear Editor

Where are the women's issues in *SA Labour Bulletin*?

Despite the growth of women's structures in the union movement, it seems that little is written about it in the columns of the *Labour Bulletin*. All we read about are interviews with women worker leaders. This surely does not adequately reflect attempts to place women's issues on the agenda of the union movement. The last review of the state of women workers' structures appears in issue 15 (2), which was written over two years ago! Has *Labour Bulletin* forgotten women's issues as CODESA

hits the headlines?

It is unacceptable that *Labour Bulletin* has neglected this crucial issue. Everyone should be kept informed about the successes (and failures) of the women's struggle in the union movement and beyond.

Yours

Leslie London

We have to admit that our coverage of gender issues in the labour movement has not been adequate. However, see Fiona Dove's article on p 63. By the way, our 'Women in the unions' column is not simply a series of interviews with women worker leaders, but each is part of a serious debate about different strategies for dealing with gender oppression.

Editor

Dear Editor

I would like to make a modest contribution on Allan Horwitz's excellent article "Supping with SACCOLA".

Firstly, perhaps Horwitz has a problem understanding alliances. You don't make an alliance for the sake of an alliance. You ask yourself some questions such as with whom should you make an alliance? What kind of an alliance? Is the alliance going to advance the struggle or not? Of course, you do not make alliances with the enemy, but that does not mean you do not talk as we are doing as shopstewards.

We must not forget that the economic crisis as Horwitz puts it, is not affecting

COSATU alone, but all the forces of progress. That is why there is a need for an alliance. Also, we need to use different approaches, not moving forward like a wounded tiger. We must consolidate our gains and put ourselves to the test.

According to Horwitz "The unreliability of employers should make us wary of loose agreements. Lacking tightly monitoring mechanism ...". I think he is correct on that score. What we need is a clarion call to our leadership to maintain the culture of consultation and mandates and accountability.

Horwitz criticised Jay Naidoo for speaking on television of a "government of national unity".

First let me say to Horwitz, the little knowledge I have indicates COSATU is the most consciously developed labour movement in Africa. When all the people's organisations were banned in 1986, COSATU had to spread its wings to represent the aspirations of the working class and other oppressed sections of the society. It was not a favour what COSATU did, it was out of necessity.

Lastly, I would say Horwitz in his article is mostly criticising. Criticism is very important in this revolutionary situation, but also we must put proposals. We must not find ourselves being like spectators who are criticising the players, we must also be creative.

Thobile Maso, Transkei

Siberia defeats Leon Louw

Siberia is so keen to privatise its assets and establish a market economy that it hired famous South African free-marketeer Leon Louw as a consultant. When he arrived, Leon was somewhat disconcerted at the complete absence of free-market infrastructure.

For example, contract law is hardly developed. If one businessman breaks a contract with another, there are no lawyers to take the case to court and no judges who have the experience to judge it. This makes it rather dangerous for companies to enter into normal free market relations. Leon also found that there is no-one trained in normal accounting or auditing procedures. This makes it difficult to tell whether a company has made a profit or a loss.

But Leon was even more shocked after his meeting with the president of the Republic of Siberia. The president said that there was an urgent need to privatise the schools, the health department and roads.

'But what about the metal industries, the mines, the chemical factories,' stammered Leon. 'Surely it would be better to start by privatising those?'

'No, those are running quite smoothly,' said the president. 'The problems are in health, education and



roads. The quicker we privatise them, the better.'

For once, Leon found himself speechless.

REDEYE understands that Leon now thinks that Siberia might do better to stick to socialism! ❖

Move over gents!

The South African ruling class is really in a mess. It seems that the state Auditor General can no longer do his job because government departments have stopped keeping their books.

Corruption among government officials is as common as measles in children.

Meanwhile in the private sector, Greg Blank is just the tip of the iceberg. In Johannesburg alone, police are investigating white collar crimes such as fraud and other scams worth R3,5 billion. The government has decided to tax the pensions of ordinary citizens while guaranteeing itself enormous tax-free pensions after only twelve years of "work" in parliament.

While workers are getting increases below inflation, business executives have

increased their salaries by 15% and their benefits by 28%, according to a recent secret survey. Management often says South African workers should learn from the hardworking Japanese and South Koreans, but maybe South African managers have more to learn. A German trade unionist who spent some time with South African managers comments that "in Germany, most of them would be lucky to get a job as a storeman."

Maybe the workers should take over industry – they can hardly make a worse job than the bosses – and let the managers take over the state – because clearly the current state bureaucrats don't even make the grade as storemen!

C'mon gents, you've had your day. Move over! ❖

Tricky dicks!

This year's Institute for Personnel Management (IPM) Convention was titled: "SA in transition – making human capital work".

Making human capital work? These personnel managers think they're clever, broer! That's just a smart way of discussing how to make workers work harder ... ❖

Two laws?

Law firm Cheadle, Thompson and Haysom,

ough fighters for workers retrenchment rights in many industrial court cases, have just broken all their own rules by retrenching four of their employees. Four articulated clerks were told they were to be retrenched with no consultation, no alternatives discussed, and no explanation of the selection criteria.

The law firm played an important role in establishing fair retrenchment procedures. According to these, employers must establish the need for retrenchment and consult with employees, they must seek alternatives to retrenchment and they must explain the criteria for selecting those to be retrenched.

REDEYE hears Cheadles has just employed four new articulated clerks – at articulated clerk wages! Learning from the bosses ... ? ❖

The new SA?

In the midst of all the mass action, it seems that the class enemy is sometimes prepared to help the opposition out of a tight corner. During the recent metal strike, 2 000 chanting NUMSA members marched towards the SEIFSA offices in Durban to deliver their demands.

When they arrived, the union organiser went into the building to find the SEIFSA officials – only to discover that SEIFSA had moved offices some time back. What to do?

Toy-toying workers outside, no class enemy inside?

Our organiser phoned SEIFSA and explained the problem. Would they mind sending someone to pretend as if these were the offices? Not to worry, the SEIFSA man said, he'd be right over ...

Meanwhile ...

... far away in Matatiele, SAMWU organised a march to the Town Clerk's office. When they arrived, and the Town Clerk came out to meet them, the worker leaders discovered they'd forgotten the memo in the office.

They looked at their members who had marched so far, and they looked at the Town Clerk. Then they explained their problem to the Clerk, and asked whether he'd mind accepting a blank sheet of paper. They would fax the memo later ...

Now COSATU has resolved that it is no good to just hand memos over – marchers must stay and demand a response.

REDEYE wonders what would have happened in Matatiele if the workers had demanded an immediate response. Blank stares ... ? ☆

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BCAWU blames CAWU for murder

A leading shopsteward and national executive member of the Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union (BCAWU), Before Moeketsi, was gunned down in Sebokeng on 9 October 1992.

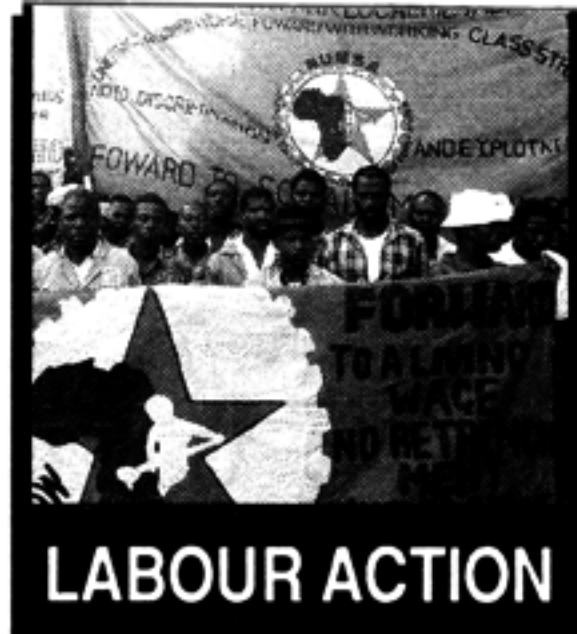
Moeketsi was leaving Sebokeng hostel after visiting friends when he was confronted by two men. One pointed him out and the other shot him in the forehead after asking whether his name was Before. Moeketsi worked for Vitro Pipes in Vereeniging.

BCAWU has blamed members of its rival in the construction industry, Construction and Allied Workers Union (CAWU) for the murder.

CAWU national administrator, Dumisane Ntuli, denies that CAWU members murdered Moeketsi. "We have discussed the allegation with BCAWU, and the case should be referred to the police," he says. CAWU also says it has investigated the matter with its members, and they deny involvement.

A spokesperson for the NACTU affiliated BCAWU said Moeketsi was threatened by an official of the COSATU affiliate at its offices where striking Vitro workers, who are COSATU members, were meeting. This alleged incident took place six weeks before the murder.

"The official had told him that he would not live long if he did not leave BCAWU."



BCAWU also accuses CAWU of trying to coerce workers in the construction industry, including BCAWU members, to join it.

Ntuli responds that CAWU believes in freedom of association and does not coerce workers.

In late September, BCAWU and CAWU attended a meeting convened by the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers – to which both are affiliated – in Harare. A joint commitment to unity was expressed. The two unions also sit together on industry provident funds.



Do BCAWU's allegations against CAWU threaten possible unity in the industry?

BCAWU – which claims 26 000 paid up and 120 000 signed up members – accuses CAWU of being in cahoots with management and of failing to win decent benefits.

CAWU's Desmond Mehashe does not believe

unity is threatened. The unions co-operate on a number of issues, such as provident funds and industry training boards.

The union – which claims 31 000 paid up members – believes unity is paramount – by far the vast majority of the 255 000 building workers, 58 000 civil engineering workers and 45 000 building products workers remain unemployed. ♦

(Karl von Holdt)

SADTU gains recognition

The nationwide strike threatened by the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) less than one month before exams was averted when the Department of Education and Training (DET) officially recognised SADTU on September 8. Although SADTU was finally able to win recognition from the DET, the union did not win its long-standing demand for the right to strike. Instead, it was agreed that this issue would be referred to the Department of National Education and discussed at the national level.

Also, the 'chalk-down' strike carried out by SADTU's Soweto branch which began on September 2 ended after only one day. During the one day strike, 5 000 teachers downed their chalk and held a protest rally at the Funda Centre in Diepkloof. The strike succeeded in winning the



SADTU: launched in 1990, finally recognised in 1992

Photo: William Matlala

reinstatement of three union activists who had been dismissed, as well as achieving a two month moratorium on pending cases of misconduct against SADTU members.

It seems that most community groups supported SADTU's aims, but some were worried about the effect of the strike on the students in Soweto. The Soweto Education Crisis Committee, an organisation of Soweto parents, strongly objected to the strike despite supporting the teachers' aims. On the other hand, although the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) supported the strike, it also offered to organise alternative means of education and urged students to go to school.

Nevertheless - without in any way detracting from the seriousness of the crisis of education in the townships - SADTU does appear to be justified in arguing that

without the threat of strike action, it would not have achieved recognition from the DET, and if not for its successful one day strike in Soweto, it would not have won the reinstatement of the three dismissed comrades. ❖

(Jesse Fenichel)

Movement toward centralised bargaining

Three COSATU affiliates are stepping up their campaigns to drive employers into centralised bargaining.

PPWAWU, operating in sectors which are dominated by a few large corporations, has made the most progress. Because of this, the PPWAWU negotiations give some indication of employer responses to demands for centralised bargaining.

PPWAWU met with the SA Typographical Workers Union (SATU) and Media Workers Association of SA

(MWASA) to establish a joint union position on the formation of an industrial council for the packaging industry. They agreed that an industrial council should negotiate minimum wages and conditions and allow for plant-level bargaining above the minima.

The three major employers in the industry - Nampak, Kohler and Consol - attended a meeting with the unions on 19 October. The employers agreed in principle to centralised forums - but totally opposed the forming of an industrial council.

Instead they proposed

- three narrow sectoral forums (in corrugated, folding cartons and sacks) without statutory power;
- the forums should have a bargaining agenda limited to issues such as a single minimum wage for the industry, hours, leave etc;
- industry restructuring should only come onto the agenda if both employers and unions agreed;
- there should be no two-tier bargaining unless both parties agreed, ie there should be no compulsion to bargain at two levels;
- regional differences in wages and conditions should be accommodated.

It is interesting that Nampak - the Barlow Rand subsidiary that broke PPWAWU's strike for centralised bargaining in 1990 - should now accept the inevitability of centralised bargaining.



Clearly, times are changing. As PPWAWU organiser Rob Rees points out, employers realise the pressure for centralised bargaining can only increase, and would prefer to pre-empt that pressure by establishing forums now. What employers want though, is the most limited, narrow form of centralised bargaining possible, so as to limit union power and preserve maximum flexibility at company level. For example, according to Rees, packaging employers insist that job grading is a local issue, not an industry issue!

The next meeting in the packaging sector will be in February.

PPWAWU also aims to establish an IC to cover the entire pulp and paper, forestry and chipboard industry. Except for Carlton Paper, all the major employers attended a meeting called by the union - Nampak, Mondi, Sappi, H & H, Hans Merensky, P G Wood. PPWAWU proposed that an IC in this industry could have sub councils for the different sectors.

Employers did not commit themselves to an IC. According to PPWAWU's

Dickson Mota, the main stumbling block is the employer's demand that all 14 unions in the industry should be at the next meeting and indicate whether they support PPWAWU's proposal.

Another meeting is to be held in November.

CWIU met employers on 26 August and 24 September. Most of the major players - SASOL, Sentrachem, the petroleum companies apart from Total - failed to turn up. The union is campaigning for an IC to cover the entire chemical industry, but proposes that the first phase could be an informal forum consisting of companies organised by the union. Sectoral forums could also be a starting point.



Employers who attended the meeting said they needed more time to debate. They would develop a joint position before the next meeting in February.

CWIU general secretary, Musi Buthelezi, says the union does not want to rush things. "It is not an easy thing to set up an industrial council." The union is discussing the experience of other ICs, and debating issues

such as whether two-tier bargaining is desirable. "The key thing is to fight for agreement in principle," says Buthelezi. "Then we can negotiate the process."

The union invited other unions in the industry to discuss its proposals. NACTU affiliate SACWU expressed interest, according to CWIU, but failed to pitch up.

In contrast to CWIU, SACCAWU declared a dispute with all employers where it is organised, after they failed to respond to seven demands tabled on 18 June. Some of the demands were:

- agree to establish industrial councils in three sectors, that is, finance, catering and commercial and retail;
- agree to national provident funds;
- agree to national industry training boards;
- end retrenchments and wage freezes.

Although a large number of employers attended three sectoral meetings with the union in October, the major employers in catering (Karos, Southern Suns) and retail (Pick 'n Pay, Checkers, OK) stayed away. Major insurers such as Old Mutual, Liberty Life and Metropolitan Life attended the finance sector meeting.

The union has suspended the disputes with companies which attended, and confirmed disputes with companies which stayed away. The SACCAWU NEC will discuss the next step in

November.

In general it seems as if employers are no longer rejecting centralised bargaining out of hand. Some realise they cannot hold out forever, and wish to pre-empt more radical proposals. Others are no doubt waiting to see whether the unions will be able to implement their threats of action on demands for ICs.

All three unions agree that they will have to step up education of their members and mobilisation on the ground if they are to make serious progress.

Already SACCAWU and CWIU are making plans to pressurise the major employers in their sectors to enter the talks. It looks like PPWAWU too faces a tough battle to establish the powerful bargaining forums it wants. Mota warns the union will go into dispute with pulp/paper, forestry and chipboard employers if there is no in-principle agreement on an IC by March next year.

The campaign for centralised bargaining could be the first co-ordinated and sustained COSATU campaign on collective bargaining issues. It has taken three years to reach this point. Although the federation announced the campaign in 1990, PPWAWU's strike at Nampak at the end of that year received very little support from other affiliates.

In addition, the campaign did not have a clear focus on establishing ICs - the focus was

more on company bargaining in the Barlows Group.

This year, COSATU affiliates have established a joint forum to strategise. There is a clear focus on ICs, which will facilitate union influence in industrial policy. And a number of affiliates are gearing up for serious campaigns. This may well be the key collective bargaining issue in 1993. ♦

(Karl von Holdt)

Bisho massacre protests: 11 and 18 September 1992

Production in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage was seriously disrupted on two successive Fridays in September as workers stayed away in response to the Bisho massacre, in which 28 protesters were shot dead by Ciskeian security forces.

The Industrial Relations Unit conducted a telephonic survey of 50 companies in the region, employing 34 943 hourly-paid employees, to establish the extent of worker participation in the protests.

11 September 1992

A total of 34 (68%) of employers surveyed reported that business had been disrupted on Friday 11 September 1992.

At most companies, workers left the premises about noon, some for a two hour prayer meeting. Production losses were less severe at several factories which operate shorter shifts

on Fridays.

Managers generally were sympathetic when approached by shopstewards about time off, even though most received very short notice. Three companies reached agreements with unions to work in the time lost, but similar negotiations at three other factories failed.

79% of companies affected by the protest adopted a policy of no-work, no-pay, no-discipline. Seven employers stated that they reserved their right to discipline, but did not indicate whether this would, in fact, be exercised.

Production at at least three Uitenhage factories was also disrupted on Tuesday 8 September, the day after the Bisho massacre.

18 September 1992

Thousands of workers observed a day of mourning on 18 September for the victims of the Bisho massacre, by absenting themselves from work.

However, while 84% of African workers stayed away, only 22% of coloured hourly-paid employees did not report for work. 65% of hourly-paid workers (African and coloured) stayed away. Five companies reported normal attendance levels, while another three working short-time had not scheduled production for the Friday.

Advance discussions between managers and worker representatives took place at 93% of the

LABOUR ACTION

companies affected by the stayaway, and some employers responded sympathetically to requests for unpaid leave. Two undertook to bring wage pay-outs forward to the Thursday. Agreement to work time in was reached at three organisations. A fourth employer rejected a union proposal that workers make up lost time over the ensuing weekend.

Management at a Port Elizabeth factory conducted a ballot to guide their decision on whether to close the plant or not. 70% of employees voted in favour of working – and came to work.

A no-work, no-pay, no-discipline policy was applied at 76% of the organisations affected by the stayaway. Seven employers reported that they were reserving their right to discipline, although they had not exercised it when interviewed the week after the stayaway. Two managers said disciplinary steps would definitely be taken.

At a Uitenhage factory, management rejected a demand that those who worked on 18 September be sent home for five days.

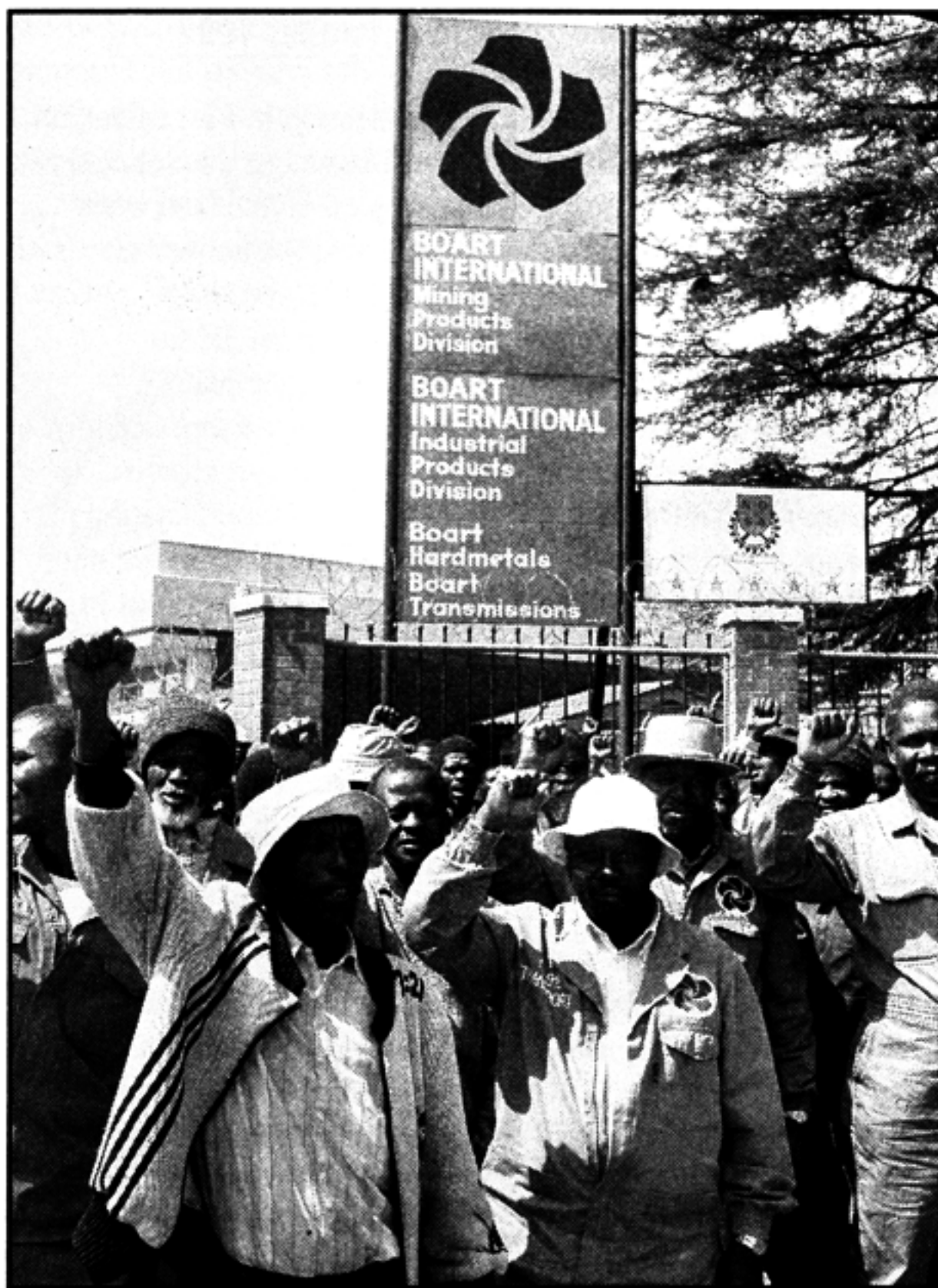
Several employers canvassed in this survey were unable to provide racial breakdowns of the number of African and coloured workers who participated in protest action. To the extent that this signals deracialisation of workplaces, it is a healthy development. However, it

makes it more difficult to discern trends in coloured participation in stayaways, which has vacillated considerably since the Unit

first started monitoring them seven years ago. ♦
(Judy Parfitt, Industrial Relations Unit, UPE)

Strike report: nine months ending 30 September 1992

From a slow start to the year, strike activity accelerated rapidly in the third quarter bringing total person-days lost for the period to 3,1 million - significantly higher than the figure of 2,0 million for the same period in 1991. This increase can be largely attributed to industrial action involving NUMSA which alone accounted for the loss of 1,3 million person-days for the nine-month period. The 15-day national wage strike involving



Striking NUMSA workers outside BOART - part of NUMSA's national wage action

Photo: William Matlala



NUMSA and SEIFSA, which commenced in August and involved some 60 000 workers, contributed 900 000 person-days to this overall figure, and the prolonged hospital strike involving NEHAWU and the Transvaal Provincial Administration, some 247 500 person-days up until the time the workers were dismissed.

With the recession showing no signs of abating, wages were again the dominant trigger factor at 76,3% and notably higher than the figure of 62,7% for the same period last year. This was followed by Grievances (15,5%); Dismissal/Discipline 5,0%, Recognition/Bargaining Levels 2,5% and Retrenchment 0,3%.

The Manufacturing/Metal sector accounted for 43,4% of industrial action mainly as a result of the NUMSA/ SEIFSA dispute, the Automobile Sector



(21,2%), due to strikes involving NUMSA and Toyota and the Auto Industry National Bargaining Forum. This was followed by the State at 14,1% where the hospital strikes predominated, Food (4,7%) and Retail (4,4%).

The most active unions in terms of person-days lost were: NUMSA (61,8%), NEHAWU (13%), SACCAWU (4,6%), NUM 3%, CWIU 2,9% and PPWAWU 2,7%. Unions responsible for the most strikes were:

SACCAWU	(15%)
FAWU	(12%)
NUMSA	(11%)
CWIU	(11%)
NUM	(10,8%)
NEHAWU	(8%)

(Andrew Levy Associates)

SA Labour Bulletin comments

The Andrew Levy figures show a surprising increase in strike action, given the depths of the recession. However, it is important to note that three strikes by COSATU's biggest and best organised affiliate (NUMSA in the metal and engineering and auto sectors, and at Toyota) accounted for over 60% of person-days lost.

NEHAWU's strike in the notoriously unstable hospital sector accounts for a further 13%. Apart from these strikes, the general trend in most sectors is probably a decrease in strike action.

The economic recession, retrenchment and low wage

increases are having a contradictory effect. On the one hand, the enormous pressures on workers are driving them into militant and drawn out strikes; on the other, the erosion of their bargaining position creates pressure to settle without striking. It is not clear which trend will predominate next year. ♦

(Karl von Holdt)

Most NEHAWU workers to be re-employed

Although the re-employment of 2 700 members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) hangs in the balance, the union's assistant general secretary, Neal Thobejane, says the agreement marking the end of the four-month hospital strike was a positive achievement.

The 24 September agreement allows for binding private arbitration to settle unresolved disputes falling under the jurisdiction of the Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA); a six-month moratorium on strike action; the reinstatement of 5 000 of the 7 700 striking NEHAWU members on 26 October; and the dismissal of strikers found guilty of 'misconduct'.

The strike began on 8 June when general assistants at Baragwanath staged a wild-cat walkout. Within days the strike spread to 59 hospitals throughout the country. The workers

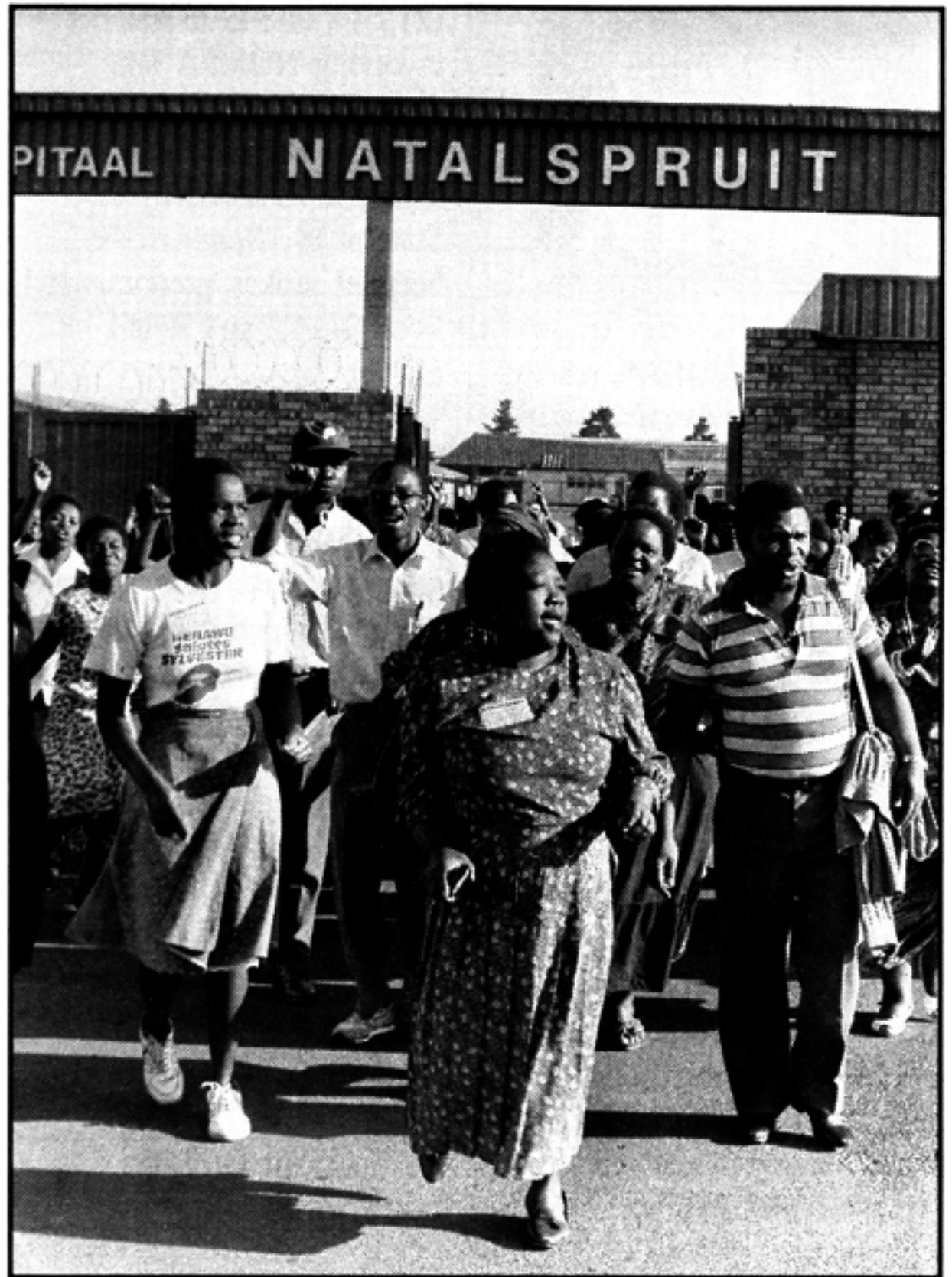
LABOUR ACTION

demanded a 15,3% across the board wage increase, a minimum wage of R724, and an interim dispute settling mechanism. Only the last demand was met.

Thobejane says the TPA's agreeing to arbitration procedures is groundbreaking because the Commission for Administration (CFA) will be forced to accept binding arbitration at national level. "Even though the union did not gain anything in wages or conditions of employment because of the strike ... any impartial arbitrator will see that wages paid by the TPA are well below those paid for comparable work in the private sector."

NEHAWU officials also argue that although 2 700 of its members could theoretically be dismissed, fewer than 200 will actually lose their jobs because the TPA will have to prove misconduct in each case. Nevertheless, 5 000 strikers who will be re-employed are not guaranteed their original positions.

Thobejane does not think the strike weakened the union. He says solidarity donations from sister unions overseas meant union coffers were not depleted, and that the internal restructuring process undertaken before the strike began was successfully concluded. Nor are workers, he claims, less likely to undertake strike action in the future although the strike "taught workers planning and organisation are necessary."



Dismissed NEHAWU workers return to work on 26 October 1992

Photo: William Matlala

Violence

The hospital strike was unusually violent, causing the National Peace Secretariat (NPS) to involve itself in brokering a deal. COSATU officials indicate this was a major factor in the TPA's decision to make concessions.

Twelve people were killed during the strike and, according to TPA figures, there were 107 incidents of intimidation, 110 assaults and 45 incidents of arson. It is not clear whether the figures include attacks

against NEHAWU members. On 12 August, for example, 30 scab workers wielding knives, pangas, and spears attacked four NEHAWU members picketing at Hillbrow Hospital while police looked on.

Union officials allege much of the strike-related violence was perpetrated by Inkatha scabs. Presumably these are the "loyal workers" Piet Wilkin of the TPA claims "enabled TPA health institutions to provide a

normal service". The *Weekly Mail* of 18-27 September describes strike-hit Baragwanath Hospital's "normal service": urine on the floor of ward bathrooms and unhygienic conditions; delays in operations and cases of patients not being fed; patients and staff refusing to talk to reporters for fear of violent reprisals from scabs.

On the positive side, NEHAWU was able to mobilise its members throughout the strike for picket lines and demonstrations. There was a daily picket line of 50 workers at Baragwanath, and smaller ones at other hospitals. Delivery of health care in much of the country was disrupted.

COSATU gets involved

One of the major issues thrown up by the strike was COSATU's questionable ability to successfully co-ordinate solidarity support for striking affiliates. NEHAWU also threatened to pull out of the Public Sector Caucus, a grouping of eleven public sector unions (mostly established staff associations), when it perceived it was getting little concrete support from the other unions.

COSATU eventually adopted the strike on 15 August – more than two months after it started – and workers in COSATU affiliates embarked on solidarity shopfloor protests on 31 August. COSATU's Neil Coleman said affiliates would be willing to block the

delivery of supplies to the 'struck' hospitals. NEHAWU officials credit COSATU with helping to resolve the strike, but criticise the federation for being slow to take concrete action.

They ask whether COSATU should be allocating federation resources to gain the support of big business. Pressure from SACCOLA was crucial in forcing concessions out of the TPA, they say, but wouldn't direct pressure on the TPA from COSATU have resolved the strike more quickly? ♦
(*Jesse Fenichel*)



NUM accept Harmony rescue plan

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has accepted the rescue plan put forward by Harmony, Rand Mines on the basis that it involves no wage cuts, retrenchments or increases in working hours.

NUM's centralised bargaining officer, Martin Nicol, said that the union has accepted the survival plan to save jobs on the mine. The plan involves blasting on Sundays, pulling workers out of low grade slopes and

redeploying them in higher grade slopes.

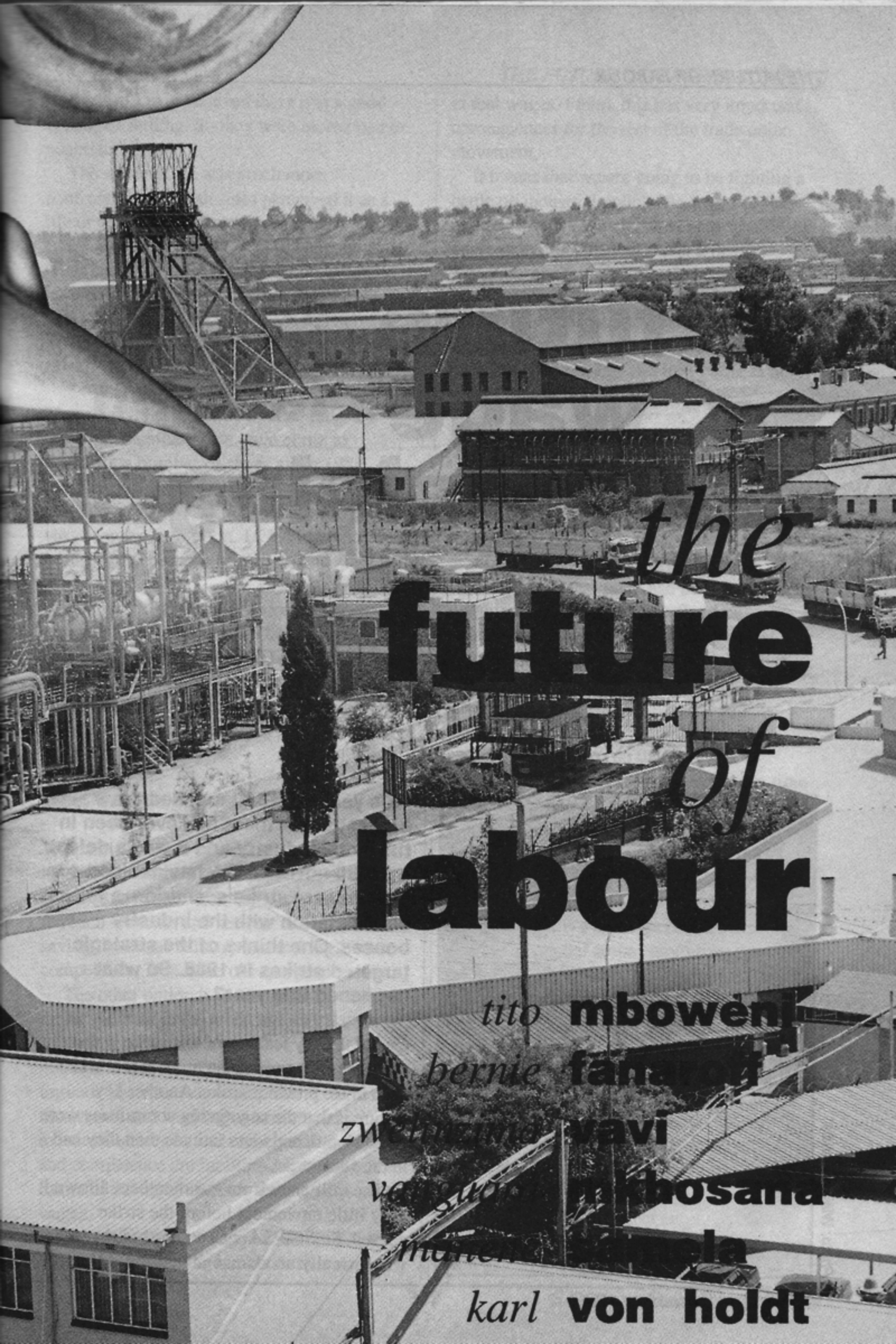
He said the closure of the mine which had retrenched 6 000 workers this year would have serious repercussions for the Free State community of Virginia. "With the rescue plan, we will be able to save 12 000 jobs, especially for unskilled black workers."

NUM is confident that the union will be able to control the process and participate in it. Harmony has also agreed to support NUM's campaign to change government policy on marginalised mines.

Nicol said that the government has not changed its policy at all. They have extended to Harmony a loan agreement and this will allow Harmony to borrow R30m, but they have to pay that money back. "The money that the government is giving is just limited to this very narrow formal aid to the company. There is no aid to the retrenched workers, which was our request."

However, the mainly white Council of Mining Unions (CMU) is still opposed to blasting on Sundays. The general secretary of CMU, Allen Liebich, said his union has made several recommendations to management, of which one was to involve extra shift work six days a week, and they were rejected. "Our executive committee which will be meeting on 4 November, will take a decision on this." ♦
(*Snuki Zikalala*)





the
future
of
labour

tito **mboweni**

bernie **fanon**

zwe **vavi**

von st **hosana**

mar **la**

karl **von holdt**

the **future**
of **wage**
bargaining

interview
with
bernie fanaroff

KARL VON HOLDT speaks to
NUMSA's national organising secretary



Photo: William Matlala

This year NUMSA launched the biggest strike there has ever been in the metal industry and it was a defeat. Up until now NUMSA has avoided a 1987 miners strike scenario – a full-on confrontation with the industry bosses. One thinks of the strategic targeted strikes in 1988. So what happened this year?

One of the key features of this strike is that the economy is in a worse situation than it was even in the previous strike. Another key feature is that the negotiating committees were given significantly less latitude than they had in the 1988 strike.

The militancy from our members allowed very little movement before the strike started. So SEIFSA was convinced that there was virtually no chance of settling. I think

that in 1988 they believed there was a good chance of settling. So they were more open to negotiation.

The whole thing was much more confrontational. Both sides perceived it as a life or death power struggle. In the circumstances of the very severe economic crisis and a very severe crisis in the industry, it became much more difficult to settle.

Why was it such a big strike, an-all-or-nothing strike, from your side?

There has been a hell of a lot of pressure from our members. We have come to deadlock a number of times since 1988. A number of times we have balloted on whether to strike. Last year we settled after a very lengthy mediation. In 1990 we decided not to strike because of the violence that had blown up.

So, our members have become very impatient. They say that we ballot them every year and then we call off the strike. They want to strike because they feel that SEIFSA has been ripping them off for some years now – and the union structures have held them back from taking action.

What was the strike really about?

We really face *two options* in the metal industry which is in crisis at present. One option is to reduce real wages, cut costs and retrench workers, and see that as a means of saving the metal industry and making it more competitive. This is the old apartheid option.

The other option is to recognise that the major problem in the metal industry is incompetent management. Their ability to manage in a competitive environment is very limited. The issues of work place skills, motivation and working conditions, of industrial strategies and managerial strategies and competence are far more important to the future of the metal industry than cutting real wages.

The NUMSA strike can be seen in that light. We did not succeed in our battle to stop a cut

in real wages. I think this has very important consequences for the rest of the trade union movement.

It means that we are going to be fighting a battle on industrial policy. Do we go for an industrial policy which can lead to significant improvement in efficiency and industry without prejudicing workers?

Or do we follow the employers' approach – cut wages and retrench people and hope to God that's going to somehow save your industry? Having lost the first battle is not a good omen.

What forced you to call off the strike?

On 25 August, after three weeks, SEIFSA sent us a letter saying the strike was non-functional to collective bargaining. The same afternoon the court interdict came out against the strike, on the grounds that there had been balloting irregularities. Then we had a flood of ultimatums saying that the strike is illegal and workers must be back at work.

Our strike committee was meeting on Thursday 27 August. We asked companies to extend the ultimatum to Monday. Most companies agreed to do that, but 230 ultimatums had been accumulated by the time our strike committee met on Thursday.

We were unlikely to be able to block dismissals. We would then be faced with tens of thousands of dismissals, where workers would be sitting for years hoping for reinstatement. We recommended a return to work as a national strike committee. People accepted that with one or two exceptions.

There was a lot of ill feeling from our members about the interdict. A lot of members said we must stand up against this thing and just ignore it. What was decisive was the mass dismissals.

There is no doubt in our minds that the mass dismissals were a strategy that Anglo initiated and pushed in SEIFSA. There were many small employers that were only too happy to go along with it, but bigger employers like Gencor and Dorbyl in general did not go along with that strategy.



Scaw workers during the national metal dispute: striking at the heart of Anglo

Photo: William Matlala

Why do you say Anglo American initiated it?

After two weeks we had a letter from Scaw Metals which is owned by Anglo American Industrial Corporation. They said their business was suffering permanent damage and that the strike was no longer functional to collective bargaining.

Two days later, on 22 August, we met with SEIFSA. They told us they did not know and could not understand the term "non-functional to collective bargaining".

Then three days later, we received a letter from SEIFSA. The letter said that SEIFSA had for some time been discussing that the strike was non-functional to collective bargaining. They had now decided that it was non-functional, and were telling their members to take whatever action was necessary to end the strike.

On Saturday morning the director of SEIFSA did not even know what the expression meant. On Tuesday he had been

discussing it for a long period! Now somebody is not telling the truth. We conclude that Anglo had twisted the arms of the others to go along with this position. As soon as that happened, and the interdict came out the same afternoon, we had a flood of ultimatums.

Anglo is very influential. It not only has a lot of subsidiaries, it also has immense power over other companies because it has big contracts with them and holds shares in many, such as Powertech.

How are you going to deal with these problems in the future?

We will campaign for Anglo American to be split up. What is clear to us is that some companies in SA, particularly Anglo, hold immense economic power and immense political power. That economic and political power enables them to frustrate what would otherwise be possibilities for negotiation within civil society. Because they centralise so much power, they can determine policy and

they can enforce that policy.

It is much easier for us to have a general strike than it is for us to win an industry strike at the present time. There is overwhelming evidence that Anglo American initiated and drove the strategy of crushing our strike by mass dismissals. That of course is what they did in 1987 as well to the miners. The mass action again – Anglo was a significant deviate in taking strong action.

Anglo is a dominant force in SACCOLA and in the business group in the National Economic Forum (NEF). You can go a long way with them in the NEF, but where they disagree on a fundamental issue with you, an issue which they perceive to be bad for their long term interests, then they will fight you on that issue. Then you have to fight them on the ground. The way things stand at the moment, Anglo and other major capitalist enterprises have the power to smash us up on the ground when we come to an industry-based fight.

So when we come to negotiating economic and industrial policy, we may start with an agenda the labour movement feels is our agenda. But we will find a process of selection taking place where capital will allow us to move on those issues that they feel are either beneficial to them or not adverse to their interests in the long term. The issues that they are adverse to they will fight on the ground and they will smash us up as we stand at the present time. That is why we want Anglo American split up. They are too powerful in our society as a whole.

How are you going to take up the campaign to split Anglo?

We have raised it with COSATU. COSATU has put it forward as a campaign - and will be meeting Anglo very soon. Anglo asked for the meeting. We hope COSATU will motivate to the ANC that it is an absolute priority to take Anglo apart. We would want it to become part of the alliance policy. Obviously that won't be easy – because there are people within the alliance who would feel that we are being unwisely confrontational with business, and

that we may scare off investment.

We don't believe that it needs to scare off investment. There is no particular benefit in having very large conglomerates in industry. We are not saying that it must be nationalisation. What we are saying is that no company should concentrate within itself the kind of power that this one does. That is, in any case, already COSATU policy.

What about rights for strikers?

SEIFSA claimed in its magazine that they were acting because NUMSA's strike was undemocratic. SEIFSA are the last ones to talk about democracy. We have asked SEIFSA for many years to negotiate facilities for balloting. They have refused – year after year.

On the one hand, they say they are defending democracy, and on the other hand, they make it impossible for us to ballot with any ease and efficiency!

It's our view that the procedure for strike action must be changed – not that you have to go through months and months of negotiating in good faith, balloting in good faith, conciliation in good faith – and then you can be stopped by a technicality.

The second point of course is mass dismissals. We believe that there has to be a change to the law on the right to strike. When you have gone through legal procedures you must have some rights. One of those rights is that you cannot be dismissed. You cannot be permanently replaced.

What are NUMSA's proposals for overcoming the crisis in the metal industry?

The successful industrialised countries are all characterised by certain common policies: a high level of investment in plant and machinery, a high level of investment in skills, a high level of investment in research and development. We do not have this in the metal industry in this country. Even in more sophisticated plants like in the car industry, the technology is not new.

We believe this industry has got structural problems that cannot be resolved simply by retrenching people and by paying others less.

You need a much broader package. We believe the key area is the network of wages, skills, grading and work organisation. We need a new look at skills and training. Link that to a different grading system, and link that to a wage system. There is obviously a danger because employers will take higher levels of skills and higher levels of investment in plant and machinery as a way of increasing productivity and decreasing employment.

But that doesn't need to follow. With proper industrial policies – and with greater control by workers over the investment process and over the policy process – it can lead to an enrichment of the whole country and growth in employment. We are now saying to our members and to the industry that we need to look at macro economic policy and industrial policy and at this area of skills, grading, training, work organisation, wages and job security.

We participate in industry growth committees in the engineering industry, in the auto industry, in the electric power industry, in the tyre industry, and we are trying to do that in the motor industry. NUMSA is participating in the statutory committee on restructuring of the auto and components industry. We will be participating in the standing committee on electronics as well. So we participate on a number of levels. Those are committees which we believe can be influenced to a point. But they need to be linked to the National Economic Forum and industry-level negotiation.

You speak about a union vision for reviving industry and placing it on a new growth path – a 'high road' of high wages, high skills and job creation. COSATU talks the same language. Is this really feasible, or is it rhetoric? Is it possible to go through restructuring in the metal industry without pain, without job loss, wage cuts, etc? And if it isn't, what are the implications for a trade

union – the contradiction of taking responsibility for restructuring which means pain for the membership?

I believe it's difficult to build an export capability without a domestic base. If you try to do that you will have savage job cuts, greater exploitation, etc.

Resources exist for SA to redirect a tremendous amount of spending, which currently is wasted, into things which will serve a political and social purpose on one hand, such as electrification, housing, roads, schools, and which on the other hand will provide a tremendous boost to industry. For example, the effects of electrification on the metal industry – and on small business – would be very substantial.

So there's a huge feedback from that kind of infrastructural development, both in political stability and in industrial development. This kind of growth in the domestic market gives industry a boost which enables it to restructure less painfully. We've observed overseas that successful restructuring happens during booms, not during a recession.

But at the moment, various industries are cutting to the bone to survive in the present day market - which is not an appropriate market! For example, the telephone industry is cutting capacity so it can remain profitable in the present day limited market. But clearly, for social and political reasons, that is not the appropriate market. They should be gearing up to reach a much larger market in future – the millions who do not have telephones.

That is why we are arguing to generate infrastructural projects that will provide massive markets for companies and enable them to restructure.

Of course the question arises whether we should be helping capitalists to get richer. That's where the socialist debate is providing no guidance. We are forced to deal with it pragmatically, without any theoretical underpinning.

What is the implication of industry restructuring for plant bargaining?

My own personal view is that industry-level bargaining must cover wage levels and similar basic issues, so you can limit differentials and improve conditions throughout the industry. But other things you have to negotiate at plant or company level.

Restructuring of industry must occur through national policy changes, but re-organisation tends to occur in a way that is specific to each company. It is very clear from our shopstewards that multinationals are well advanced in company restructuring – breaking plants down into smaller business units with independent managers, flattening the managerial hierarchy, etc. It is clear these innovations are going to be to the detriment not only of the workers, but the working class more broadly, unless we can move to control them. It is equally clear that economic forces won't allow us simply to stop this restructuring.

So I think restructuring is the key issue for negotiating at company level. In some companies, management is introducing very sophisticated changes, in others we may want to introduce them. We think the issues of wages, training, grades, work organisation is the vehicle to do it.

Many of these methods of re-organising work increase the potential power of workers. Just-in-Time for example immensely increases the potential power that workers have. So does Team Work. So does flattening management hierarchies. The problem then it to maintain militant organisation, but that is a different question. Reorganisation of work does not automatically oppress and co-opt workers – it *tends* to, in the absence of militant organisation and correct strategies. If you go for a life-or-death attack on restructuring and you lose - workers will be demoralised. *Then* they will be co-opted.

One of the mistakes that I think we have made is not having a clear enough policy on



Shopfloor restructuring: new arena for union initiatives

Photo: William Matlala

how to deal with company and plant level issues. The Australians decided that it was not realistic to try and involve the entire membership of the union in every debate on macro economic policy. What was possible, and successful, was to involve the membership strongly and actively in things that directly affected them like the wages and grading, skills and work organisation.

There are two problems. One is lack of workplace strength. The other is lack of capacity. Our shopstewards and our organisers are going to be swamped. There is no question that the expertise that management can bring to bear is going to make it extremely difficult for

the unions to direct those agendas. So we are faced with a very severe capacity problem.

It is extremely difficult to go into a very sophisticated company and have a real influence on its direction of restructuring. We have to build power around that.

What makes it worse is that we don't get the support from academics in this country. They don't provide us with the research we need.

How is the union responding to the question of productivity?

A key issue facing us all, both internationally and locally, is *the question of efficiency*. How do the trade unions deal with the question of efficiency as international trade becomes a dominant factor in the next couple of decades of world history? We have to deliver the goods, both for our own members and politically. That means we've got to face up to the issue of efficiency.

How do we confront the issue of efficiency in a positive way where we can lead the agenda, but do it in the direction of socialism? I think perhaps this is the key issue: how does socialism approach the issue of efficiency? And how do trade unions approach the issue of efficiency?

In the first place, unions have to take efficiency or productivity seriously. The second step is to say how do you distribute the benefits of efficiency - that's social democracy. And the next step is to say how do you control industry which has become productive, and use it for the benefit of society as a whole? That's the area of socialism. These questions will have to be debated as we go along.

What is happening at Eskom?

We are taking Eskom as a model. Eskom is a parastatal corporation. We believe that even in a capitalist society the mode of management and control in a parastatal corporation must be significantly different. There should be a far higher level of worker control or influence in the decision making. We recently had a summit meeting with Eskom where there were many in-principal agreements. For instance,

the Electricity Council which makes policy should be restructured.

Also, there should be a careful evaluation of what the role of workers and trade unions is in decision making at every level of Eskom structures. It will be a very important exercise for us to develop ideas on participative management or of work place democracy by using companies like Eskom.

This is an area of ownership we should be dealing with - at the very least as a laboratory. Eskom, Armscor, TELKOM, Transnet - we don't mind their operating as commercial entities, but the way they are run as parastatals must change. There you are raising the whole issue of ownership - how society participates in management and ownership. It may well mean that we decide commercial management should continue, but that the community decides policy.

Let us turn to the recent settlement in the metal industry. For the first time there is an agreement on a single level of bargaining wages and other issues contained in the Industrial Council Main Agreement (MA). The settlement precludes plant level negotiations on these issues unless such bargaining arrangements already exist. Employers have been demanding this for some years, and NUMSA has resisted. What is the significance?

We have had a long debate about the weaknesses of the Industrial Council (IC), and about our keeping it alive. Centralised bargaining has been under assault from a number of quarters - the Department of Manpower, the Presidents Council, a number of employers. And of course the international trend is away from centralised bargaining.

So we are responding to all of this, and trying to strengthen centralised bargaining. Plant level bargaining on the same issues already settled at the IC undermines centralised bargaining. We have seen that in our strikes, and with companies like Barlow Rand. In fact, we have proposed that the house agreements,

which are separate from the MA, be scrapped too.

The wage negotiating scenario seems incoherent at the moment. You have the house agreements separate from the main agreement, you have historical wage negotiating arrangements on top of the MA in a number of companies which will continue, and you have the council MA which up until now set minima, but this year set actual increases. Has the union got a view of where this should all go in order to become coherent?

Our leadership believes that there should be no increase in the number of plant level arrangements which allow bargaining *on the same issues* as covered in the MA. Bargaining on other issues, such as the ones I have already mentioned, at plant level or company level is essential. Secondly, negotiating increases on *actual* wages, rather than on minima, at the IC prevents companies like Barlow Rand from undermining centralised bargaining by offering increases *above* the minima. Their wages are already higher, so a percentage increase on the actual wage means a bigger increase. This absorbs what they would otherwise give in plant level negotiations.

It's not automatic and it's not complete, but it will *tend* to discourage further plant level bargaining on those issues. So there will a gradual tendency towards centralisation. But it will require a far more coherent strategy on our part as to what we bargain at what level.

Does this movement towards centralisation not open the danger that companies which are rich and have a greater capacity to pay, will earn super profits because they will no longer face pressure at plant level to pay much bigger increases?

There is that danger. But firstly, many such companies have, in any case, always refused to negotiate wages at plant level, despite our

struggles to force them to do so – Anglo companies, for example. Secondly, it is not clear that wage bargaining is the best way to distribute those extra benefits. We are saying that there must be a whole *area* of negotiation around efficiency and restructuring, and one of them must be negotiating the investment of surplus. The benefits of increasing efficiency must be used to improve the conditions of workers *and* to provide jobs. This is not the same as profit sharing, which would benefit only the workers in that specific company rather than workers more broadly. There is a danger of creating a labour aristocracy, especially as workers get more skilled. This needs more debate.

You mentioned changes to law as well as necessary changes in labour market institutions. What kind of changes do you want to see?

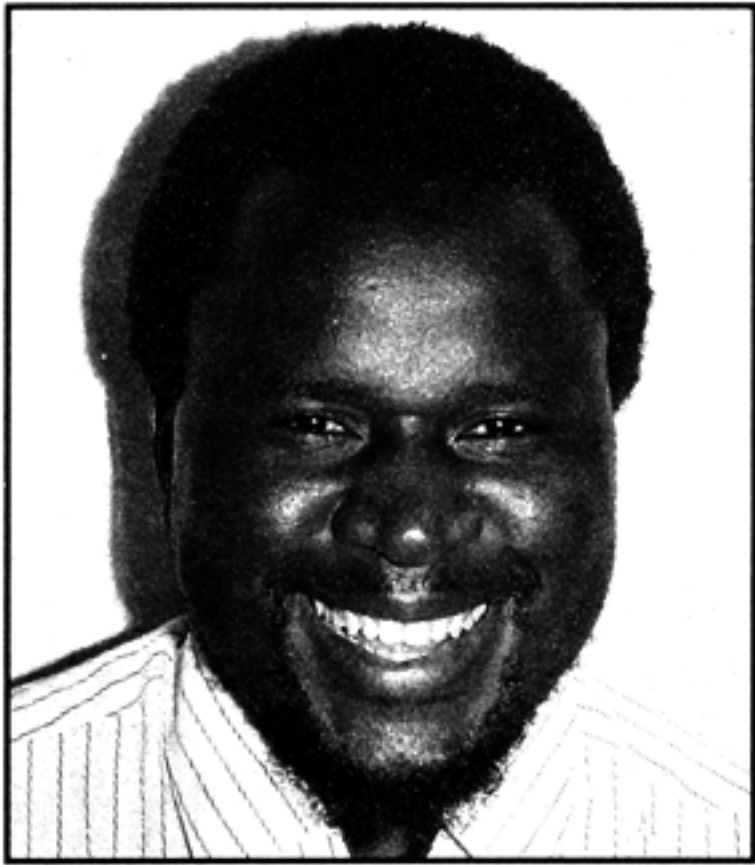
There is a need for the labour movement now to carry out a law review project. In the past, we looked at labour law. Obviously there are a wide range of other laws that effect the labour movement. We want laws that help democratisation in the economy, anti-trust laws, democratisation of media. All of those things are important.

Labour market institutions and statutory bodies is another very important area. Labour market institutions up to now have not really been vehicles for the formulation of industry policy, but they should be. They should be an integral part of it. There are other statutory bodies – research councils, consumer councils – which need to be beefed up/restructured. They need to become something very different, much more active and capable of dealing with policy debates.

We need a legal framework that enables you to develop rights on the shopfloor and in the company much further than previously. You would perhaps want to have rights that facilitate the development of democratic practices in business. If those rights affect ownership, so be it. ☆

the **role of the** **trade union m** *in the* **future**

Photo: William Matlala



TITO MBOWENI from
the ANC's Department
of Economic Planning
gives his views*

When our struggle against apartheid led to a partial victory in February 1990 and De Klerk was forced to unban the liberation movement, a new phase in the struggle for democracy opened up. It enabled us to formalise the tripartite alliance between the ANC, COSATU and the SACP. This alliance is based on two traditions. Firstly, there was the alliance between the ANC, the SACP and SACTU which had been established in the fifties and continued to exist in the long years in exile. Secondly, the new unions that were established in the seventies became part of the mass democratic movement alliance of popular, mass based organisations inside the country which emerged in the eighties.

The relationship between labour and capital ✓

This alliance is important for many reasons which go beyond the current struggle against apartheid. This is in a sense the beginnings of a possible pact amongst the forces in the oppressed communities which will find expression in the reconstruction period. Much as the relationship between the democratic state, the union movement, civics, student and teacher organisations and other organs of civil society is important, so is the relationship between capital and labour.

In the past there were two competing, diametrically opposed positions on the relationship between labour and capital. The

* Paper presented at the 36th Annual Convention of the IPM on "South Africa in transition: making human capital work", Sun City, 21 October 1992.

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more dominant conventional economic view portrayed trade unions as a distortion in the labour market. According to this school of thought, trade union action drove up the price of labour and resulted in less employment than was socially and economically optimal.

The policy implications of this position were simple: smash or limit the powers of trade unions in the interest of maintaining perfect competition in the labour market. This would allow the price of labour to be determined, like that of any other commodity (such as an orange or a bicycle), by the 'objective' forces of supply and demand.

Such arguments were of course supported vigorously by many within the business community and the richer members of our society. But this is often a self-interested ideological position. In a market economy, resources get channelled towards areas where there is greatest (monetary) demand. Thus, in a highly unequal society such as ours, the structure of production tends to reflect the needs of the rich rather than the poor. It is thus not surprising that free-market arguments fail to appeal to the labour movement and the poorer sections in South Africa. They do not buy the idea that labour is simply another commodity or that the benefits accruing to the rich are ultimately in the interests of the poor.

The alternative, radical, perspective was very different. In this school of thought, the capitalist class was able to exploit workers precisely because they were disorganised and relatively powerless. The bourgeois state of

course supported the business community against labour. Economic dynamics were portrayed in terms of class struggle - as a war between labour and capital over the distribution of economic surplus between wages and profits. The policy implications were equally simple: empower trade unions as a means of limiting (if not eradicating) the exploitative potential of employers. In extreme versions of the argument, the 'workers state' acting on behalf of the workers was seen as a far more advanced manager of industry than the private capitalist class.

However, with the collapse of the commandist central planning system in Eastern Europe, it is now clear that state centrist responses to the failures of the market system are not adequate.

Conflict and co-operation

It seems that these days both the old-style conventional free market and state commandist positions lack intellectual currency. It is now widely recognised that the market system of economic organisation involves a simultaneously conflictual and co-operative relationship between labour and capital in both the production and distribution of economic surpluses. The class struggle is very real, but if workers withhold their labour or business people their capital and their management skills, then both sides lose. Put more positively, where workers and employers co-operate in improving the competitive position of the firm, both sides benefit to a

great extent. It seems that the Japanese system bears some eloquent testimony of this. Increasingly, debates within economic theory now emphasize the need to see labour as more than a commodity or as merely a variable cost of production. Recent evidence suggests that a co-operative partnership between labour and capital is a crucial determinant of stability and international competitiveness.

Labour as partner

Although fundamental conflicts of interest will always remain between labour and capital, the co-operative nature of economic production should serve as a basis for consultation and negotiation about specific economic and social issues. However, for the economic system to acquire any legitimacy whatsoever, organised labour must be accorded a position of power and influence. Business must come round to accept labour as a partner in production rather than simply a cost to be minimised. Programmes to achieve higher levels of productivity and profitability should be agreed upon by business and the trade union movement.

The obvious question which presents itself at this point – particularly amongst business people – is whether the labour movement will act responsibly if given greater power and influence. The more cynical among business people may believe that the unions will simply go on a wage spree and destroy what is left of the South African economy.

We are convinced that this is an unduly pessimistic position. The lessons from Germany, Sweden, Austria and other countries suggest that workers respond very well to the need to keep their firms competitive. It doesn't take much for a worker to understand that her/his position is infinitely better off if the enterprise stays afloat and grows, than if it collapses under the burden of excessive costs and lower levels of productivity.

However, for workers to make this judgement, they must be in a position to evaluate key trade-offs inherent in the wage demand and incorporate them into their strategic thinking. If organised workers are well informed (and trust

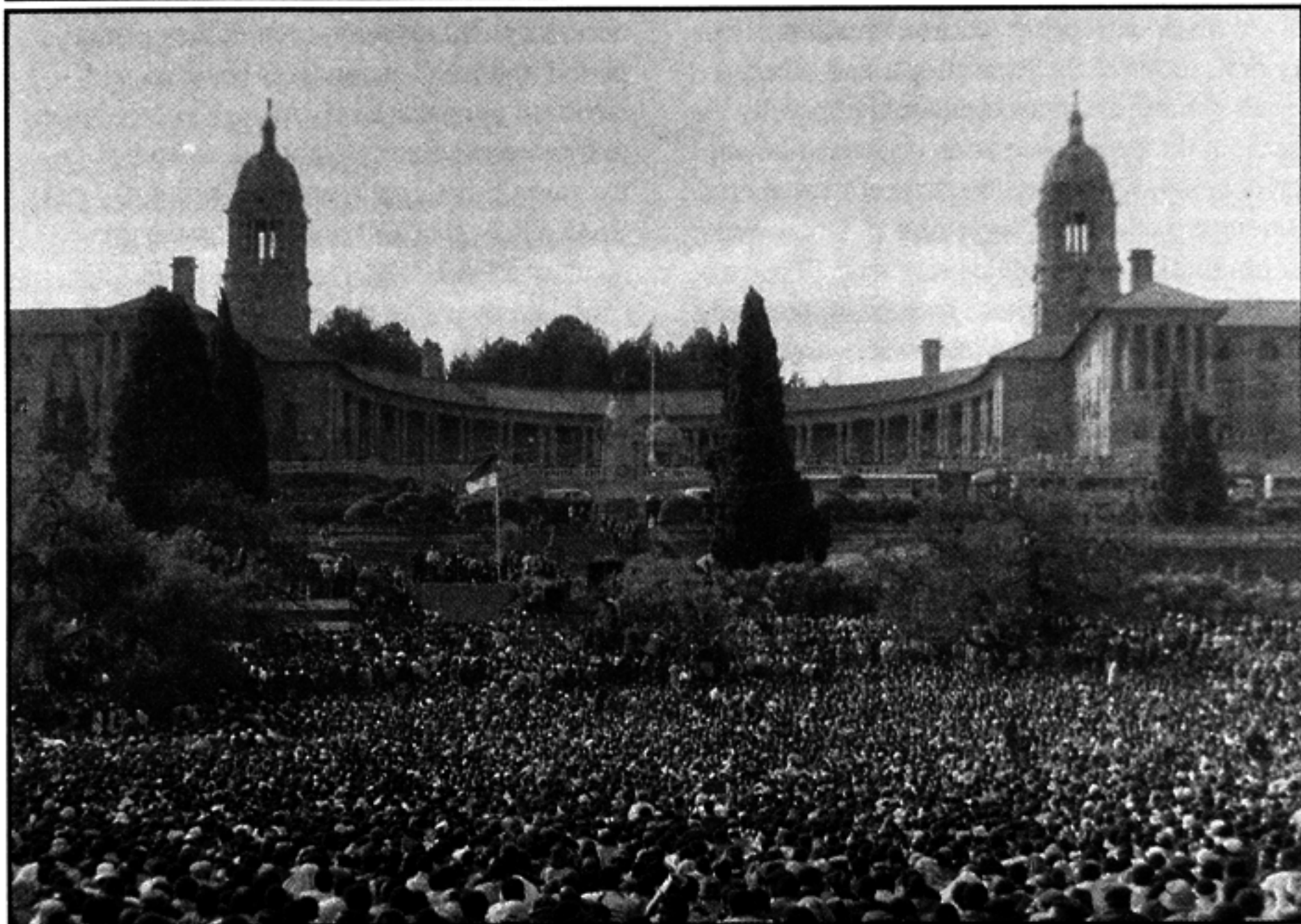
the information) about the possibility of wage growth eroding the competitiveness of firms, then they will be more prepared to co-ordinate their wage demands (as they do in Germany and Japan) with increases in productivity. This entails a totally new and trusting approach to the relationship between capital and labour in South Africa. Management will have to alter its secretive stance and provide unions with detailed information about the company's economic position and include workers in key decision-making processes.

The need to boost productivity

Under these conditions, there need not necessarily be a conflict between the interests of maintaining profitability and the demands of the labour movement for a living wage. The key factor here is productivity growth. If productivity improves fast enough, then the South African economy will be able to finance both living wages and growing profitability. The challenge facing this country, in the light of the above, is thus to boost productivity – and to do so in a way which generates further employment.

Trade unions often respond in a hostile manner to calls for improved productivity as a condition for wage increases. They feel that workers are being blamed for our country's poor productivity performance. However, as any economist or business person knows, productivity is primarily related to technology development, availability of skilled labour and the character of management. It is our opinion that whilst further education and training of the workforce will boost productivity, the primary responsibility of improving productivity rests with management.

Management in this country needs to respond positively and immediately to the challenge and take the lead in improving productivity. If this is done in conjunction with trade union support, then we are convinced that South Africa faces a bright economic future. Management must play its part. The trade union movement is already focusing on these issues. For example, COSATU has initiated an Industrial Strategy Research Project which is taking the issue of productivity



ANC/COSATU/SACP rally at the Union Buildings - what will happen to the alliance when the ANC is the official occupant?

Photo: William Matlala

and improving South Africa's export performance very seriously.

There is growing room for co-operation between management and labour. If the two sides can enter into a more trusting relationship, then there need not be a major trade-off between a living wage and productivity growth.

What of the future?

The pressure on unions to identify with the goals of national development will be considerable under a democratic government. In post-colonial Africa and other less developed countries, for example, governments have expected unions to play a dual role: first, that of sacrificing their narrow interests to the overall demands of national development; and second, the representation of the economic interests of their rank and file members. The argument for this reversal of the primary role of unions to be developmental rather than representational has been based on the belief

that trade unions represent a small and allegedly privileged proportion of the labour force in these societies.

This post-colonial temptation to co-opt or worse still crush the trade union movement is a real one. We are of the opinion that this temptation can best be avoided through the development of methods and institutions which seek to increase mutual co-operation and joint programmes whilst ensuring the independence of the trade unions and other organs of civil society. In this case for example, two sets of Reconstruction Accords could be entered into. Let us call these *Reconstruction Accord A* and *Reconstruction Accord B*.

Reconstruction Accord A would involve an alliance between the ANC, the union movement, the civics movement, women's groups/movements, youth and student organisations, mass organisations for educational restructuring, associations of the unemployed and the aged, small and medium

sized black enterprises, consumer unions, organisations of the rural people and others. Such a multipartite accord would hopefully prevent the emergence of an organised labour aristocracy. This would be an accord anchored amongst the hitherto oppressed and excluded communities of our society.

Because many of these sectors are precisely the weakest, the poorest and most marginalised in our society they will experience the most difficulty in developing stable national organisations. For that reason, institutional representation on all national economic bodies should be guaranteed – as an active stimulus to these sections of our population to form national organisations which would occupy the representational space provided. Furthermore, the state should be required to make resources available – in a manner which does not compromise their independence – for the purpose of supporting and assisting the growth of such organisations.

The aim of such a restructuring accord would be to ensure that the agenda of national reconstruction is characterised by the demands, wishes and objectives of the forces of transformation. Such an organised pact would better ensure still that there is a better impact on the outcome of the negotiated pacts with other powerful forces in our society.

Reconstruction Accord B would be an agreement negotiated with other forces which are not included in *Reconstruction Accord A*. The most important of which will be the private sector, in particular the corporate sector. But there may be others who have to be part of the accord and whose importance will render them critical for the success of such an accord. In the negotiations for *Reconstruction Accord B*, an agenda for South Africa's reconstruction will indeed begin to emerge and the trade union movement – given its unique position – will without a doubt play a key role in this.

Of course such a multi-partite accord does not rule out a social contract between employers and labour. We would welcome such initiatives. However, for such social contracts to be effective and successful, strong nation-wide organisations are absolutely

necessary. That is why, even in the current period, the ANC encourages business and labour to pursue actively their respective plans to forge greater unity among their bodies. In the case of the employer organisations, SACCOLA, SACOB and AHI on the one hand, and FABCOS, NAFCO, CBE, CBF, CTA and others on the other, need to establish representative national organisations; COSATU, FEDSAL and NACTU should as well continue efforts to establish one trade union centre which will include all the organised working people in South Africa.

Broad-based alliances

The approach we are suggesting is one of broad based alliances and solutions that impact positively on the South African economy, the poorest people and the general development of our society. In our view, this approach does not necessarily involve a complete rupture with all existing institutions. Some institutions are reformable whilst others are not. In other areas entirely new institutional arrangements will need to be established such as the multi-partite *Reconstruction Accords A and B*.

Let me mention a few examples of those institutions that we would like to radically reform. We support COSATU's demand for the restructuring of the National Manpower Commission (NMC) – although we prefer to call it a National Labour Commission – from a purely advisory body to a representative structure dominated by the negotiating parties – organised labour and employers – and in which the existing arm of government (the Department of Manpower) is present.

At our recent National Conference on ANC Policy Guidelines we gave strong emphasis on the need to develop human resources. They are our greatest asset and source of national wealth. The ANC believes that without massive and consistent investment in our human resources we will be unable to achieve the economic development and growth that we need to ensure a productive economy.

The ANC is committed to the establishment of a national training fund to promote human resource development. The fund will include a

levy on employers. There will be a vigorous skills upgrading programme, especially for the most disadvantaged sectors of our society, in particular women, youth and rural people. The ANC's human resources policy has the objective of active labour market policies aimed at developing and directing human resources to areas of social and economic need, including rural development.

Training will be linked to economic policy and form an integral part of the restructuring of the economy. All workers should have the right to paid education and training leave. Retrenched and unemployed workers should have the right to retraining to help secure employment in other sectors. Access to education and training should be available throughout a person's life to enable her/him to keep pace with technological changes and continually develop his/her abilities in order to achieve secure employment and a rising standard of living. Provision should be made for the recognition of skills which people already have. Such recognition should be linked to and

public sector, the recent disruption of the hospital sector could have been averted. We also reject the current structure of the labour force in the public sector where separate employment laws exist for permanently (predominantly white) employees and temporary (predominantly black) employees. The development of increased security of tenure for certain public service employees is a necessary condition for an effective affirmative policy in that sector.

Conclusion X

The challenge facing semi-industrialised countries such as South Africa is to fashion new institutional arrangements between labour, capital, the democratic state and other organs of civil society. Indeed the crux of the successful transition to a new democratic order lies precisely upon such institutional innovations – strong labour movements can propel transition to democracy, but this requires both institutional innovation and

The challenge facing semi-industrialised countries such as South Africa is to fashion new institutional arrangements between labour, capital, the democratic state and other organs of civil society.

integrated with a national accreditation system.

The ANC Labour relations policy is aimed at fostering industrial peace and the settlements of dispute through bringing our labour law into line with the recommendations contained in ILO conventions. We support their recommendations to extend the coverage of the Labour Relations Act to sectors of the economy that are not covered or have inadequate legislation such as farm and domestic workers.

Of particular importance are the recommendations on the need to remove the current restrictions on strike action to place South Africa in line with international principles of freedom of association. I might as well add that had adequate structures for collective bargaining, conciliation procedures and provision for legal strikes existed in the

economic strategies with a high degree of sophistication.

This is the challenge that the ANC has committed itself to. If we are to succeed in this daunting task of economic and social reconstruction, the economy will need to be healthy, that is, continuing growth and profitability. We are far more likely to succeed if the economy is growing than if the economy continues along its present path of decline. But clearly, the democratic state will not be able to achieve the desired growth and development path on its own. That is why the emphasis in this paper has been on the need for the active co-operation of the democratic state, the trade union movement, business and all other organs of civil society. Reconstruction Accord A and B are proposals to achieve this required form of co-operation. ☆

KARL VON HOLDT argues that a new form of trade unionism – strategic unionism – is emerging in South Africa. What is it and what are its prospects?

what is the future of labour?



The signing of the 1990 Laboria Minute was a turning point. Suddenly the trade unions found themselves on a new terrain. Resistance was the terrain they knew best. And now

the biggest and most protracted campaign of resistance – consisting of demonstrations, overtime bans, massive stayaways, a thousand creative disruptions on the shopfloor, international support – had suddenly produced a highly significant series of legal reforms. Even more significantly, it had opened up new institutional space within the state apparatus: participation in the National Manpower Commission (NMC).

We are still at this turning point. The shift in terrain has been far more dramatic and sudden than envisaged when COSATU and NACTU launched the anti-LRA campaign and Workers Charter campaigns. The De Klerk reforms have opened up a tremendously fluid and contested situation as a range of forces struggle to entrench their interests in preparation for a

democratic South Africa.

This has compressed immediate demands and the longer term vision into one process. Thus the Laboria Minute led not only to immediate changes to labour law, but also to ambitious proposals from COSATU for transforming the NMC from a toothless advisory body of government appointees, into a tripartite negotiating forum with powers to place legislation before parliament. Such a body would lay the basis for negotiated active labour market policy in a democratic South Africa.

“Solving economic problems”

The fluid and contested situation has led to further breakthroughs. COSATU responded to the government’s unilateral implementation of VAT by spearheading a broad anti-VAT coalition. This campaign gathered so much momentum that COSATU shifted the emphasis of the campaign to the demand for a national economic negotiating forum.

By the middle of this year, business and government had agreed to the formation of the National Economic Forum (NEF). Once again, the success of resistance had culminated in a

new institutional breakthrough. The NEF – despite current government obstruction – will give COSATU and NACTU (joined by FedSal, the moderate and mostly white Federation of Salaried Employees) unprecedented access to decision-making on macro-economic policy and restructuring.

Speaking about the NEF demand during the campaign, COSATU general secretary Jay Naidoo said the NEF would “identify the framework within which we are going to try to resolve economic problems in this country we will be able to bring about a fundamental transformation of our country at an economic level” [*SA Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 2].

Naidoo’s words point to two new ideas in union thinking. Firstly, he sees the NEF as a forum for “resolving economic problems”. COSATU, by its participation, assumes that it has an interest, a role and a responsibility for *solving economic problems*. This introduces a completely new development into a trade union movement forged in opposition and resistance.

Secondly, Naidoo argues that through such forums the labour movement will be able to drive a *fundamental economic transformation*. This is a new concept of how radical social change can take place: in the period of apartheid and resistance there was a deep rooted belief among many labour activists that fundamental transformation could only take place through a revolutionary seizure of power. Participation in the NMC and the campaign for the NEF reflected – and called forth – a new strategic perspective. COSATU now combines mass struggle and organisation with wide-ranging negotiations and participation in tripartite forums.

Does this changing strategy reflect a new and more sophisticated perspective on how to transform society? Or is it a sign that COSATU has changed its objectives, that it is now ready for an accommodation with capital and the state?

There is no clarity within COSATU on these issues. Events have moved so fast that the federation has been unable to develop a coherent view on the implications of the NEF

and other forums. There are debates and deeply conflicting views within the federation. Many fear that it may become the first step towards a ‘social contract’ and accommodation with the regime of capital. Others see it as the only way to build working class power and influence, and establish ‘building blocks for socialism’.

Industry restructuring

The emergence of a new kind of unionism in response to new challenges is not confined to developments at the level of the NMC and NEF.

In many sectors trade unions are facing an increasing number of retrenchments and factory closures as the stagnation of manufacturing gets worse. They are also finding it difficult to win wage increases equal to or above the rate of inflation. As unions put the demand for moratoria on retrenchments on the negotiating table, employers respond with demands for productivity increases. Trade unions argue that productivity is linked to the broader issue of industrial restructuring and growth, and propose that these issues should be negotiated in joint forums.

Thus the mining summit was established in 1991 to negotiate the down scaling of the crisis-ridden gold mining industry. Industry growth forums were also established in the auto and metal sectors. None of these has been very fruitful as yet.

The most successful industry restructuring negotiations have taken place in the clothing and textile industry. Here the COSATU-affiliated SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) reached agreement with employers on a structure of tariffs and subsidies for the cotton-textiles-clothing pipeline which was intended to boost the industry and increase competitiveness. This plan foundered when the government said there was no cash available for the subsidies. Tripartite discussions are continuing.

Pioneering agreements on production schedules and production bonuses were reached last year in the auto and gold mining industries. However, both these agreements



COSATU occupies Manpower offices during the LRA campaign in 1990: beginning of a new era?

Photo: Peter auf der Heyde

have been dogged by conflicting interpretations over how they were to be implemented, and this year NUM refused to renew the agreement in gold mining.

“Becoming centrally involved”

Despite the lack of progress and break down of most of these negotiations, they mark a shift in union attitudes as profound as those accompanying participation in the NMC or the NEF. They are also highly controversial, even within the unions involved in such negotiations. Again, many militant activists fear that the unions are being co-opted into “managing capitalism better”.

Yet the pro-engagement attitude is part of a much more far-ranging vision of transformation. NUM assistant general secretary, Marcel Golding, has put this view forcefully. “Any industry has to undergo transformation and change,” he said last year. “There are two ways we can respond. We can either stand by while the process takes place or we can become centrally involved. Our union will fight to be a central player in the management of transition ...

“For us the struggle for greater control over

the production process is starting with participation ... We are now talking about one of the most critical areas itself, the workplace, and participation in decisions made at the workplace. We are firing the first shots in beginning to challenge managerial prerogative in the production process. We’ve already challenged managerial prerogative on dismissals and other abuses. But I think through this we are beginning to challenge management’s prerogative in decision-making over what they believed was their exclusive right - setting targets, setting the production plan” [*SA Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 2].

A new kind of unionism

The developments outlined above are signs of a new kind of trade unionism in South Africa.

Faced with political reform and the reconstitution of South African society on the one hand, and economic crisis on the other, trade unions are beginning to develop far reaching policies for new labour legislation, constitutional rights, economic growth, job creation, industrial restructuring, industrial training, and reorganising the workplace.

These are nothing less than proposals for a

completely new industrial relations system. It is an industrial relations system not divorced from economic decision-making, but intimately linked to it. The leadership of the trade unions realises that the economy – and manufacturing industry especially – has to be restructured if it is to become internationally competitive. This will involve new technology, increased productivity, higher quality and increased levels of skill.

As Marcel Golding says, the labour movement can either oppose this change, or be at its centre: this amounts to a new union manifesto to drive the process of change, to shape it and to empower the labour movement through it.

This emerging vision of a new kind of trade unionism has broad similarities to trade unionism elsewhere. In Sweden and Australia it has been called *strategic unionism*. It involves a strategic vision of a labour driven process of social change.

Strategic unionism in SA

Strategic unionism is only beginning to emerge, in practice and in vision, in South Africa. It emerges in negotiations in one place, in proposals in another, and in strategic comments somewhere else. It is not yet a fully developed strategic vision.

Furthermore, the emergence of strategic unionism in SA, and the conscious parallels with union strategies in Australia and Scandinavia, raise crucial questions. What possibilities and prospects are there for strategic unionism in SA? Are there dangers in such a strategy? How would it differ from strategic unionism elsewhere? Is it possible to link strategic unionism to a socialist rather than a social democratic perspective?

It is important to consider these questions so as to chart a clear strategy for the road ahead. As a contribution to the debate, I try in this article to put forward a clear definition of a form of strategic unionism which I believe is possible and necessary in our country.

Strategic unionism is a strategy for far reaching reform of the state, of the workplace,

of economic decision-making and of civil society. It is a strategy driven by a broad-based coalition of interest groups, at the centre of which is the labour movement. Strategic unionism develops a step-by-step programme of radical reforms – each of which extends the arena of democratic decision-making, and deepens the power of the working class.

Such a programme of radical reforms will inevitably run into the resistance and counter strategies of the dominant interests in our society. At the core of these opposing interests will be the power of capital. But there will be others: the state apparatus inherited from apartheid, the bulk of the privileged white population, the emerging elite among the oppressed.

Thus strategic unionism must be based on independent labour and popular organisation, with the capacity to mobilise and struggle. NUMSA's agreement on production targets in the auto industry demonstrates this clearly. Several employers tried to use the agreement to impose new production schedules on workers. Only the militant capacity of workers to fight back prevented this from happening.

Building alliances

Strategic unionism cannot succeed if it exists as a perspective in the trade union movement alone. This is especially true in South Africa where so many are excluded from formal employment.

Firstly, the labour movement itself needs to build a broader unity – between COSATU and NACTU, between blue collar workers and white collar workers organised in Fedsal and other organisations; and between white and black workers. The labour movement also needs to define itself more broadly to include not only trade unions but labour supporting organisations and intellectuals.

Secondly, the labour movement needs to build a broad coalition of popular organisation and interests around a programme of economic, social and political reform, democracy and development [see Bird and Schreiner in *SA Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 6; also Alec Erwin in *African Communist* No 129].

A programme for the trade unions cannot achieve radical reform of the workplace without a national strategy of radical reform in all arenas of civil society as well as the state. It is also crucial that the movement for radical reform is a majority movement – that is, it is capable of winning elections.

This introduces the third key condition for the success of strategic unionism. The labour movement needs to build a durable alliance with a progressive political party capable of winning elections. In South Africa this means the ANC. Strategic unionism requires the radical reform of the industrial relations arena and of state institutions. Only a government which supports the perspective of strategic unionism and which has the political will to act decisively can ensure this.

Reforming the state, reforming civil society

The industrial relations arena, like any arena of civil society, is structured both by autonomous organisations of civil society which are independent of the state (eg trade unions, employer organisations) and by the state itself [see box on p 35].

The current industrial relations arena will have to be changed to strengthen labour and curb the powers of capital. A government supporting strategic unionism will have to:

- extend the legal rights of workers
- extend workers rights to information and consultation on all decision making in the workplace
- ensure the establishment of national industrial councils in all sectors of the economy
- ensure that the industrial relations system facilitates democratic economic decision-making in the workplace, in industrial councils and in the NEF
- strengthen tripartite institutions such as the NMC, the NEF, the National Training Board, etc.

As regards the state, there will have to be a general democratisation of state institutions, on the principles of transparency of decision-making and accountability. New

values will also have to be developed in the state bureaucracy. More specifically the department of manpower and the various economic ministries will have to be made more accessible and open to the trade union movement. They will have to provide research, information and other resources to strengthen labours' economic and workplace role.

For example, currently whatever industrial policy exists is formulated and implemented by among others the department of trade and industry, the board of trade and tariffs, and the industrial development corporation. At present these are virtually inaccessible to the trade union movement. Unless they become accessible, trade union attempts to develop industrial policy will have little impact.

It is clear that such sweeping reforms of the state and civil society can only be implemented by a strong government closely aligned to the trade unions and other popular movements.

What prospects?

What are the prospects of making these reforms? COSATU managed to build an impressively broad popular coalition around the anti-VAT campaign. However, key sectors are extremely weak - the youth, the civics and the rural areas. NUMSA officials Adrienne Bird and Jeff Schreiner, have suggested that a democratic state should make resources available for the strengthening of these organisation of civil society [*SA Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 6].

On the other hand, the ANC itself has not yet developed a coherent policy towards labour. Many unionists fear that big business, the IMF, and the World Bank are increasingly influential in the top ranks of the ANC's leadership.

At the moment, the ANC relates to COSATU through the structures of the tripartite alliance, that is, at a political level. It does not have a labour department or portfolio through which to liaise with the labour movement on labour issues. It is not at all clear that a future ANC government will implement the far reaching reforms required by strategic unionism.

Civil society and power

Civil society is not an autonomous zone of self organisation and self activity, as many argue. It is regulated and structured by the state, as well as by the activities and struggles of autonomous organisations. The industrial relations arena, for example, is quite clearly structured by labour legislation, and state institutions or state-established institutions, such as the Department of Manpower and the industrial court, the NMC or the industrial councils. These regulations and institutions will be designed to have a specific effect on trade unions, employers and industrial relations generally. Thus, the Wiehahn reforms were intended to contain and incorporate the emerging unions. The 1988 amendments were designed to weaken and undermine the unions.

Struggles of trade unions and employers will in turn shape the practice of these institutions – or under certain circumstances force the government to reform them. This happened with the NMC.

Strategic unionism seeks an industrial relations system that extends the power and rights of labour, and curbs those of capital. To seek 'self regulation of the relation between capital and labour' is to ensure the continued subordination of the working class to capital.

The trade union movement, financed by the contributions of its members and by solidarity funds from trade unions overseas, can never be as well-resourced as the organisations of capital and other wealthy and powerful interests in society. This is one of the key obstacles to the success of strategic unionism. Overcoming this problem requires a radical reform, not only of state institutions, but also of other institutions in civil society.

Reform of the universities and technikons is essential to provide the trade union movement with access to information, research and education. Likewise, access to the press and other media is essential to win public support for the policies of labour. In order to facilitate these reforms, the labour movement needs to build broad alliances with the intelligentsia, professionals and their organisations. ❖

An active and mobilised base

There is a general trend towards centralised bargaining in South Africa. This is essential for strategic unionism. Centralised bargaining gives unions:

- the capacity to unite workers across industry and the economy
- access to industry-wide decision making
- access to macro-economic policy.

But strategic unionism will have to find a balance between national centralised negotiations and local negotiations. National centralised agreements hold a great danger of distancing the base from negotiations and decision making. This can lead to demobilisation and passivity of the membership.

The success of strategic unionism depends on an active, mobilised and empowered base. Thus national agreements should open up the

scope for workplace and regional bargaining and activity. If wages and conditions are settled in a centralised forum, then the key to involving members is workplace negotiating on productivity, work organisation, investment, technology and product ranges. However, if the base is to engage in negotiations on such complex issues without being outmanoeuvred by management, it will have to be equipped to do so [see Bernie Fanaroff, p16]. This means a much more effective union education programme.

Transforming the workplace

Strategic unionism is not only a strategy for negotiating on macro-economic issues and industrial policies. It is a strategy for reforming economic relations, and at its heart is a strategy to transform the workplace. As Marcel Golding says, the trade unions are "beginning

to challenge managerial prerogatives in the production process.”

Unions will demand increasing autonomy and control on the shopfloor, in exchange for commitment to productivity, efficiency and quality. A strategic aim may be the removal of line managers on the shopfloor, and their replacement by elected work leaders. Unions will seek to extend the negotiating agenda to encompass technology, product lines and marketing. Linked to these reforms will be demands for new training, grading and promotion plans [see Fanaroff, p16, and Adrienne Bird, *SA Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 6].

Strategic unionism will not restrict itself to issues on the shopfloor, but demand the right to negotiate management productivity and efficiency, corporate business plans and investment.

Workers will naturally want to share in the benefits of improved performance. This would mean negotiating bonus schemes on top of nationally negotiated minima. The 1991 agreement in the gold industry probably stands as a state of the art performance bonus scheme, despite its collapse.

Other possibilities are profit sharing and collective ESOPs and wage earner funds. The latter entail transfer of assets to worker-ownership [see Torres and Maree, *SA Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 4].

There is no one ‘correct’ formula for approaching these issues. Probably unions will want to experiment with different options to see which most empower and benefit workers and strengthen their organisation.

Accompanying movement in this direction will be demands for access to information and training to equip shopstewards for a far more complex role than they played in the past.

The response of capital

Finally, what about the response of capital to strategic unionism? Capital has the power to wreck strategic unionism. Generally, capital wants labour to accept a policy of wage restraint, ‘industrial peace’ and a commitment to productivity increases. While in some

forums and on some issues employers may be happy to reach agreement with trade unions (for example, on a short term plan for the textile and clothing industry, or on industry wide training programmes in various sectors), in general they are likely to resist strenuously the more radical reforms proposed by strategic unionism.

This raises the question of the limit of co-operation between capital and labour. It may be necessary to coerce employers, through a combination of mass struggle and state intervention, to accept certain aspects of reform. For example, it may be necessary to compel employers to accept industry wide bargaining in national industrial councils. Legislation may be needed to compel employers to give unions access to company and industry information, and to negotiate on investment, technology and product decisions. It may also be necessary to ‘unbundle’ the massively powerful conglomerates such as Anglo American.

Such measures would limit or change currently existing ‘property’ rights. Only a strong government with the necessary political will would be prepared to force this issue.

Strategic unionism entails a complex combination of coercion and mass struggle on the one hand, and on the other co-operation and negotiation with employers. This implies that labour may at times enter into a ‘social contract’ with capital, as happened with the COSATU-NACTU-SACCOLA accord. If the costs of resisting strategic unionism are too high, and there are clear benefits to capital in co-operation, employers may go along with a union project of radical reform.

Is strategic unionism viable in SA?

COSATU has played a central role in the struggle against apartheid. It is the biggest and most powerful organisation in the democratic movement. It has played an important role in the tripartite alliance, both in developing political strategy and tactics, and in organising mass action.

Transition has opened up a series of spaces and opportunities for COSATU to intervene in

shaping institutions and politics. This was impossible under apartheid. COSATU is determined to continue playing a central role, not only in transition, but in the period of democratic reform and economic reconstruction that will follow.

Strategic unionism is a response to this new situation. COSATU is attempting to define a new role for itself, at the centre of a process of establishing democracy and restructuring the economy. Can it succeed? Or will it, as so many commentators expect, be slowly forced onto sidelines, to become a classical oppositional trade union movement?

On the positive side, COSATU is one of the most militant, powerful, ambitious and influential labour movements in the world. Its role in the struggle against apartheid has given it great influence within the democratic movement and society at large.

On the negative side, neither the federation nor its affiliates have developed a common and coherent vision or strategy. The practice and perspective of strategic unionism is beginning to emerge, but it is uneven and contested.

Contributing to this are organisational weaknesses [see Vavi, p38, and Bobbie Marie, Dot Keet in *SA Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 5] and a lack of resources. Strategic unionism requires a highly resourced and well organised labour movement. Another factor which weakens the prospects of strategic unionism is the weakness of the broader popular movement. Lack of unity within the labour movement is also a problem, although there is increasingly cordial co-operation between COSATU, NACTU and Fedsal.

Finally, there is the question of what policies will be pursued by a new democratically elected government in South Africa. The ANC is unlikely to pursue a decisive, coherent policy in support of strategic unionism. We are more likely to see a series of ad hoc measures designed to avoid displeasing any major constituency. This will be even more true if the first government is some form of 'government of national unity'. We will therefore probably see a fairly protracted period of struggles, partial reforms and



ANC & COSATU: warm relations now, but will ANC support labour-led reform in the future?

Photo: Sharif.

ongoing contestation over policies. The results will be unpredictable.

For these reasons, it is unlikely that a fully-fledged strategic unionism will emerge in the near future. The transitional period is too fluid and fragmented for that. But it is essential for progressive activists and intellectuals to devote time and energy to developing such a strategy and vision.

Strategic unionism provides the best hope for economic growth, job creation and the development of a dynamic manufacturing sector. The labour movement is powerful enough to block any strategy of economic development that seeks to sideline or exclude organised workers. Strategic unionism is also the only strategy that can strengthen and empower the working class in South Africa today. A labour-led programme for economic and social renewal, democracy and development holds out the hope, if successful, of winning broad support for ongoing and more radical transformation and democratisation of our society.

A broad coalition of organisations based in the countryside, in the communities, in the work place and in the state, united around a programme for transformation and democratisation, could lay the basis for socialism. ☆

Next issue: *The dangers of strategic unionism.*

the **name** *of the* **game** *is* **membership**

Too much debate about politics and too little organisational work are weakening COSATU, warns COSATU organising secretary ZWELINZIMA VAVI.*

Few readers will disagree with Bobby Marie's in-depth analysis in the article 'COSATU faces crisis' (SA Labour Bulletin Vol 16 No 5). I fully agree with his assessment of the crisis.

I wish to broaden and deepen the discussion. The views expressed here are therefore mine, not necessarily COSATU's.

The crisis facing COSATU is mainly a consequence of the changed political situation and the growth of the organisation. There are many other contributing factors with which Bobby Marie dealt with, but certainly living under apartheid rule and the negative results of this, like high levels of illiteracy, is a major factor.

In the early period of the establishment of trade unions in South Africa, issues were fairly straightforward and simple. Organisers spent 90% of their time recruiting members, defending jobs, fighting unfair employment practices and dismissals and building effective organisation. The organisers were 200% committed to the cause and eager not only to defend their members' jobs at the factory level but to fight the entire system of oppression. Once recruited, members were as bitter and

fought as hard against the overall system of oppression as the organisers. They understood the only way to get rid of both exploitation and oppression was unity and continued struggle.

Today that is no longer the case. As the political situation unfolds things will simply become worse.

Commitment to fight

Workers then were angrier than they are now. Stories of bitter wars of dispossession, told to them by their grandfathers, were still ringing in the minds of most black workers when they started jobs. The tales of how their grandfathers and mothers were forced out of their land to work in the gold mines and develop cities aggravated by their own brutal treatment by the managers and baas boys. Assaults and physical punishments were the order of the day in most mines, factories and shops.

Little wonder that there was such a strong commitment to fight exploitation and defend one another. Slogans like "*Organise or Starve*" and "*Unity is Strength*" were rooted in the minds of each and every worker.

* The views expressed here are the author's, not necessarily COSATU's.

The changed situation has been dealt with by other comrades who have contributed to the discussion.

Today we have bosses wielding ANC membership cards and a smiling state president on television shaking hands with black people. The bosses and the state have realised it was a serious mistake to treat black workers as they did in the past. Now their strategy is to smile while they continue with the attacks on workers' living standards and political rights.

Today workers are lazy to attend meetings, discuss and plan strategies. Discussions about strategy which formerly took place in filthy toilets have been replaced by discussions about soccer matches which take place in well-kept canteens.

Now organisers spend 90% of their time reading papers, reading countless reports and minutes from countless structures, attending countless internal meetings, preparing press statements and phoning or faxing papers to the head office. Only 10% of their time is spent recruiting, holding general meetings, distributing pamphlets and solving workers' problems. The result is a deteriorating organisational capacity.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

Building strong organisation is the key

Despite the smiles and nice talk, there are still retrenchments, unemployment, low wages, high food prices, privatisation, lack of houses, deregulation, poverty, diseases, lack of clean water, lack of land and lack of political rights.

More than one million workers have been organised. But there are two and half million unorganised workers in the farms, public sector and construction industry.

Instead of discussing how to organise farm workers or how to counter the undermining of worker control in our unions, COSATU structures have spent the last two years concentrating on discussing CODESA and related political issues. It has become a tradition to place issues like weakness of affiliates and regions at the bottom of the agenda and to start with the "current political



Photo: William Matlala

situation, briefing and discussions".

Certainly COSATU and the trade union movement has contributed to the changed political situation through many years of sacrifice. It is natural for members to be interested in political events. One is not arguing against the holding of political discussions but against their being held at the expense of the organisation and its principal task.

We need to change this. Unless we begin to spend most of our time discussing the weaknesses of our factory, local, regional and national structures and the areas of potential development, our gains will soon disappear.

COSATU must grow

The latest statistics show no growth in COSATU membership. Despite massive retrenchments and dismissals, COSATU should have grown massively in this period. Some three million workers participated in the 4-5 November 1991 VAT general strike. We estimated more than four million workers took part in the recent 3-4 August peace and democracy strike. Quite clearly those workers, who participated - in the face of dismissals - identify with our goals. So why have they not joined our unions?

Every time we assess a major strike, we say rural and small town workers are thirsty for our organisation. How do we intend to organise them? These questions disappear after every successful action, reappear when there is another action and then disappear again. But we have certainly been playing lip service to such crucial questions. Otherwise, there would have been an answer from the membership, shopstewards, organisers or the leadership.

When we assessed the VAT, Inkathagate and National Party corruption we said COSATU does not and should not concern itself only with issues affecting its membership, but should also vigorously take up broader issues. Certainly we profited from this approach. But beside the good public profile and image we have created, what have we achieved? Our membership has not increased.

Our influence in social, economic and political matters depends on the significance of our constituency. The name of the game is membership. Without it you can scream as loud as you can, but nobody will listen to you.

Today we talk of organisers battling to keep up with the pace of workers demanding to be signed up as members of COSATU. However, workers join unions because they deliver the goods — not because they are affiliated to COSATU, which has a good public image and history of fighting against apartheid.

In the future, when the political situation has been 'normalised', it may be extremely difficult to organise workers into trade unions. There will be no anger against apartheid and its

evils. That is going to be a shadowy story. Workers may be more conservative. They will be interested in standing for elections as councillors and mayors and even cabinet ministers.

An effective organisation must be built now. There will be no chance in the future.

WORKERS CONTROL

Comrades Bobby Marie and Rob Rees talk of the principle of worker control becoming more and more a slogan that is not practised. This is relatively true. We need to look at each level of our structures to see what is going on.

Factory level

Ten years ago all the organiser had to do to get an issue discussed was to get hold of one worker or shopsteward. By the next day every member in the factory was aware of and would have discussed the issue. Shopstewards and members were not allowed to receive calls and faxes were not even a dream. Today, many shopstewards have access to a telephone and fax machine. Yet the members' grasp of union issues is not comparable to what it was ten years ago.

Then shopstewards were not permitted to be seen drinking coffee with the management while workers were unaware of what they were discussing. The accountability of shopstewards to the membership was guaranteed. Now such issues have become more complex.

It is no longer as simple as calling a wild cat strike against the kicking on the buttocks by the "voorman" or a dismissal without a hearing.

Major issues are now retrenchment and packages, restructuring, technology changes, deregulations and so on. Most strategies for fighting these complex issues are not developed by factory membership but by experts based at head offices.

Our biggest enemy in understanding these complex issues is Verwoerd's permanent rape of the living generation — illiteracy. The survey conducted for COSATU illustrates that up to 70% of our members cannot read or write. On top of that, there is just too much information in the factory coming from the

union branch office and head office.

Growing membership means you cannot translate pamphlets and reading material into the workers' languages at will. Many shopstewards are factory based and never attend local or branch shopstewards' councils because they cannot grasp the complex issues. Those who understand or have a better education occupy many positions. They are over-stretched and cannot find the time to develop fellow workers and shopstewards.

More resources should be made available for the compulsory training of shopstewards. Intense mass education programmes should be developed for membership at the factory level. More general meetings should be held to improve worker control and accountability. Lazy shopstewards who do not attend other union meetings should be cautioned and if they do not improve, replaced. Union policy should be developed in consultation with union membership. The fight of the 1980s for Adult Basic Education (ABE) in each factory should be revived. Workers and shopstewards should be encouraged to take advantage of ABE and made to understand this is the fruit of their own struggles.

Branch and regional level

A crisis in a factory often reflects a crisis in a regional or branch office. There is no tree without roots.

Our major weaknesses at this level have been co-ordination and general management skills. Newly employed organisers or elected secretaries are never trained and lack experience. Planning and prioritising is a dilemma. We need to root our branches in the factories they have organised.

Unless we make the training of new staff a priority we shall continue to have disjointed structures. We have to ensure new organisers get the experience not only through making costly mistakes, but through a systematic training programme and working alongside more experienced organisers.

Our Regional Executive Committees (REC) or Branch Executive Committees (BEC) must have their foundation in the factories and must



COSATU membership still only numbers around 1.4 m

Photo: William Matlala

represent the locals and factories. We need to promote dynamic contact between our ground and middle structures.

National level

The nerve centre or backbone of any organisation is its head office. Our major weaknesses here are similar to those at branch level. The difference is that any weakness at the national level does not have an effect limited to a small branch area but to the entire union.

Of course, most criticisms have been directed at the head offices. The main function of any head office is co-ordination. Without an effective strategy on co-ordination, there is simply no organisation. Both head office functionaries and delegates to the NEC have a duty to ensure the union acts within the principles and policies of the union.

COSATU level

The COSATU Central Executive Committee, as the highest constitutional structure after the national congress, has to set examples.

The main problem within our federation structures is the flow of information to the membership. Decisions taken by the CEC mainly find their way back through other COSATU structures. If the REC is held four weeks after the CEC, people will discuss the decisions of the CEC only then. This means the affiliates' regional delegations often have to formulate their own individual responses to the immediate issues confronting them in COSATU structures, with no mandates.

If we want to defend the principle of worker control, we cannot leave matters as they are. We need to urgently reach a situation where the majority of our members and structures know what items are on the agenda of the CEC and are waiting for the decisions. If we can achieve this, our growth is assured.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND STRENGTHS

Despite the above weaknesses, COSATU remains the best organised organisation in our country. We need to continue building on our strengths and gains.

COSATU has considerable organisational strengths which very few organisations in our country can match. The fact that COSATU has grown from about 400 000 in 1985 to more than one million shows it has become a real home for workers. The potential for more growth is there. We need to work out the best strategy to organise the more than two million farm and public sector unions and concentrate more in the rural and small establishments. If we do this, we can continue growing at the same rate.

Shopstewards

There is a 25 000-strong shopstewards' movement in COSATU which is mainly rooted in the factories, shops and mines. These shopstewards have been the real engine for growth, strength and upholding the democratic principles of the federation.

Major role players

Undoubtedly COSATU has secured its place as a major organisation in all spheres of life in our country. No cabinet minister, politician or boss

can afford to ignore COSATU.

COSATU's ability to mobilise its members in a short period and rally other organs of civil society around its programmes is known and does not need further emphasis. We have managed to make major interventions, often successfully, in economic, social and political matters that are not only of interest to our immediate constituency but to the broader society. During hard times every freedom lover in South Africa always wants to know what direction we are taking on any matter.

COSATU has successfully created a more active labour market policy. In the few years of our existence, we have managed to reverse the backward amendments which the apartheid government and bosses wanted to introduce in 1988. We have made major inroads in reshaping the National Manpower Commission, and continue to fight for the inclusion of the farm, public sector and domestic workers in the Labour Relation Act. Some of these battles are almost won.

Sustaining organisation

We have survived the worst repression ever launched by the apartheid government. COSATU was launched in the middle of the notorious National Party state of emergency. Within this brutal repression, the detentions without trial, bannings and killings, COSATU made strides and sustained its organisation until the National Party was convinced it simply could not destroy COSATU. Our organisation, albeit with the weaknesses we have discussed, is still alive.

Programmatic approach

We have a more programmatic approach in implementing our resolutions and decisions. The three-year plan COSATU adopted after its 1991 national congress has proved to be a pillar of strength in guiding our way to the next congress in 1994.

Challenges facing COSATU are to create an integrated strategy that will deepen our organisation, develop our capacity and provide muscle for our interventions at the economic, social and political level. ☆

preparing *for the* future

Is the era of conflict being replaced by a new era of co-operation? How is the character of trade unionism changing? SARHWU's education officer VANGUARD MKHOSANA discusses the dangers.

The trade union movement in South Africa – especially COSATU – is a force that cannot be ignored. However, to meet the expectations of our people the trade union movement needs to assess its strengths and weaknesses in order to shape itself for the challenges ahead.

A number of new challenges are emerging to confront the labour movement.

Firstly, the trade unions are beginning to participate in tripartite agreements and forums. Secondly, there are a range of managerial innovations at whose centre is the 'team concept'. Thirdly, there is an increase in full-time shopstewards. Finally, there are new problems in the relation between intellectuals and workers, and in connection with internationalisation and self sufficiency.

Tripartism refers to a system of institutions and agreements which involve three parties: capital, labour and the state. An example would be the restructured National Manpower Commission (NMC). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is the chief advocate of tripartite institutions. In its structure the ILO accommodates labour, employers and governments. ILO sets labour standards in the

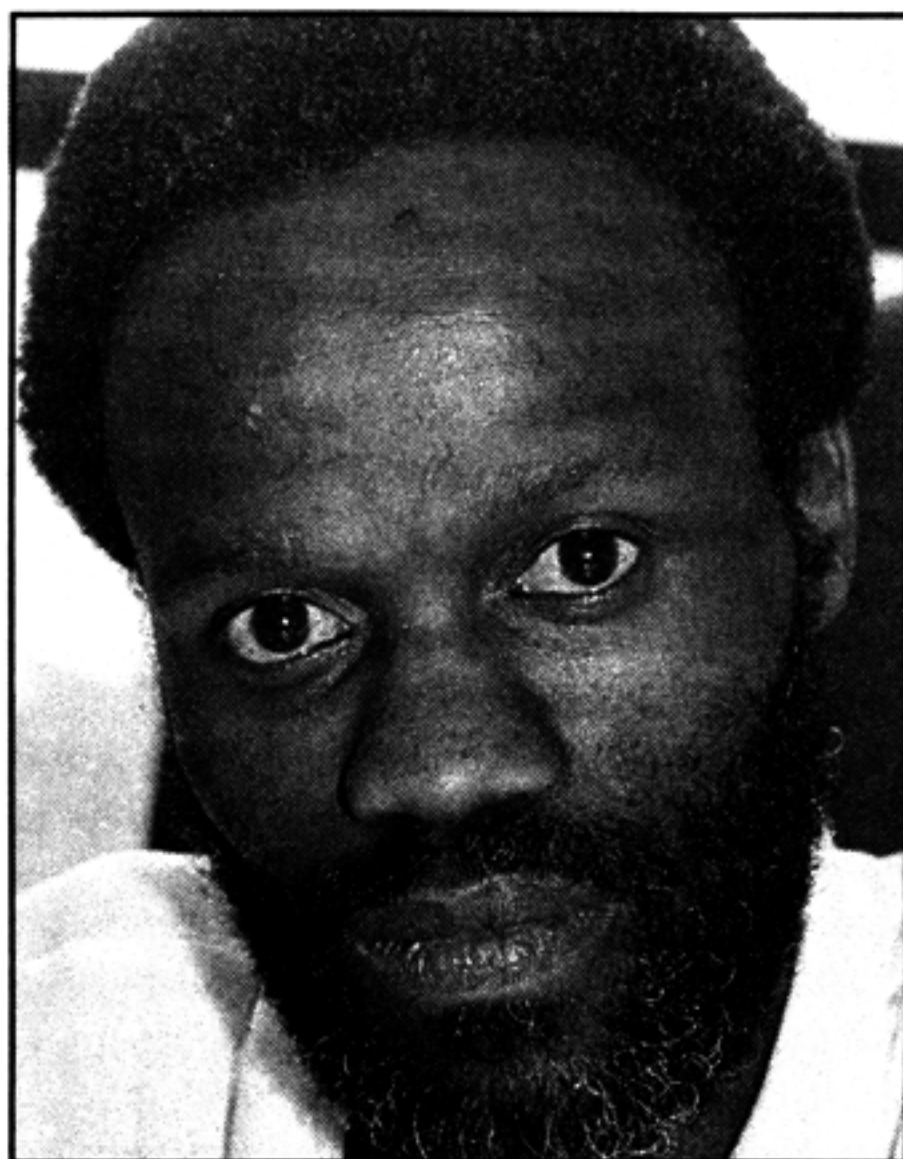


Photo: William Matlala

form of conventions. South Africa left ILO in 1964 and is not a signatory to most of those ILO conventions. However, COSATU and NACTU have observer's status in ILO annual meetings.

New era of co-operation?

Apartheid mistrust has made the ILO's concept of tripartite co-operation well nigh impossible in South Africa. However, recently there has been a greater degree of involvement by labour in government institutions like the NMC and the National Training Board, and a demand for inclusion in structures like CODESA.

At the same time COSATU has engaged the employer body SACCOLA in various discussions (rewriting the LRA, creating the National Economics Negotiations Forum and the pre-stayaway talks of early August). Increased discussions on both government-employer fronts is likely to continue.

Tripartite engagement introduces a new culture in the present generation of unions and therefore cannot go unchallenged.

Tripartism is capable of serving as a 'taming ground' for trade unions. At this stage we should guard against our 'involvement card' changing into a 'collaboration card' because that would prolong the lifespan of apartheid. Which does not mean COSATU should stand aside and watch disinterestedly from afar. It is important to stay close to the membership and be guided by their views in every step taken.

Managerial innovations

Recent managerial innovations like employee share ownership, quality circles and 'worker participation' have also created a lot of debate.

The main focus of these innovations is productivity and involvement of workers in running the company. While these innovations are not yet common they will spread, and it is important to debate them now. They do of course raise the question of workers' control.

In discussing what workers' control entails, we need to ask ourselves many questions. Should workers co-operate with bosses in participatory management? Should we build co-operatives controlled by workers? Should we create work groups which would run parallel to management structures, control day-to-day work and get management to disclose their plans about the company? Or should we gear ourselves for the painstaking

long road towards scientific socialism in order to realise real workers' control?

To me it seems there is no short cut; as workers we should put our weight behind the forces fighting for socialism. However, it is important to improve our conditions now. The development of leadership skills in worker leadership and the all-round upgrading of the membership are both matters to be considered.

Fulltime shopstewards

The development of industrial relations has established a working relationship between unions and employers. This has led to a new 'category' of worker - the fulltime shopsteward - paid for by management and given company facilities and resources.

The unions benefit by getting shopstewards to service workers at no cost to the union. On the other side is the possibility of blackmail of the shopstewards by managements and their inability to operate independently of management - as can organisers. Also such shopstewards run the risk of losing touch with factory floor conditions. These weaknesses may, over time, weaken the union against the employer.

The system has so far only been put into operation within a few unions like NUM and NUMSA. We need to study the system carefully.

The role of intellectuals and officials

Increasingly, there is a need for sophistication within unions. Union personnel need to be able to represent workers in disciplinary hearings and arbitrations, they must be capable negotiators in collective bargaining, skilled administrators and so on.

But there is a fear that the flooding of unions with skilled personnel could mean many unskilled but experienced union staff losing their jobs; and also that intellectuals will dominate the decision-making processes.

The situation calls for the upgrading and training of union staff and members and the creating of mechanisms to guard against the domination of union members by intellectuals.

In theory, COSATU's principle of workers'



Need to rethink internationalism: NUMSA president Mtutuzeli Tom meets Brazilian counterpart Guiba Navarro in Sao Paulo

Photo: Karl von Holdt

control should curb intellectual domination. In practice, workers' control does not seem to go beyond getting a worker to chair meetings. Then union officials start to put forward their views articulately which influence the decisions. We need to get beyond sloganeering about workers' control. Already there are tensions between union employees and union members. At the same time, the role of intellectuals in the unions should be defined so they do not feel alienated.

Another matter for concern in the labour movement is discrimination.

Affirmative action for both black workers and women workers must similarly go beyond a declaration of intent. Every union ascribing to gender equality must consciously pursue some stated goals. Those unions that do not upgrade women should be held to account. By discriminating against women we deprive the working class of a powerful force.

Internationalism and self sufficiency

Democracy is not God-given. Conditions must be created for democracy to thrive and be self-generating. Central to this is the ability of the organisation to maintain itself. This saves

the organisation from the risk of outside control. We need to keep in mind that he who pays the piper chooses the tune. Perhaps we need to look at working class solidarity and see how it relates to the question of self sufficiency.

Since the growth of capital into an international force it became necessary to have internationalism and working class solidarity as an equally viable force.

Solidarity means mutual help among the workers industrially, nationally and internationally. Yet judging our unions (mainly in COSATU and NACTU) by our practices, it would seem we understand workers' solidarity to mean receiving material handouts from others.

One historic example of solidarity was COSATU's support and help to the workers and the people of Namibia in preparation for their first elections. But that was exceptional. Otherwise solidarity mainly takes the form of receiving funds from international trade union centres and individual unions abroad. Almost all COSATU affiliates receive such grants. This cannot go on indefinitely without undermining COSATU's independence.

The dying of apartheid makes it imperative

that we prepare ourselves for the post-apartheid period. We cannot expect COSATU to enter the world as an equal if it cannot run itself.

Foreign funding benefitted COSATU a lot. We managed to build a strong federation with viable structures which make it possible to consult membership and account on all matters of importance.

However, we would be lacking in self-criticism if we were to say foreign funding is without its problems.

- First, a new culture of using posh hotels for trade union meetings has taken over the use of poor people's places like churches and community halls.
- Second, the availability of funds has elevated the holding of meetings to the level of a struggle in itself. Many top trade unionists appear to spend the better part of their time in meetings.
- Third, innumerable task forces, commissions and special committees are created daily, sometimes with ill-defined scope. In some cases such task forces have taken decisions, thus reducing the leadership to mere rubber-stamps.
- Fourth, pre-occupation with meetings has reduced trade unionism to a near-academic exercise characterised by the use of flamboyant English; this alienates workers. An elite within the labour movement gets room to manoeuvre.
- Fifth, there is limited time to spend servicing workers on the ground. We are gradually surrendering workers' militancy to the tower of legalism in a situation (apartheid) which does not fully warrant it. Big sums of money come from abroad for legal bills. In the beginning unions used foreign funding for the services rendered by the lawyers who were the custodians of these funds. Now these legal bills must be paid directly from union coffers. Unions are now trapped between legalism, lack of funds and diminishing militancy.
- Sixth, the 1991 International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) conference in Gaborone showed how our poverty can

be used to blackmail us. ICFTU was accused of using this platform to campaign for new affiliates and to condone rather than to condemn the International Monetary Fund and World Bank structural adjustment programmes which have been disastrous for workers and paralysed unions throughout Southern Africa. ICFTU General Secretary Enzo Frisco went on to say: "It would be difficult in the future to co-operate with organisations who discriminate against affiliates of the ICFTU ... these are not empty words." This should not be construed to mean that foreign funding is by its nature evil but it does highlight our vulnerability.

We must familiarise ourselves with internal fund raising methods and aim at self-sufficiency.

In conclusion, it is clear the challenges confronting the trade union movement are becoming more complex.

As unions, we need to forge stronger solidarity links at national and international levels and develop the necessary skills in our cadres so that the unions will be able to face these challenges. ☆

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ISCOR violence: *union splits,* *shopstewards die*

SNUKI ZIKALALA traces the events leading to the brutal killings of National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) shopstewards in the Vaal earlier this year.

On 5 June 1992, a NUMSA leader was performing his routine duties at Kwamasiza flats in Sebokeng, distributing toilet paper. France Monakedi did not know his life was in danger. But three assassins were admitted into the flats and shot him.

"They shot ten AK47 bullets into him and made sure he was dead before they left," says Iscor's hostel manager, Dries Steenkamp.

After Monakedi's death, NUMSA's shopstewards left Kwamasiza flats, now controlled by an anti-NUMSA faction, the 'Top 20'. So far eight NUMSA stalwarts have been murdered.

NUMSA was previously so well organised at Iscor that it was able to force the company to build an entire zone of family flats, Kwamasiza, to house workers at Sebokeng. Rent for company housing dropped from R48,50 to R20 a month. The union got Iscor to implement job descriptions for workers as well as training and medical schemes, provident funds and annual leave. Since 1987 the minimum wage has been raised from R349 to R981.

Because of the level of organisation at Iscor, the NUMSA shopstewards' council was the driving force in building the ANC and the civics in the township. They organised

marshals for rallies and demonstrations from 1987. When residents decided, in 1988, to form defence committees, they turned to the NUMSA shopstewards.

But the union's gains are now in jeopardy. This year Iscor's management unilaterally decided upon the annual wage increase without consulting NUMSA and the workers. NUMSA shopstewards now do not venture into what was once their stronghold – the Kwamasiza hostel.

Internal problems began to develop in 1988. According to NUMSA shopsteward, Livingstone Mthonga, from the 'Top 20' faction, workers were unhappy with the three-day national stayaway, which resulted in the dismissal of 134 workers. Till late 1989, workers demanded shopstewards fight for the reinstatement of the dismissed workers. They felt shopstewards were not ensuring dismissed workers received provident fund pensions.

Management proposals aggravate tensions

In early March 1990, Iscor management proposed that the 190 NUMSA shopstewards should attend a seminar on the Omega quality circle programme, a variation of the new

Japanese management style stressing worker participation. Some shopstewards and most of the rank and file opposed this.

At a meeting in Autumn 1990 between shopstewards and workers to discuss Omega, most workers voted against participation. Senior shopstewards disregarded this, which angered workers. As Maxwell Qangase*, a worker-leader, put it: "Ndamase and the other shopstewards are now managers."

In June 1990, a meeting of 500 dissatisfied workers demanded the resignation of the four shopstewards. Eight workers, some former shopstewards, were elected as an interim committee. However, NUMSA's regional congress overturned their decision and continued to recognise the previous

shopstewards' committee. Tensions within the union began to get out of control.

According to Lucas Tabane, NUMSA's regional organiser, the meeting held by the 500 workers was unconstitutional - it did not constitute a quorum and shopstewards should be elected at plant level meetings.

Attitudes harden

Immediately after this, Inkatha supporters who had been ejected from Kwamasiza launched two attacks on NUMSA members. This made the issue of defence committees - and who controlled them - even more pressing.

On 22 September a powerful local political figure, former MK operative and ex-Robben Islander, Ernest Sotsu, addressed workers at

* Qangase was shot dead at Sebokeng Hostel on 22 October and his body burnt

The Omega Man

Iscor management defends Omega

"Omega is what we call participative management. It gives workers a chance to participate in all decision-making processes. Omega, our quality circle concept, is not the reason for dissatisfaction among our employees.

Omega was introduced to Iscor's white workers in 1983 and to blacks in 1988. Quality circles is a foreign concept to South Africans; that is why we started introducing it to skilled workers, who are whites.

So far, 70% of white workers have accepted Omega, and 12% of blacks. In Omega, workers are practically involved in problem solving.

Some of the union shopstewards were working in the department of Omega as facilitators. That may have created an impression that these shopstewards were promoting it.

In 1988, we had a five-day conference with the shopstewards, where we introduced Omega. The shopstewards were very sceptical. We asked them to sell it to the workers, but most workers rejected the idea. NUMSA's official position is that

they are neither for or against Omega. They see it as management's tool and won't participate in it.

At Iscor we failed to convey the Omega programme properly to black workers. 60% of our black force is not well educated. To train a man in Omega with its financial concepts, brainstorming principles, is difficult. Later we discovered we should have started giving our workers basic literacy training, so they could understand certain concepts. It was a costly mistake.

Participative management can bring about magnificent results. If a person feels he is taking part in the decision-making of the company, he changes his whole attitude to the company. It becomes 'us' and not 'them'.

At Iscor we have an advantage because the company belongs to the workers. The majority of workers own shares. When the government sold the company, Iscor gave 200 free shares to every employee and a discount of 20% for shares bought by workers. We want workers to feel they own the company and can take decisions, but this can only be done through Omega.

Kwamasiza hostel. According to Ndamase, Sotsu told workers NUMSA was ineffectual and undemocratic, and that workers had the right to democratically elect shopstewards in general meetings. He called for the "elimination" of the current shopstewards' council and said civics should negotiate directly with management on housing issues.

Says senior shopsteward, Michael Maloka: "Sotsu's intervention added fuel into the fire. Workers were agitated and demanded we be removed from our elected positions. We don't even know who invited him to this meeting. He is not a worker and yet he talked on behalf of the workers."

At Sotsu's suggestion, some Sebokeng residents urged workers in Kwamasiza to form block committees and self-defence units

(SDUs) under the banner of the Sebokeng Civic Association instead of depending upon NUMSA's shopstewards.

According to NUMSA shopsteward Daniel Makgele, "there was a problem when block committees wanted to meet Iscor management to put civic demands. They were turned back and conflict arose between the block committees and our shopsteward council."

Regional congress reverses shopstewards' suspension

NUMSA held a regional congress on 24-25 April 1991. This reversed the suspension of the NUMSA shopstewards involved in the Omega programme and dissolved the anti-NUMSA Interim Committee of 8, which was now called the 'Top 20'.

NUMSA and the current problems

We are concerned about NUMSA. My opinion is that workers became disillusioned with their leadership. It is alleged that NUMSA never consulted with workers. The shopstewards took decisions on their own, without a mandate. This is what the other group is saying.

The other problem is that there are personality problems related to ethnic differences inside Kwamasiza. The fight was between the Pondos and the Pandomse which eventually led to the breakaway and to the violence.

Workers lost confidence in the shopstewards and demanded new elections, but NUMSA refused. There are allegations that we gave them cars, houses and walkie-talkies. It is true we gave them certain things but it was to promote good working relations. This made workers suspect they were being bought.

Productivity has not been affected

I am not really surprised the violence has not affected our productivity. Once workers get into the factory there is no sign of conflict. Iscor has very strict rules against violence and intimidation inside the company.

We are very concerned about what is

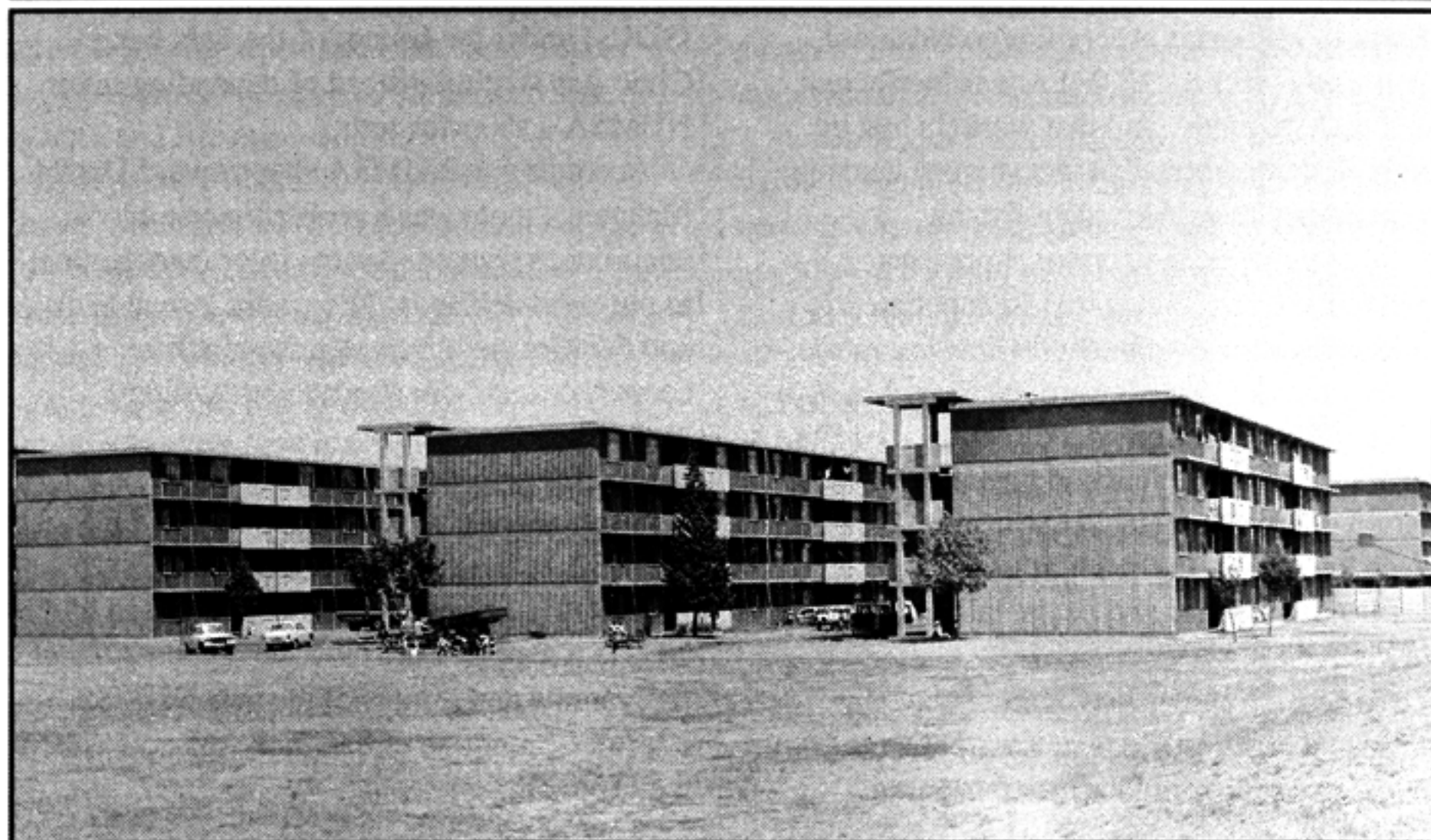
happening after work, that is why we have increased our security within the hostels. We protect workers when they travel with our buses, but we can't go inside the flats or hostels and search for armaments. We are not really responsible for what happens inside the flats. That is the work of the SAP.

On the breakaway group

Iscor has accepted one principle; it is best to have no union, and the second best thing is to have one strong union. The worst thing you can have is two or three unions. This is a very important industrial relations principle. In a split union you get an agreement with one of the unions and the other one runs away. I am not saying we are going to recognise SAAWU, we are far from it.

SAAWU has handed over 2 500 stop orders. We have a recognition criteria at Iscor; a union must be registered and SAAWU is not. We will not give them stop orders.

We begged NUMSA for months to solve this problem. NUMSA reacted very slowly. We are worried about who we are going to negotiate with. Wage negotiations are around the corner. All we need is a strong union and that is NUMSA. ♦



Kwamasiza flats: scene of death for NUMSA shopstewards

Photo: William Matlala

Congress resolutions were communicated to workers in a general meeting on 1 September 1991 addressed by regional office-bearers and a NUMSA head office representative.

Says Sam Maqhubela, a 'Top 20' member: "This was the last straw. We were told the decision was final and those who were against it had the right to leave the union. It was outrageous. The majority of us could not accept it. We felt congress was imposing people we had no confidence in."

This decision had a negative effect on the workforce. Workers became more divided and consolidated their factions around another power struggle that was developing.

In July 1991, Sotsu's wife and two children were shot while he was attending the ANC consultative conference in Durban. Sotsu was taken into Sebokeng hostel by supporters.

After the massacre of Sotsu's family, a meeting was called at Kwamasiza, where the supporters of the NUMSA shopstewards – under whose control the SDU's fell – were disarmed.

The 'Top 20' sided with Sotsu. The union split into two opposing factions.

MK members in Sebokeng initially involved

in training the SDUs also sided with Sotsu. This exacerbated the conflict.

NUMSA shopstewards marginalised

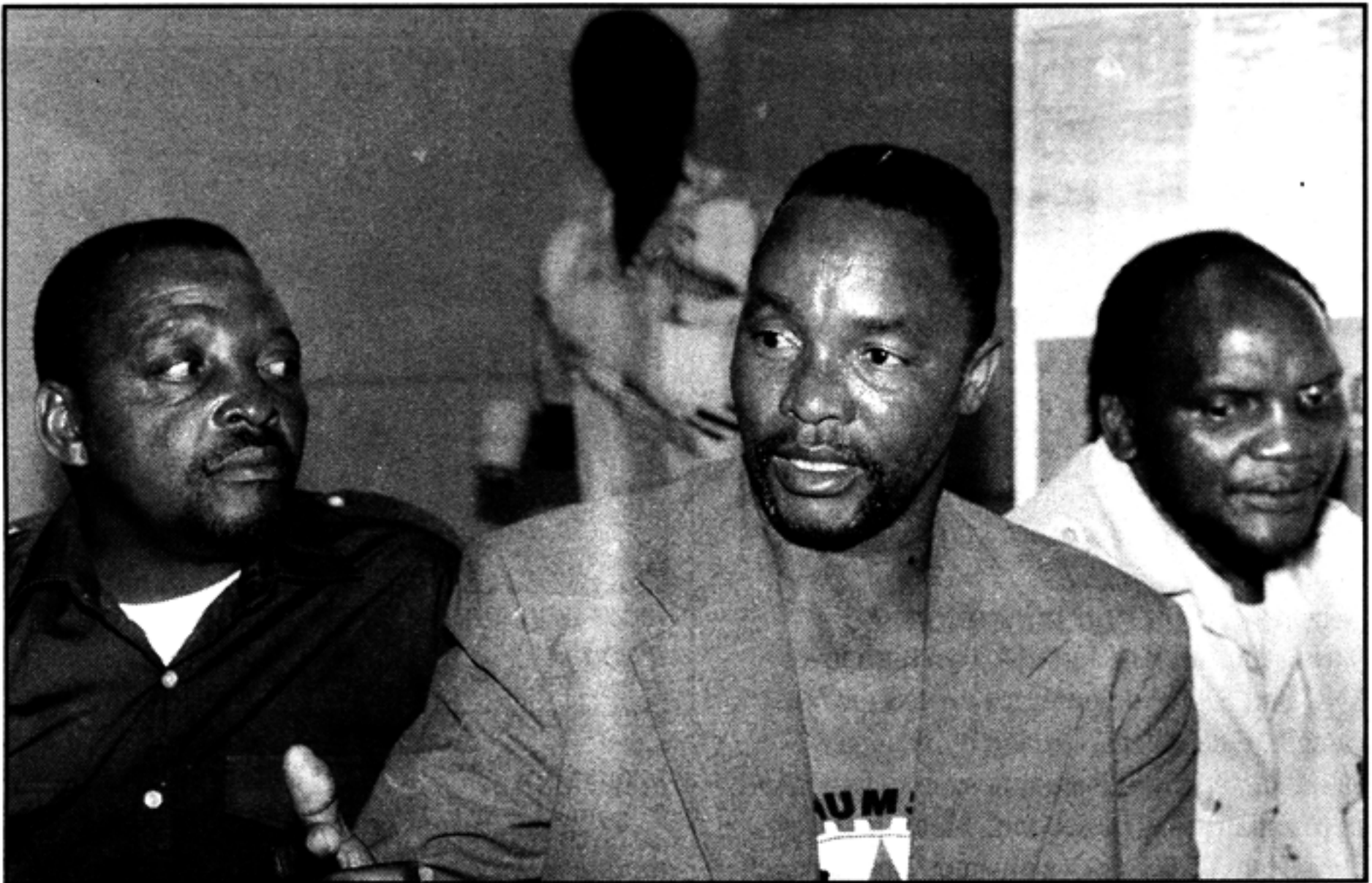
NUMSA could no longer take up worker-related issues with the management, which used the conflict situation for its own ends. There were dismissals without representation. Rental at the flats was increased without notice. Shopstewards were increasingly viewed with suspicion by workers.

The 'Top 20' seized the moment to 'represent' workers. They met management on several occasions and discussed workers' problems. To a large extent they co-operated with management. Most workers did not respond to the 1991 anti-Vat campaign strike or the 3-4 August 1992 mass campaign action.

The minutes of a meeting on 26 November 1991, when the 'Top 20' asked management to disregard the official shopstewards' committee and recognise them as the official worker representatives. Management advised the 'Top 20' to form a workers' council.

NUMSA takes a firm stand

On 28 March 1992, the Vanderbijlpark



Jeffrey Ndamase (centre) leader of NUMSA shopstewards at Iscor, now on the run

Photo: William Matlala

NUMSA local council expelled 'Top 20' members from the union and informed management.

According to regional organiser Lucas Tabane, this decision was taken after the 'Top 20' failed to appear before a disciplinary inquiry in mid-March 1992. "We were going to discuss the manner in which they were undermining shopstewards, disregarding union structures and the destructive role they were playing."

The expulsions were not taken lightly. Some of the 'Top 20' members were founder members of NUMSA at Iscor and senior shopstewards. They could not accept they were no longer members of their union. They mobilised more vigorously against the older shopstewards' committee and their lawyers appealed against their expulsions.

There followed a series of well-planned killings of top NUMSA shopstewards and activists:

- On 5 May 1992, senior NUMSA shopsteward, Colbert King, was shot dead at Kwamasiza.
- On 20 May 1992, NUMSA shopsteward,

Jeffrey Ndamase's house was riddled with 26 bullets. He survived but is on the run.

- On 3 June 1992, NUMSA member, Manqontshane Nobengane, was kidnapped and murdered outside Kwamasiza hostel.
- On 4 June 1992, NUMSA activist, Atwell Bheshe, was shot dead at Kwamasiza hostel. His small child was also killed.
- On 5 June 1992, NUMSA shopsteward, France Monakedi, was killed at Kwamasiza flats.
- On 6 June, NUMSA worker, Gwebu Ngwenyama, was shot dead outside the Kwamasiza hostel.
- On 7 June 1992, NUMSA shopsteward, Simai Sokaza, was shot dead in broad daylight at the sports ground near Kwamasiza.
- On 26 June 1992, NUMSA shopsteward, Alfred Maxaka, was shot dead at the Kwamasiza hostel.
- On 5 July 1992, NUMSA shopsteward, Michael Mantu, was shot dead at the Zone 17 hostel in Sebokeng.
- On 22 September 1992, Stanley Tyelentombi, NUMSA's legal officer in the

Vaal Region was kidnapped, but managed to escape. It is alleged his kidnappers carried ANC membership cards.

After Monakedi's death, NUMSA shopstewards and supporters of his group left Kwamasiza flats. They felt they had been sitting ducks since they no longer had weapons.

"We fled. Our lives were and are still in danger. We can't enter the flats, we can't represent workers at plant level. We are even afraid to use the Iscor buses that ferry workers to the plant. MK cadres are killing us.

Reconciliation committee formed

During the week of June 14, two high level ANC and SACP delegations visited the Vaal triangle. One delegation, led by Nelson Mandela and Cyril Ramaphosa, met local ANC representatives. The second, which included Chris Hani, Tokyo Sexwale and Sam Shilowa, visited the hostels and met with residents. A local peace committee was formed which included the leaders of both factions, Ernest Sotsu and Jeffrey Ndamase.

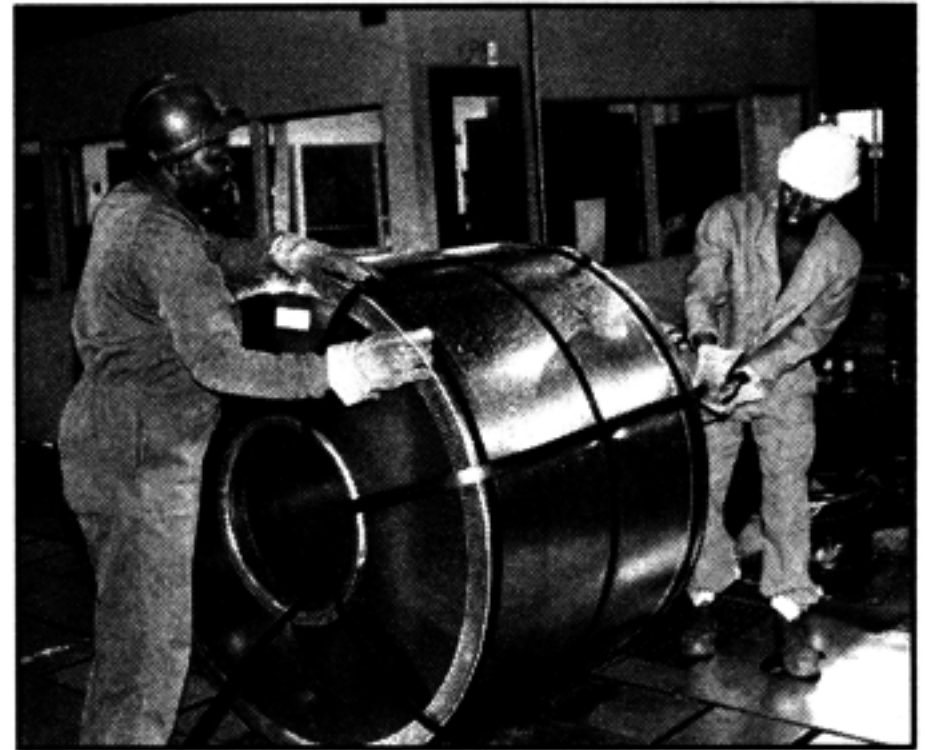
The Boipatong massacre complicated the reconciliation process, which resulted in a stalemate. The ANC/SACP/NUMSA grouping has since appointed a commission of enquiry to look into the Vaal violence and report to the relevant structures.

In the interim, the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) is trying to make inroads at Iscor. SAAWU is an independent general union, formerly strongly aligned to the now defunct South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).

The 'Top 20' faction invited SAAWU's general secretary to address workers on 5 October.

"We have submitted 2 500 stop orders to the management and in two weeks we will gain recognition," says Livingstone Mthonga. But Iscor management will not recognise SAAWU unless it is registered. SAAWU still sticks to the old SACTU principle of non-registration.

Mthonga says Kwamasiza residents are joining SAAWU because they are frustrated with NUMSA. Another shopsteward, Sam Maqhubela, claims there is no worker control



Iscor workers, no longer defended by their union

Photo: William Matlala

in NUMSA.

With the current crisis at Iscor, workers' morale is very low. The 'Top 20' workers have started a reign of terror at Kwamasiza flats, where NUMSA has become a swear-word.

Those who can assist in the crisis are:

- NUMSA. As the strongest union in the country, it has the power to unite the two factions. But it must admit to several mistakes: simply upholding and not reviewing the original shopstewards' elections; siding with the NUMSA shopstewards instead of investigating the conflict impartially. New elections are needed at plant level and more consultation with the workers is essential.
- SDUs falling under the civics. They must be made accountable. The murdered shopstewards were ANC members. Members of the SDUs are also ANC members yet they are believed by many NUMSA workers to be responsible for the killings.
- Management owns the flats and hostels at Sebokeng. Just as it protects workers when they travel to work, so should it protect them in their flats and hostels.
- The ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance, which must put an end to the internecine strife, take a resolute decision on members who use violence and defend the lives of workers. ☆

'no unity at plant level before a federation merger'

Labour Bulletin: *How did the congress handle the question of workers' unity?*

Samela: The issue of unity of the working class was thoroughly debated. In principle, SACWU is not opposed to unity. But it is important to look at what happened before SACWU's congress.

COSATU and NACTU held a number of meetings in preparation for the workers' summit which was to take place in May. We were not opposed to that. We are against an attempt to first force mergers at the plant level. We would like to see the two federations merging before talking of unity at the shopfloor.

SACWU feels strongly if there is to be genuine unity of the working class, we need to lay down certain principles at the level of the federation. Both federations are leaning heavily on political groups.

We do not want a federation that is indifferent to politics as politics permeates all aspects of society. A trade union federation must accommodate all workers, irrespective of political affiliation.

Labour Bulletin: *Did SACWU have any problems with the proposed workers' summit organised by COSATU/NACTU?*

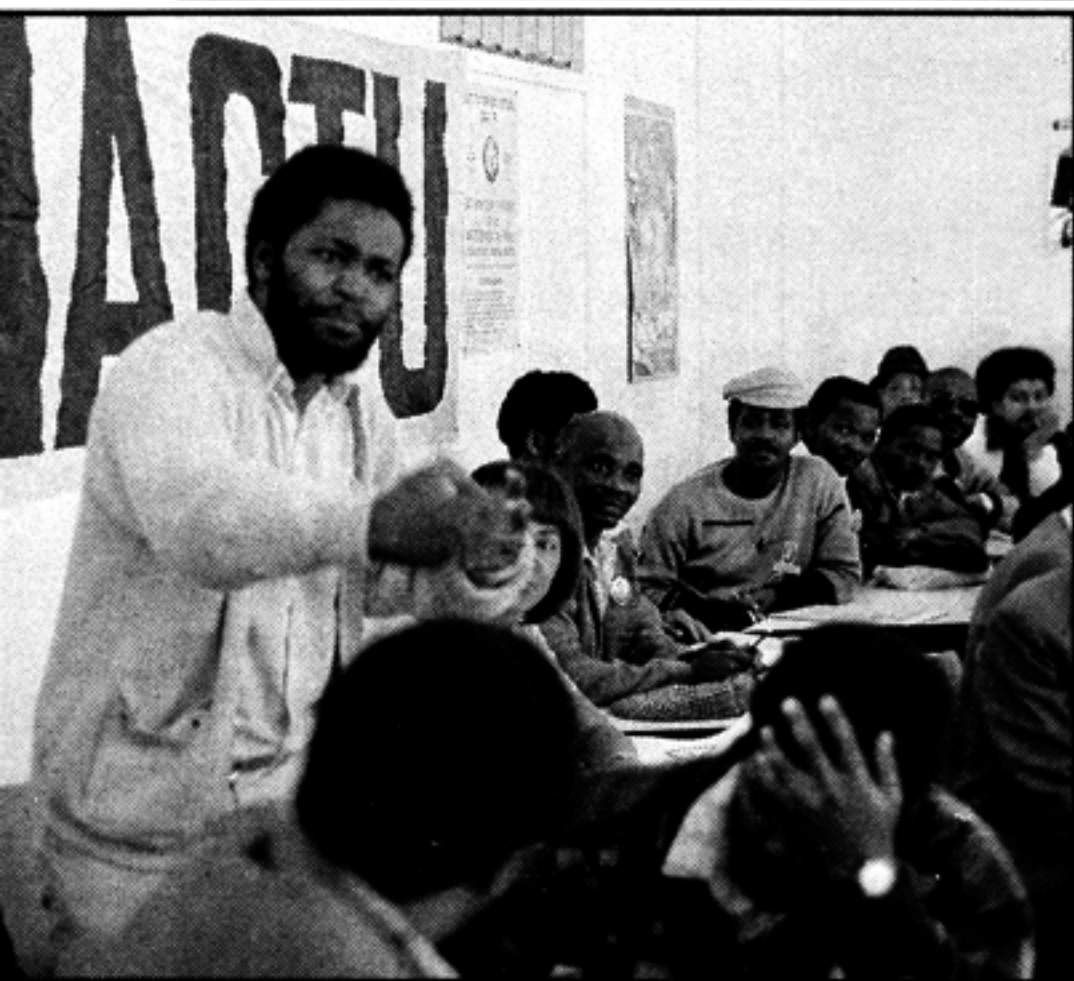
Samela: Our problem was that a decision had already been taken that affiliates should

In May, the 45 000 strong South African Chemical Workers Union (SACWU) held its 8th congress. Workers' unity was a key topic of discussion. SNUKI ZIKALALA asked SACWU's national organiser MANENE SAMELA for his views on unity, mass action and the future of the trade union movement.

discuss mergers. We did not agree with that decision. We discussed it in our locals and could not come to terms with it.

What annoyed us was that at the preparatory meetings for the workers' summit, discussions centred around the merging of CWIU (Chemical Workers Industrial Union - affiliated to COSATU) and SACWU. It is impossible for that to happen without discussions at federation level.

The two federations must first solve the question of unity before it can be discussed by



Manene Samela

Photo: NACTU

the affiliates.* In their discussions they must accommodate the independent unions.

Labour Bulletin: *Are you looking forward to another workers' summit?*

Samela: That is a resolution taken by NACTU and we support it. We have suggested NACTU initiate the resumption of the workers' summit. An agenda must be drawn up to accommodate all the affiliates and the independent unions.

Labour Bulletin: *What other pertinent issues did congress discuss?*

Samela: The focus was on internal re-adjustment. SACWU is a worker-controlled union. Administrators and officials do not participate in debates. Their role as office bearers is to provide workers with necessary information.

The congress also rationalised the union's structures. Workers wanted the union run more efficiently. We have acknowledged there is a lot of legal work and as such there are a lot of legal cases and costs. Workers at the congress

decided there should be a legal department.

Comrade Hendrick Molefe, an accountant, was elected as the general secretary. The department of education, which deals with the training of shopstewards, was revamped. Workers also adopted a resolution for a centralised provident fund.

Labour Bulletin: *Did SACWU support the last mass action?*

Samela: We did not support mass action. The 3-4 August mass action was COSATU's programme. We were expected to tell our members they should participate. If COSATU had planned the mass action with us it would have been something else.

The mass action was on the agenda for the workers' summit which did not take place. Our understanding of mass action is that we have to remove the government. This is what we were advocating. We were actually talking along the lines of a general strike to force the government out of power.

Granted, mass action took place and millions of workers participated, but the state is still intact. De Klerk did not move an inch. Very little was achieved. As trade unions we need to discuss this as soon as possible.

Labour Bulletin: *Will the non-participation of SACWU members in mass action cause tension among workers at plant level with those who participated; with members of CWIU for instance?*

Samela: I don't think there will be tension as we have explained to our workers why we did not support mass action.

We don't have problems with CWIU. Among our members, there are those who are demanding that we should explain the confusion going on before mass action. The meeting between COSATU and SACCOLA confused workers. The employers are part and parcel of the state. De Klerk is their machinery.

* For a different view within NACTU, see November Nkosi, Profile, p85.



SACWU wage strike at Janssen Pharmaceuticals

Photo: William Matlala

Labour Bulletin: *Do you experience a situation where there are conflicts between workers belonging to SACWU and those of CWIU?*

Samela: There are conflicts at plant level. But I think those conflicts arise through lack of education. We have fairly active members in senior positions in the ANC but committed to SACWU. We do not agree with organisations which want their political activists to dominate, as we are in opposition to party politics in trade union affairs.

Our one problem with CWIU is they encourage their members not to take part in strikes we organise. We once had a strike in Modderfontein and CWIU told its members not to take part. This divides the workers. Some of the workers are being influenced in street committees not to take part in SACWU's organisational activities.

Labour Bulletin: *Is there a possibility of a merger between SACWU and CWIU?*

Samela: It depends on what I said earlier on. It also depends on the political climate in the

country. Once we have the so-called interim government and an elected constituent assembly, things are going to change.

We can only merge when there is one federation in the country.

Labour Bulletin: *How is SACWU bargaining in this sector?*

Samela: We are bargaining at plant and company level. We were once involved with the industrial council, but that council was not national. It was based in Cape Town. We found 70% of the employers were owners of small companies and most decisions were taken by them. We realised the best thing was to negotiate at plant level. We have achieved a lot since taking that approach.

We are now thinking of negotiating nationally, as it appears we will have a centralised provident fund. This will eventually lead us to discuss wages and conditions of employment nationally. We are also ensuring conditions of employment are similar in all companies. Workers are beginning to understand the importance of centralised bargaining since they started at plant level.

Labour Bulletin: *Is it true SACWU is now organising in other sectors, becoming a general union?*

Samela: For the past eight years, companies like AECI, SASOL and Sentrachem started contracting out certain services. One of their arguments is that at AECI, for instance, they only manufacture explosives and chemicals. Sentrachem says they are just manufacturing chemicals while SASOL is just manufacturing petrol, oil and other products. They are now saying that for transport, building, maintenance, cleaning and cooking they would prefer to use subcontractors.

With subcontracting, workers were left without any representation. Subcontractors are known for their brutality and violation of workers' rights.

We then had to go out and organise these workers. We feel they have the same grievances as other workers although they come from different sectors. Workers who used to belong to Transport and General Union have joined us. I have to make it clear we don't poach workers, we organise them properly. SACWU does not intend to become a general union.

Labour Bulletin: *SACWU has been organising predominately black workers (Africans, coloureds and Indians). Has that situation changed?*

Samela: When I came into SACWU in the early 80s, there were no whites. You must accept the feelings and the attitude of the workers during those days. In the last five years we changed our constitution and presently we do have white members in our union. But NACTU's policy is to advance black leadership and that is why you don't find white workers in senior positions of the union.

I agree with that policy, we need to encourage it. In Europe or Asia you will find the indigenous people are the ones in the forefront.

Labour Bulletin: *Is SACWU aligned to the PAC?*

Samela: No, we are not. We have PAC members in the union. We are not going to say that when we form one federation people should not belong to political parties. We also have members of Inkatha Freedom Party, AZAPO, Unity Movement and the ANC in SACWU. One has to reconcile the union's position with those of the workers.

We have held seminars where we called the ANC but they never showed up. We want their views to be heard by the workers.

Labour Bulletin: *How do you see the future of the trade union movement after the election of the constituent assembly and the establishment of a new and democratic government?*

Samela: It is a complex question. It will depend on what is coming during the interim government. Definitely, there will be a realignment of forces. It is inevitable. We don't want to see the Polish situation repeated in our country.

Labour Bulletin: *Do you think the future government will change the workers' social status?*

Samela: No. In my opinion, the key thing that will determine the future of the working class is the relation between those who own the means of production and the productive forces. We will have to see how the coming government relates to the capitalist.

At the moment, workers are taking an active part in mass action and will vote for a new government. They seem to trust political parties and leaders. They don't realise when the party they support gets into parliament things will change. It is only then workers will realise they have made a number of mistakes. They will get the right to vote and that is it. Their economic situation is not going to change at all.

I believe the future of the working class will be determined by the workers. Politicians play games and will never take care of workers' interests. ☆

Union Profile

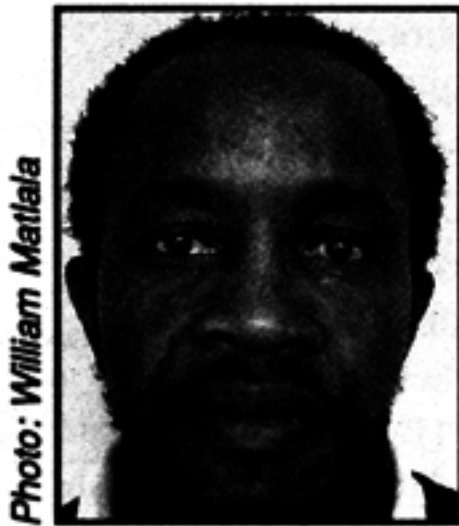


Photo: William Matlala

For eight years POTWA has waged militant struggles for union rights and recognition. Now it has won those. But

'commercialisation' poses new challenges. Can the union adapt?

SNUKI ZIKALALA asks the questions.

POTWA:

responding to **a changing sector**

Post and Telecommunications Workers Association (POTWA) scored an important economic victory this year.

The union, which organises engineers, technicians, diggers, counter clerks and postmen and women in the postal and telecommunication sector, got SAPOS and TELKOM managements to agree to a 19,8% increase – which is above the inflation rate.

POTWA, negotiating on wages for the first time with SAPOS and TELKOM, pushed the minimum wage beyond R1 000. For the lowest grades the increase means workers will earn a minimum of R1 020 and the majority will receive increases of between 10 and 11%.

According to POTWA president, Kgabisi Mosunkutu, the agreement was not the result of "a change of heart from the management. It is our strength and militancy that forced SAPOS and TELKOM to raise our wages above the inflation rate. With the wage talks out the way, the focus will now be on the immediate problems. We'll be fighting for full

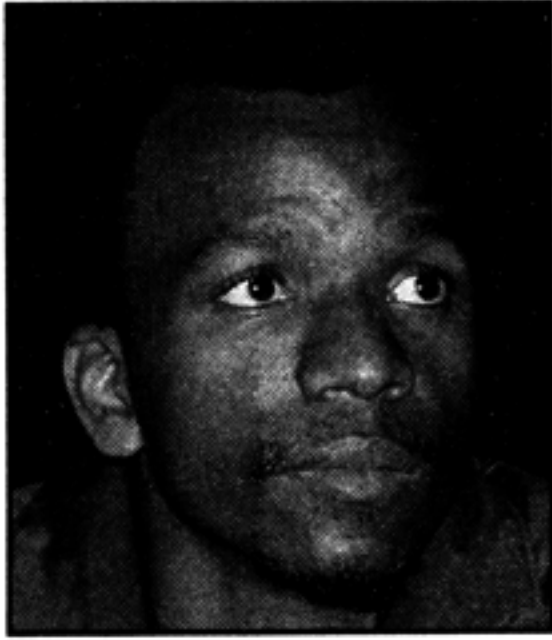
recognition and developing an infrastructure to cope with restructuring. We'll also resume unity talks with other associations for the establishment of a single union in this sector."

Since commercialisation came into effect in October last year, a number of structural changes have taken place. Post and Telecommunications were separated. An interim recognition agreement which embodies the Labour Relations Act (LRA) has been introduced.

At the same time POTWA, like other COSATU affiliates, is not without its internal problems.

Background

POTWA emerged out of the toothless Works Council in 1986. Poor conditions of employment and naked racism in the public sector had contributed to the rejection of the Works Council. Black representatives in the Works Council were always at a disadvantage and were expected to fulfil the interests of



Mlungisi Hlongwane, general secretary of POTWA

Photo: William Matlala

management. They initiated the formation of POTWA.

Hardly a year after its foundation, POTWA organised a major strike. Some 8 000 workers disrupted postal and telecommunication services for five weeks. The 1987 strike ended in

disaster with the dismissal of 2 800 workers, including leading shopstewards. Nearly all POTWA's structures were destroyed, but the real damage was the lowering of morale and weakening of the union.

Access to workers at the Post and Telecommunications premises became impossible. Coloured and Indian workers were employed to replace the victimised African workers. Those who survived were afraid of reprisals and were reluctant to be active within POTWA.

The following years were an uphill struggle. Rebuilding POTWA's structures and regaining workers' confidence in those difficult times was not easy. However, the union's membership increased from 10 000 in 1986 to 22 863 in 1992, with 673 shopstewards.

New leadership

Last year, POTWA's third national congress made sweeping changes to its leadership. Leading key figures were replaced by young, militant activists, the majority of whom were former telecommunication workers dismissed during the 1987 strike.

Kgabisi Mosunkutu was elected president and Velile Nkwanyana as vice president. Others to be elected were: Mlungisi Hlongwane (general secretary), Sizwe Matshikiza (assistant general secretary), Ramateu Manyokolo (treasurer), Bob Mabaso (education chair) and the late Floyd Mashele

(campaigns co-ordinator). The national organiser of the union, Shadrack Kiti, was appointed by the CEC.

Regions were restructured to fit in with COSATU's structures. POTWA now has regional offices in Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Western Cape, Orange Free State, Transkei, Natal, Northern Transvaal and Witwatersrand.

Since then, the country has seen disciplined actions including pickets, lunch-hour demonstrations, go-slows and sit-ins. In May 1991, twelve postal and telecommunications depots in Natal and Witwatersrand were affected by sit-ins and mass demonstrations. Actions were also reported in Pretoria and the East Rand.

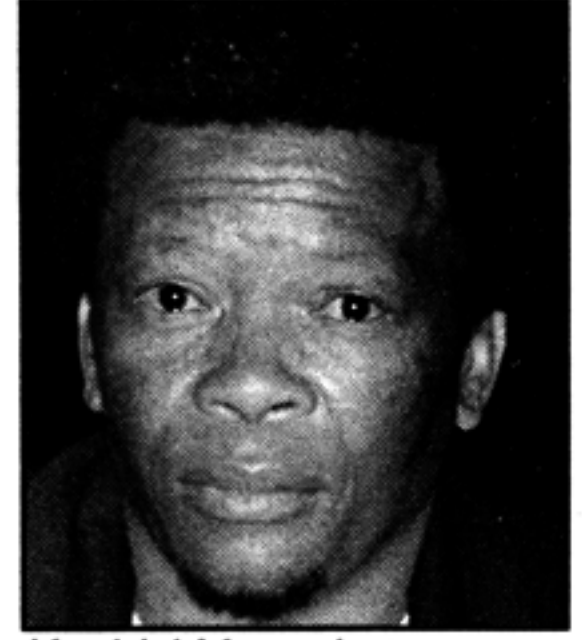
In Cape Town, the union's national co-ordinator, the late Floyd Mashele, led a 400-strong march to the central post office where a 14-day ultimatum was given to the Ministry of Public Enterprise and Economic Co-operation and to the Postmaster General.

These mass actions were precipitated by the post office's reducing the initial wage offer from R927,50 to R851,25. POTWA was also protesting against the Post Office Amendment Bill which was paving the way for privatisation of the sector.

POTWA vehemently opposes privatisation. According to the union, privatisation will result in workers losing their jobs. However, POTWA has been more accepting of commercialisation with the state being the only shareholder.

Separation of Posts and Telecommunications

Despite vigorous campaigning by POTWA, on 1 October 1991 the Department of Posts and



Kgabisi Mosunkutu, former general secretary, now president

Photo: William Matlala

Telecommunications was registered as two separate companies – the SA Post Office Limited (SAPOS) and TELKOM.

Previously, 96 000 workers in these sectors were excluded from the provisions of the LRA and were denied access to the Industrial Court. Workers were allowed to form staff associations and bargain at the Staff Relations Council around conditions of employment. However, there could be no serious wage negotiations as the budget presented in Parliament by the Minister of Posts and Communications had already allocated wages.

A positive feature of the commercialisation process is that now workers fall under the ambit of the LRA.

The new interim agreement which was signed last year, grants postal and telecommunications workers the right to an unprocedural strike for 72 hours without any intimidation or harassment from management. Unlike the LRA itself, it provides a peace clause which stipulates no action may be taken against workers who are on an illegal strike.

The interim recognition is a great victory for the workers, but is not a definitive victory.

The registration of TELKOM and SAPOS as two companies has changed the public sector. It has separated postal and telecommunications workers into two companies which are supposed to bargain separately.

According to POTWA general secretary, Mlungisi Hlongwane, the union has resisted attempts by TELKOM and SAPOS to negotiate with them as two separate companies. "During the recent wage negotiations we succeeded in bringing the two companies together. But representatives of SAPOS and TELKOM argued that their mandates and policies differ and the two companies are controlled by two separate boards of directors."

POTWA is under considerable pressure from the two companies. Negotiations and hearings are now dealt with in a professional manner. The work of shopstewards, who earlier on were representing both Postal and Telecommunication workers, will now have to

be restructured in accordance with the separation of the two companies.

POTWA's recognition and acceptance by the employers has institutionalised and professionalised the mode of conflict through collective bargaining. The militancy of the union's leadership may now conflict with the post-LRA pressures to restrain union members from engaging in unauthorised conflict activities.

A centralised bargaining forum

In the past, smaller staff associations in the post and telecommunication sector had a vote in the bargaining unit, regardless of membership. This gave them the right to veto any resolution despite their minimal representation.

POTWA, as the biggest union in this sector, is pushing for sufficient representivity as a prerequisite for inclusion in the bargaining unit. If this is accepted, it will drive the six racially divided associations towards the union.

One of the biggest problems facing POTWA is how to develop the unity of the staff associations and ultimately form one union.

Because of the legacy of apartheid, it is still difficult to involve the white staff associations, which have been part of management, in the radical politics of change and unity in this sector (see box on p 60).

The coloured and Indian staff associations are attempting to work more closely with POTWA, and a few white unskilled and semi-skilled workers have joined the union. Significant gains have been made in the postal section of Boksburg, which is known to be conservative.

One factor driving the South African Post and Telecommunications Employees Association (SAPTEA), representing Indian workers, and the Post Office Employees Association (PEASA), representing coloured workers, towards unity talks, is the fact that POTWA has succeeded in drawing a substantial number of coloured and Indian workers into its ranks.

In the Western Cape, about 2 400 coloured



White post office workers - a handful have joined POTWA, but post office unions are still mostly racially divided

Photo: William Matlala

Figures supplied by TELKOM and SAPOS on workers employed in their sectors

	TELKOM	SAPOS
Staff:	65 000	28 207
Staff associations		
<i>South African Telecommunication Association (SATA): represents predominately white technical staff</i>	14 000	
<i>Postal and Telkom Association (P&T): represents predominately white clerical and administrative staff</i>	3 295	8 744
<i>Post Office Employees Association of South Africa (PEASA): represents coloured workers employed as senior inspectors of uniformed staff and senior post deliverers</i>	5 320	2 025
<i>South African Post and Telecommunications Employees Association (SAPTEA): represents Indian workers in the clerical staff</i>	1 090	564
<i>Post and Telecommunications Workers Association (POTWA): represents predominately black workers employed as post deliverers, technicians and general labourers</i>	15 936	4 795

workers have joined POTWA.

Hlongwane attributes the inflow of other racial groups into POTWA to the relentless struggle the union has waged against the Patterson job evaluation system.

“The successful campaign against the grading system, which resulted in go-slows and other low level industrial actions for about a month last year, convinced the workers POTWA is the only union with their interests at heart,” he says.

“It is not poaching, as some would say, but practical work and goods that we deliver that convinced workers.”

Problems and prospects of unity

During negotiations for a wage increase that year, there were sit-ins and stoppages. SAPTEA and PEASA joined POTWA’s initiative. For the first time the idea of a merger with the two unions was mooted.

Talks about mergers between POTWA, SAPTEA with 1 090 members and PEASA with 5 320 members – which were mothballed because of minor differences in the leadership

might resume soon.

On 18 July, PEASA initiated a preliminary meeting to discuss unity. According to PEASA's vice president Godfrey Wright, it was only SAPTEA and Postal and Telkom Association (P&T – predominately white) which attended. "We were quite disappointed POTWA did not respond to our invitation. However, the response was great and we laid down principles of unity and agreed to meet again on 17 October."

POTWA's president Mosunkutu shows certain misgivings about PEASA's initiative. In his words, "these associations – PEASA, SAPTEA and P & T – lack commitment. They are afraid they will be swallowed by POTWA."

A single union will benefit workers. Having a centralised bargaining forum, a single union would be in a position to negotiate wages, conditions of employment, health and safety, education and housing for all racial groups.

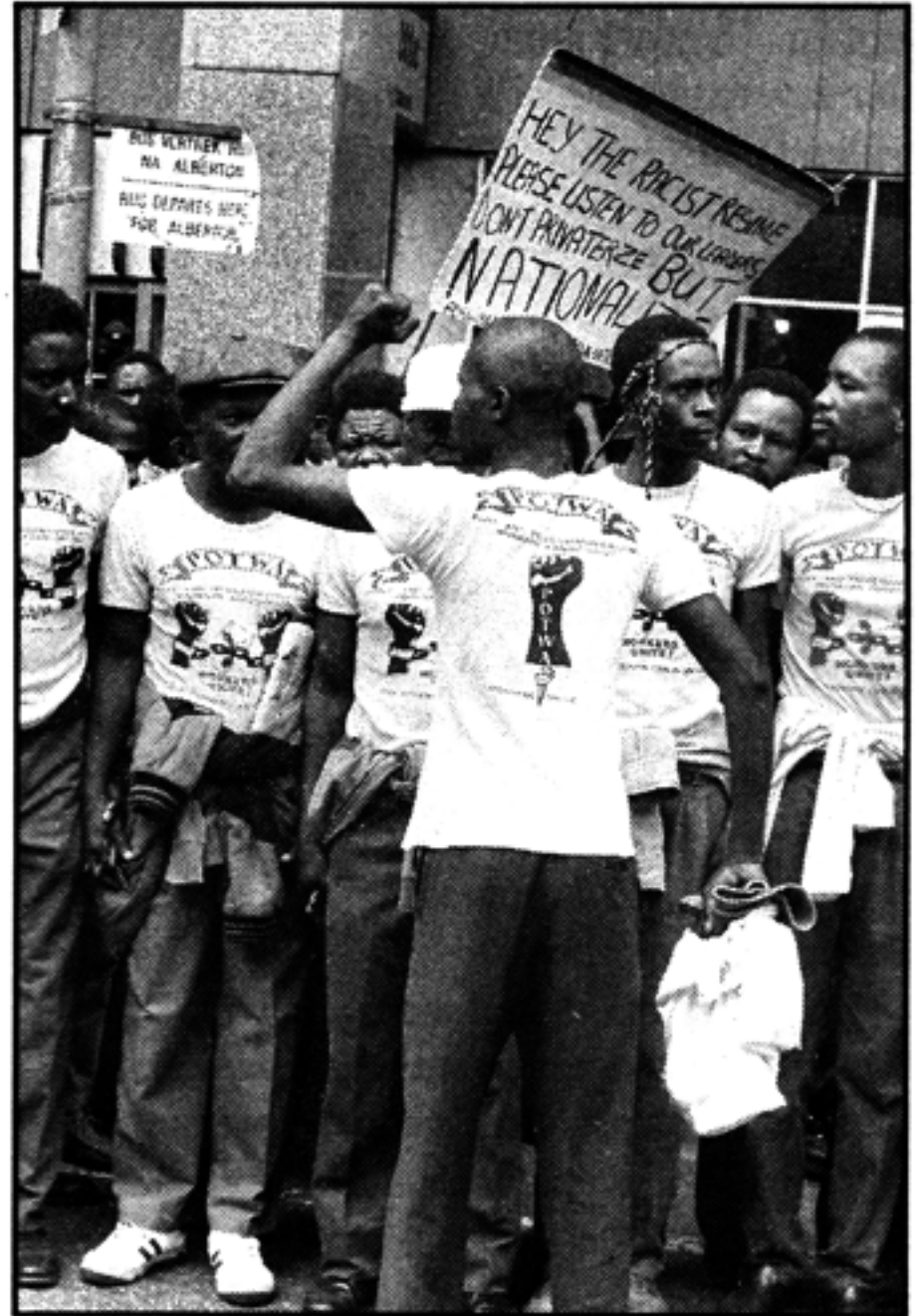
But at this crucial time of our struggle, one would have expected POTWA, not PEASA, to take the initiative and influence the decision making of these unity talks.

Is POTWA holding back because of its internal problems? Can it deliver the goods and will its well-tested leadership be able to take the necessary steps towards forming a single union?

Internal problems and POTWA's education programme

Because of violence, shopfloor structures are not functioning properly, locals are not well attended and service in the remote areas is poor. The union suffers from a shortage of skilled and professional people. POTWA's education department is still at its infancy. According to education officer, Bob Mabaso, the union is still developing its policy on training.

With the increasing sophistication of industrial relations, POTWA has taken the question of training and retraining seriously. According to a POTWA official, the union is insisting that training of new recruits should address the long-term perspective of affirmative action. "The administration,



Building one post office union: will POTWA rise to the challenge?

Photo: William Matlala

finance and security departments, which are the privilege of white workers at the moment, should be opened for blacks. Blacks should receive equal training with their white colleagues."

It is also fighting racial discrimination in the two sectors. Mabaso says there are black graduates whose knowledge and qualifications are not being utilised. "Presently, there is only one black person in the C3 level. Whites who have no matric certificates dominate the managerial posts. We are demanding affirmative action in the two sectors," he says.

POTWA's educational programme is aimed at developing the educationally disadvantaged workers.

According to Mabaso, "we have just started introducing COSATU's Adult Basic Education programme to the workers. Seminars and workshops are being organised."

Management is initiating sophisticated programmes and implementing them on the

ground. They are promoting literacy training and developing the skill levels of the workers without consulting POTWA. This has annoyed the union.

At present POTWA educational structures are very weak. There is no proper co-ordination in this field. Workers without specialised training in education are being asked to conduct their own educational seminars.

Mabaso says being fully employed means he does not have enough time to concentrate on the job he has been mandated to carry out.

"We are developing an educational programme which will focus on staff development, skills upgrading, shopstewards' training and the LRA."

Union officials admit the union will not be able to properly implement whatever educational programme is adopted without a fulltime national educational secretary.

Politics

POTWA's leadership currently wears many hats. The late campaigns' co-ordinator Floyd Mashele was also in the peace secretariat of the ANC. President Kgabisi Mosunkutu is also president of Civic Associations of the Southern Transvaal (CAST) and a senior member of the ANC.

Mosunkutu admits being involved in many committees makes a person less effective. "However, we have created sub committees and what helps us is that we work as a collective. The position taken by POTWA leadership is a principled one. We object to our leadership taking fulltime positions in political organisations."

The union's leadership believes it is presently very important for workers to be involved in the political struggle.

The POTWA leadership expresses confidence in and unequivocal support of the ANC. But this is not necessarily mirrored by the rank and file. It is well known that many COSATU members, including members of POTWA have expressed unhappiness with CODESA II. In several COSATU meetings I attended, they questioned the ANC's unilateral decision making.

On the question of COSATU's independence from the ANC-led alliance and the future government, the union leadership says COSATU does not take instructions from the ANC and that issues are being discussed in a comradely spirit.

But Mosunkutu does not rule out the possibility of a future government's proposing a moratorium on wages and strikes. "It will depend on the discussions the union has with the future government. All we are interested in is the economic growth and stability in our country."

Challenges facing POTWA

In the eight years since it was established, POTWA has become known for being very effective in its campaigns. Its young, militant leaders are mostly from the class of June '76. They have the reputation of being with the masses. They plan strategies and tactics together with workers. They have penetrated a racist environment and a sector which was meant to be for privileged whites only. They have fought not only for union recognition, but for black workers to be respected as human beings.

POTWA's independence, militancy, non-racialism and the current wage negotiations victory has attracted workers of other racial groups.

Now, with the interim agreement in place, the union has to prepare itself for an intellectual battle if it is to grow and spread its influence throughout the postal and telecommunication sector.

The head office needs skilled staff who can take on the task of collective bargaining. Regional offices like the Northern Transvaal and the Orange Free State, which lack personnel, need urgent attention. Shopstewards' councils and branch committees have to be revamped. The education department needs to be re-organised and a national education secretary appointed.

Stumbling blocks or hurdles to the proposed mergers into a single union need to be overcome. It is only through dialogue and patience that a progressive union can win the others over. ☆

clearing the **gender hurdles**



Photo: William Matlala

FIONA DOVE* compares the seven-year battle for gender equality in COSATU to a major obstacle course, with the finish line barely in sight.

Women are under-represented in the power structures of COSATU. Since 1985 women have made up 36% of COSATU's membership and constitute a mere 14% of COSATU's shopstewards at the lowest level. At national level there are even fewer women.

Because so few women have been elected as shopstewards union education and training programmes, higher levels of debate and decision-making structures are inaccessible to women. Male domination of the unions continues.

The lack of women leadership at the most influential levels of the federation is reflected in the formation of gender-blind demands in national negotiations on labour legislation and economic restructuring. A glaring example was the amendment of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. The draft amendments had been through all of the relevant COSATU structures a number of times - but the simple question of job security for pregnant women was forgotten!

Yet one of COSATU's first policies was aimed at achieving equality for women.

Great paper policy

COSATU's 1985 policy states gender equality could be achieved by

- raising consciousness through normal education programmes;

- planning special programmes aimed at building women workers' confidence;
- establishing a watchdog subcommittee under the education department to monitor progress;
- promoting women's rights through collective bargaining.

It looked great on paper, but by 1987 the federation acknowledged little progress had been made. There were some efforts to introduce the issues into education programmes by tagging on a section on women.

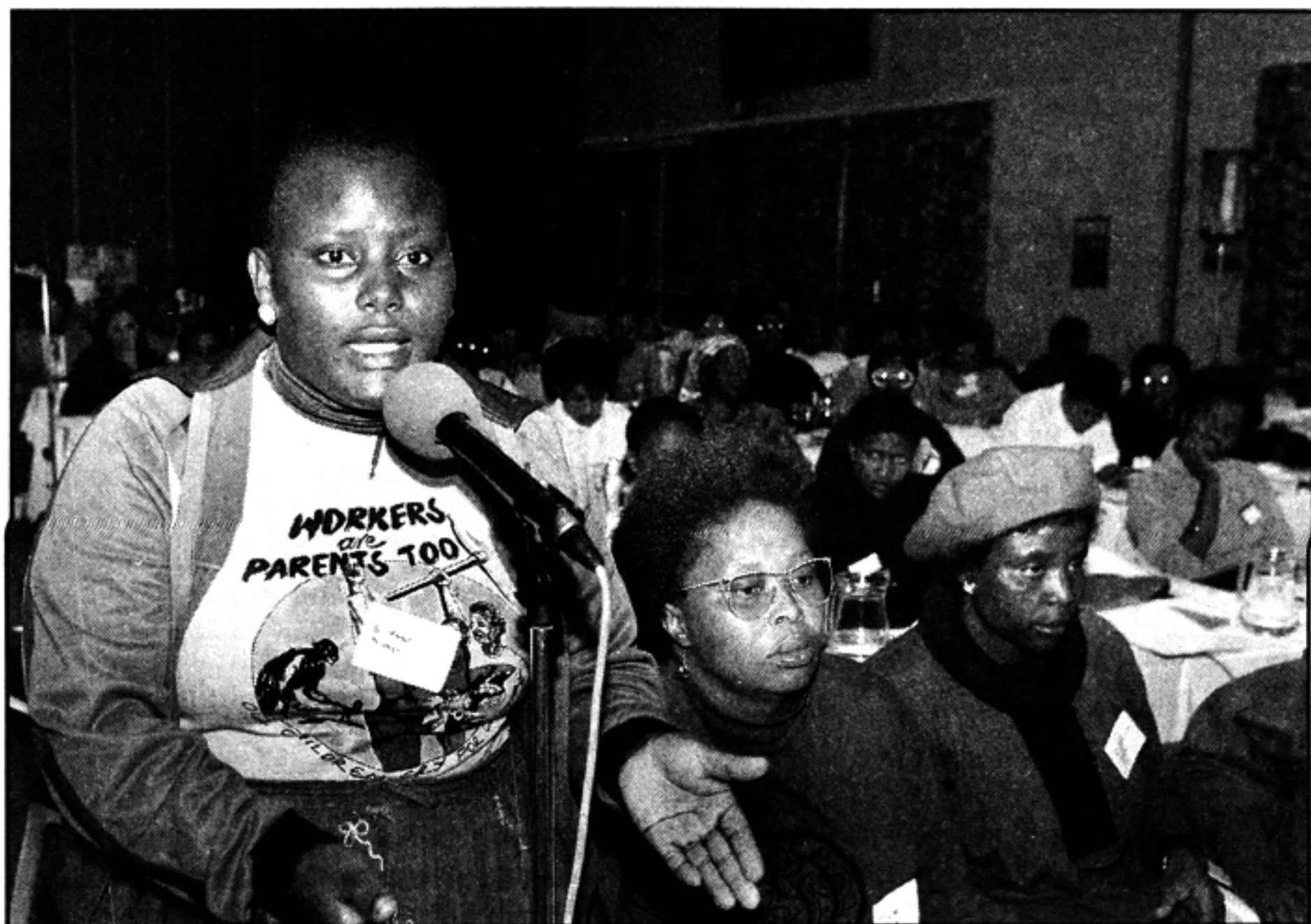
But most union education officers are men, who are not particularly gender-sensitised. The courses are generally aimed at shopstewards, who are mainly men. They are often not particularly interested in looking at women's issues.

Collective bargaining gains

Some concrete gains were made in the collective bargaining arena - notably around maternity rights - but these were confined to a few unions which had greater shopfloor participation from women.

The development of women leadership and setting up a watchdog committee to monitor progress was not addressed.

* Fiona Dove is editor of COSATU's *The Shopsteward*



COSATU women: no easy road to power in the federation

Photo: William Matlala

Women's forums are formed

In 1987, women's forums were formed in the unions in preparation for the Women's Conference early the next year. Initially, these drew on women shopstewards, organisers and administrators. Few held positions on higher constitutional structures of the unions, and fewer still in COSATU. The union officials were overburdened. Despite a commitment in spirit to seeing women in the unions develop, they simply did not have the time to become involved.

On the conference agenda was the monitoring body, agreed to in the 1985 resolution. It was called the National Women's Subcommittee (NWSC) and fell under the National Education Committee (NEDCOM).

Had it not been for the original Congress resolution, the 1988 Women's Conference might have vetoed NWSC's existence. The period was fraught with tensions over the relationship of trade unions to political organisations. A strong lobby in the Women's Conference argued that to organise women as women in COSATU would usurp the role of

the about-to-be-revived Federation of South African Women, which was affiliated to UDF. This was interwoven with a more serious argument that separate women's structures would ghettoise women's issues.

The conference reluctantly accepted the NWSC and women's forums at local level, but no co-ordinating structure at regional or national level, aside from existing structures like the education committees. The women's forums ended up with a mediated relationship through (male-dominated) education committees, which were also not decision-making structures, to the (very male-dominated) constitutional structures.

On their own

By 1989, the shopstewards and administrators were by and large left to organise the forums on their own. They drew in rank and file women.

The women's forums thus comprised mainly women lacking in organisational and educational skills. They had scant understanding of the machinations of the

Bed politics

Bed politics often scares off women from leadership positions. One high powered, outspoken woman unionist tells of how some men in her union felt she needed "taming". They encouraged one of the national officials to seduce her, presuming this would give him power over her. The plot backfired when he found himself supporting her strident views rather than "taming" her. She reckons the strategy is not unusual.

Many men in the unions abuse their power and 'hero' status to take advantage of a woman sexually, and then to drop her for another soon after. This creates competition and tension among women.

Sexual harassment is a similar hidden issue. Most women in the unions can tell tales of fighting off a drunken union man late at night or having to refute political smears by a rejected man. Staff of one large union recently revealed sexual harassment as one of the single biggest problems raised by women. ❖

unions, no idea about how to get items on to official agendas of the unions, how to plan campaigns and so on. There was no specialised leadership training programme to assist these women. They had little or no access to resources and could only relate to constitutional structures via the education sub-structures.

These women also commanded little respect. They met opposition from other women - many did not think women's forums should exist at all. Men were often threatened by the subjects women chose to discuss - like sexual harassment and sexual politicking.

When the NWSC started operating, it had no fulltime official employed to co-ordinate its activities. There was very little money available for national meetings so most representatives were from the Witwatersrand region. The representatives were usually very active, but were not high level leadership.

Women workers must not be ignored

One of the most difficult battles to date had been against the unconscious discrimination practised by the predominantly male organisers who had a tendency to report back to men on union matters, unintentionally ignoring women workers. ❖

Ghettoisation

The constitutional structures started to refer anything that could possibly be construed as concerning women to the women's forums.

But because the forums themselves only had a mediated relationship with COSATU's decision-making structures, they were 'ghettoised'. They could not get the resources they needed; they could not get their programmes supported and were isolated from the mainstream activities of the unions.

Ghettoisation could have been avoided if strong women's caucuses were allowed to flourish and to have direct representation on decision-making structures.

At a regional level, they reported to regional education committees (REDCOMs, mainly men) and the regional office-bearers (ROBs, mainly, if not exclusively, men) who then had to take their reports, requests and recommendations to the male dominated regional executive committees (RECs).

The affiliates' women's forums complained they could never present their issues themselves; the men representing them either did not understand the issues sufficiently to argue them or were not particularly concerned about pushing on the women's behalf.

Similarly, at national level, NWSC was a sub-committee of NEDCOM, itself a substructure which reported to the CEC.

So there was no direct access to the structures which would allocate resources. Gender equality was not seen as an organisational priority and was usually placed last on the agenda; or there were bigger priorities for resource allocation.

The forums floundered. Later the male-dominated structures could turn around and say: "See how useless the women are!"

Two years later, the 1989 COSATU

Why women are not elected

What is really required are affirmative action programmes, both for those committed to the women's forums (to groom them for shopsteward elections) and for women shopstewards (to prepare them for higher positions in decision-making structures in the unions).

Historical and cultural disadvantages have to be taken into account when viewing the disproportionate representation of women in COSATU's decision-making structures, which are based on shopsteward representation.

Why both men and women do not elect more women to be shopstewards mirrors the unequal power relations between men and women in society.

Traditionally, women have been the least educated, most unskilled and least secure workers: they are the general assistants, domestic workers, plantation workers, the lowest-graded machinists. They have less confidence than the more educated, articulate and skilled workers - who are usually men - particularly in taking on (white, male) management.

Another problem is the perception of leadership. Men are seen as commanding, authoritative, never admitting weaknesses. Women's style of leadership tends to be more co-operative, accommodating, self-critical.

Then there are the historical prejudices against women: *Women are not to be trusted, they gossip, they get emotional, they are easily intimidated.*

Men do not vote for women because of their structural position in social power relations. Why women lack faith in their own gender is more complex. Submissive customs, internalised inferiority to men and a retreat into traditional roles all play a part.

Most women are tied into oppressive domestic relations. Objectively, they probably would not be given the space or time required of a union leader. Most male union leaders are generally uncritical of these relationships, because they have a stake in them too. Women in leadership positions are often single (albeit with children).

Most organisers are men. This is partly because of the long hours, lack of transport and tenuous accommodation in areas one has to visit - all of which can make the job more dangerous for women. But it is also because of blind prejudice. Even if women apply for such jobs, the (male-dominated) employment committee assumes she will not be up to it. There is no affirmative action policy within unions to employ more women in organising positions, particularly in unions with a lot of potential women members like SACCAWU or FAWU. ❖

Congress pinpointed the problem as being the lack of women leadership. At the time the unions balked at the concrete resolution to make sexual harassment, as a barrier to women leadership, an official offence. The Congress sidestepped the thorny issue by agreeing to consider it in a code of conduct, which has not been drafted to this day.

Between 1989 and 1991, the women's forums soldiered on, collapsed and picked themselves up again. They were expected to succeed against impossible odds.

There was uneven support and development of women's forums in the affiliates. Without strong affiliate structures, there was little the NWSC could do. The only national campaign to be attempted by the NWSC was the 1990 Childcare Action, a patchy, one-day affair with

only a few affiliates participating in some regions.

A stayaway in the Witwatersrand region prevented plans for Childcare Action there. The NWSC members, mostly from the Witwatersrand, lacked the experience and vision to co-ordinate nationally. NEDCOM, into which the NESC was linked, did not normally undertake campaigns and did not have the resources necessary to finance and support Childcare Action.

Defending the right to exist

The national leadership of women decided to identify the obstacles and start to define themselves more as a lobby group within COSATU.

There was a real danger women's forums

would be dissolved. A strong argument existed that separate women's forums had led to the ghettoisation of women's issues in the unions. This was true, but the problem, said the women, was that they had no direct representation on decision-making structures and no-one to co-ordinate the day-to-day running of the women's forums.

Prior to the 1991 COSATU Congress, the women prepared well for the debates on the future of women's forums, anticipating they would have to defend the right of the forums to continue.

There was heavy caucusing at the Congress. But what probably saved the women's efforts were the real gains for women that had been made over the years - notably maternity/parental rights.

To a lesser extent, demands such as equal pay, childcare, training opportunities and sexual harassment were being taken up in National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) and Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). These probably had little to do with the women's forums themselves, but rather with the increased awareness

COSATU affiliates and gender issues

CWIU has made the most progress [see main story]. Although the women's forums are still very weak in the following affiliates, there have been developments on gender issues:

- SARHWU, FAWU, SAMWU, PPWAWU and NUM have given the women's forums direct access to constitutional structures.
- SAMWU has achieved roughly proportional representation of women at national level.
- SACCAWU has integrated parental rights and training issues into its collective bargaining programme, and has invested in gender sensitising courses for male office bearers.
- NUMSA has key gender issues as priorities on its agenda, notably non-discrimination in training and job opportunities and childcare.
- TGWU women have a strong voice in the union and issues like sexual harassment, childcare and AIDS are key union issues. But like NUMSA women, they are still battling for the right to status on constitutional structures.
- SACTWU has achieved proportional representation on its structures without legislating this and is now actively participating in COSATU women's forums.

The other unions have organisational problems that have to be addressed before they can give women much attention or resources. Ways of rationalising resources across the unions will have to be investigated. ❖

generated by all the hot debates over the years.

Another lifeline could have been the pressure international funders had been putting on COSATU to jack up its programmes for women.

A victory at last

The 1991 COSATU Congress was the first major breakthrough for women in COSATU. They won the right to:

- continue with the building of the women's forums;
- establish mixed gender forums;
- employ a fulltime co-ordinator for their activities;
- have their programme seen as both an educational and organisational concern;
- proper allocation of resources.

In less than a year, regional women's forums were burgeoning; workshops were being organised to inform women about existing COSATU policies on international affiliation, the economy and other matters of broad concern; there is new energy in the affiliates and a very united and directed Second COSATU Women's Conference in August.

The most recent CEC meeting adopted a conference recommendation that the post of gender co-ordinator be made a permanent one and that she



Women workers, bottom of the heap in the workplace: is it any different in COSATU?

Photo: William Matlala

be directly accountable to the CEC.

In the context of the struggles over the last seven years, this has been no mean victory. Within COSATU at a national level, there is now a possibility of greater co-ordination, resources and access to decision-making structures.

Shaping the agendas

The women are in a better position to feed into plans for a national integrated education and training system which takes account of affirmative action with regards to women leadership development.

Women will now be able to make inputs to the national task forces, the National Manpower Commission agendas, and political negotiations. The conditions for women to be able to influence legislation, such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, are now being laid.

But the battle is far from over. The NWSC cannot carry the weight without the support of strong women's forums within the affiliates. Like COSATU, the individual affiliates have to set up a proper infrastructure and pump in

serious resources.

This includes specialised staff to deal with the development of women leadership, the building of women's forums and the co-ordination of women's input. It is a fulltime job. The COSATU Women's Conference recognised this in calling for the National Gender Co-ordinator's position to be made a fulltime post and for all affiliates to be encouraged to employ fulltime gender co-ordinators. SACCAWU, TGWU and CWIU women are pushing for this at the moment.

All three union NECs have opposed the proposal. In SACCAWU and TGWU the women's forums are not yet seen as very significant. In CWIU the consideration is financial.

Right to power

Despite the conflicts in the past, the 1992 Women's Conference was unanimous that separate forums to discuss gender issues are necessary to build women's confidence, skills and programmes. However, their frustrations over the last few years have brought a keen awareness that without a direct say on decision-making structures of the unions, they will be side-lined and gender issues ghettoised.

Some affiliates, notably CWIU, have a policy of proportional representation for women at all levels and in all meetings as well as special ex-officio status for women's forums on all constitutional structures from local to national level. This ensures that women's issues are part of the general collective bargaining agenda of the union. These include non-discrimination in training and job opportunities, parental rights and women's health issues. CWIU provides a good example for other unions to follow in giving women access to real power [see box on p 67].

COSATU women have run a tough race but are now on a better footing. If they can achieve a specialised affirmative action, education and employment programme for women in the unions, they can go far in improving women's status and reshaping the direction of COSATU. ☆

Next issue: *Women and collective bargaining*

the **brazilian** **labour** **movement** *proposing* **alternatives**

KARL VON HOLDT

visited Brazil in April. He reports on the economic and organisational challenges facing the Brazilian labour movement.

Brazil is huge. It is seven times bigger than South Africa with 150 million citizens. Ten million live in Sao Paulo, the major industrial city, and five million live around it.

1 700 unions are affiliated to CUT (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores, the progressive trade union centre). They represent 4,5 million workers. Like COSATU, CUT is a militant labour movement, forged in the struggle against a military dictatorship, sweetheart unions and intransigent employers. Unlike COSATU, CUT represents an extremely broad range of working people - from rural workers and rubber tappers in the Amazon jungles to blue collar industrial workers in the metal, chemical, petroleum and other sectors, to white collar bank and public sector workers and professional unions such as doctors, architects, engineers, university teachers. This gives it a very wide social influence.

Like South Africa, Brazil is in the middle of a transition from a dictatorship to a democracy,

although it is quite a lot further down this road than South Africa. Again, like South Africa, Brazil's massive and protected manufacturing sector is facing economic crisis due to changes in the world economy. As in South Africa this has sparked debates about the new economic and political role of the labour movement.

Wages and price agreements in the auto sector

The debate on labour's economic strategy was focused on a series of negotiations in the auto sector when we were in Brazil. The massive auto industry in Sao Bernado is the cradle of CUT and the best organised sector in the country. Although in Brazil the trade unions are local unions, and each negotiates only with employers in its locality or region, scope for a national agreement was created when the government established an auto sector council some time ago.

Although the Brazilian auto industry is

* The author visited Brazil with Mtutuzeli Tom, president of NUMSA. The article owes much to our joint reflections on what we saw.

much bigger than South Africa's – the biggest plants employ 14 to 20 000 workers – it is like South Africa's, a protected and state supported sector. It faces a crisis with rising prices, falling demand and increasing international competition. Looming retrenchments mean this crisis is just as serious for workers as for employers.

Early this year, the CUT metal workers unions made a path breaking new proposal in the auto sector council. They proposed that: the government should reduce the tax it charges on new cars, employers should reduce their profits and prices, and workers would restrain their wage demands to equal the rate of inflation if employers guaranteed a moratorium on retrenchment. In addition, the trade unions demanded that employers begin to negotiate union proposals that the industry produce cheaper models, more buses, etc. The unions argued that this would expand the domestic market and allow the industry to grow.

These proposals were controversial. A number of more left wing unionists argued that it was a form of social contract which would demobilise the workers. Nonetheless at a general meeting of metal workers in Sao Bernado that we attended, the workers unanimously endorsed the proposals, which were to last for an experimental period of three months. Unions, employers and the government managed to reach agreement on the tax, price, wage and retrenchment proposals, but employers rejected the more radical proposals for negotiating their production plans.

The agreement had some success in holding down prices, and preserving workers' jobs and protecting them against inflation (this is a major issue in Brazil - the inflation rate is about 20% per month). It also gave the metal workers broad public credibility, as they were seen as trying to control car prices. In fact the agreement was renewed in July.

Ibase researcher Sergio Ferreira argues that the agreement is not a social pact or class collaboration, since workers made real gains and remained mobilised and militant. On the other hand, he notes the danger of making such

Brazil and South Africa

Our visit to Brazil and to CUT was fascinating. There are such remarkable similarities in the challenges facing us, and such great differences. The labour movements of both countries could gain enormously from a sharing of experience in the arenas of organisation, education, economic policy and industrial restructuring, and the relation of trade unions and politics.

agreements at sectoral level without overall co-ordination. "There is no way to have a successful policy for only one sector. On the contrary, CUT should make an attempt to elaborate an overall strategy for this kind of agreement so that we can confront the neo-liberal policies of the government at a national level."

Other concerns raised in the trade unions and the Workers Party (PT), are that the agreement contains no measures for modernising the industry or restructuring it; the main burden is on public finances because of the tax reduction, and this fits into the conservative neo-liberal economics of the (former) Collor government which argues for "less state, more free enterprise". There are also fears that employers are raising prices and avoiding cost of living adjustments.

Proposing alternatives

The agreement in the auto sector indicates that a new strategic view is developing in the Brazilian labour movement, in response to political democratisation and economic crisis [this is similar to the new strategies emerging in the South African labour movement, see p 30]. The president of the Rio de Janeiro Metal Workers Union told us, "I do not believe that we are going to have a revolution in the near future. I argue inside PT and inside CUT that we should combine mass mobilisation with the capacity to propose alternative policies which can be implemented if we have sufficient power. The whole idea is a process of accumulating forces."



We meet militant Novas Limas mineworkers. Their gold mines are owned by Anglo

Photo: Karl von Holdt

This kind of perspective is associated with Articulation, which is the dominant political tendency both in CUT and in PT. Other tendencies argue that it is a proposal to “manage capitalism better”, and propose instead a policy of mass mobilisation from outside all institutions, in order to deepen the crisis.

The economic challenge facing CUT is how to combat the savagely monetarist and free marketeer economic policies of the government. These policies of privatisation, cutting public services, increasing interest rates and removing tariff protection are devastating the economy and the people of Brazil. Closures, retrenchments, unemployment, homelessness and desperate poverty are seen everywhere. Children beg on every street corner. Tens of thousands of people in Sao Paulo live under bridges and flyovers because they are unable even to afford shacks.

CUT’s president, Jair Meneguelli, described little girls in the north of Brazil standing with *For Sale* signs on their backs. He pointed out that diseases which had been eradicated from Brazil decades ago such as cholera, are now re-appearing.

CUT has decided on two campaigns to challenge these economic policies – the

campaign for a new minimum wage, and the campaign to change the form of public ownership instead of privatising state enterprises and services. The campaigns are focused on two ‘public initiative bills’ which are being proposed by CUT for presentation to congress. This possibility is created by a provision in the new constitution which states that if an organisation in civil society can collect one million signatures in support of a draft bill, that bill must be placed before congress even if it is not supported by any political party.

The Minimum Wage Bill drafted by CUT proposes a phased increase of the minimum wage from its current US\$52 per month to US\$400 over a period of four years. Currently some 18 million people earn the minimum wage so it would make a great difference to an enormous number of people.

CUT’s Administration of Public Enterprises Bill proposes that the current state administration of public enterprises be replaced by a four-part administration composed of representatives of government, business, workers in the enterprise, and pension funds which would also invest in these enterprises. According to Meneguelli the problem is not public enterprise as such, but

rather the corrupt administration of public enterprise by the current state. "This is what we are imagining for the entire state - transparent and accountable public administration."

These draft bills have already been discussed in congress and in society at large, and several political parties have endorsed them. But CUT insists that they remain public initiative bills, so that together with other organisations, it can mobilise a national campaign around them. Meneguelli believes that if the campaign is powerful enough and popular enough, the majority of deputies in congress will feel compelled to support it for fear of losing votes in their constituencies. In this way the bills could become law.

"We understand this as a confrontation with the heart of the neo-liberal project," says Meneguelli. "When you affect wages, when you stop privatisation, you affect the heart of these policies."

Productivity and workplace organisation

CUT trade unionists are well aware that at the heart of global industrial restructuring are questions of efficiency, productivity, quality, work re-organisation, worker participation and new management techniques. Workers at Mercedes Benz told us that management had tried to introduce quality circles and other 'worker participation' techniques. Workers have rejected these, but are open to exploring possibilities which will give them more power and control in the workplace. CUT has established a joint committee with Italian trade unionists and other experts to research these issues. Education programmes are also beginning to raise these issues.

But all of this will remain largely theoretical until CUT can solve its most serious problem - the lack of workplace organisation. In late 1991, researchers estimated that CUT had fewer than 100 factory committees in place. Trade unions have no right of access, meeting or representation within the plants.

As CUT International Secretary Osvaldo Bargas explains: "Within the official system and in the law there are no trade union rights



Sao Bernardo metalworkers vote yes for the new agreement in the auto industry

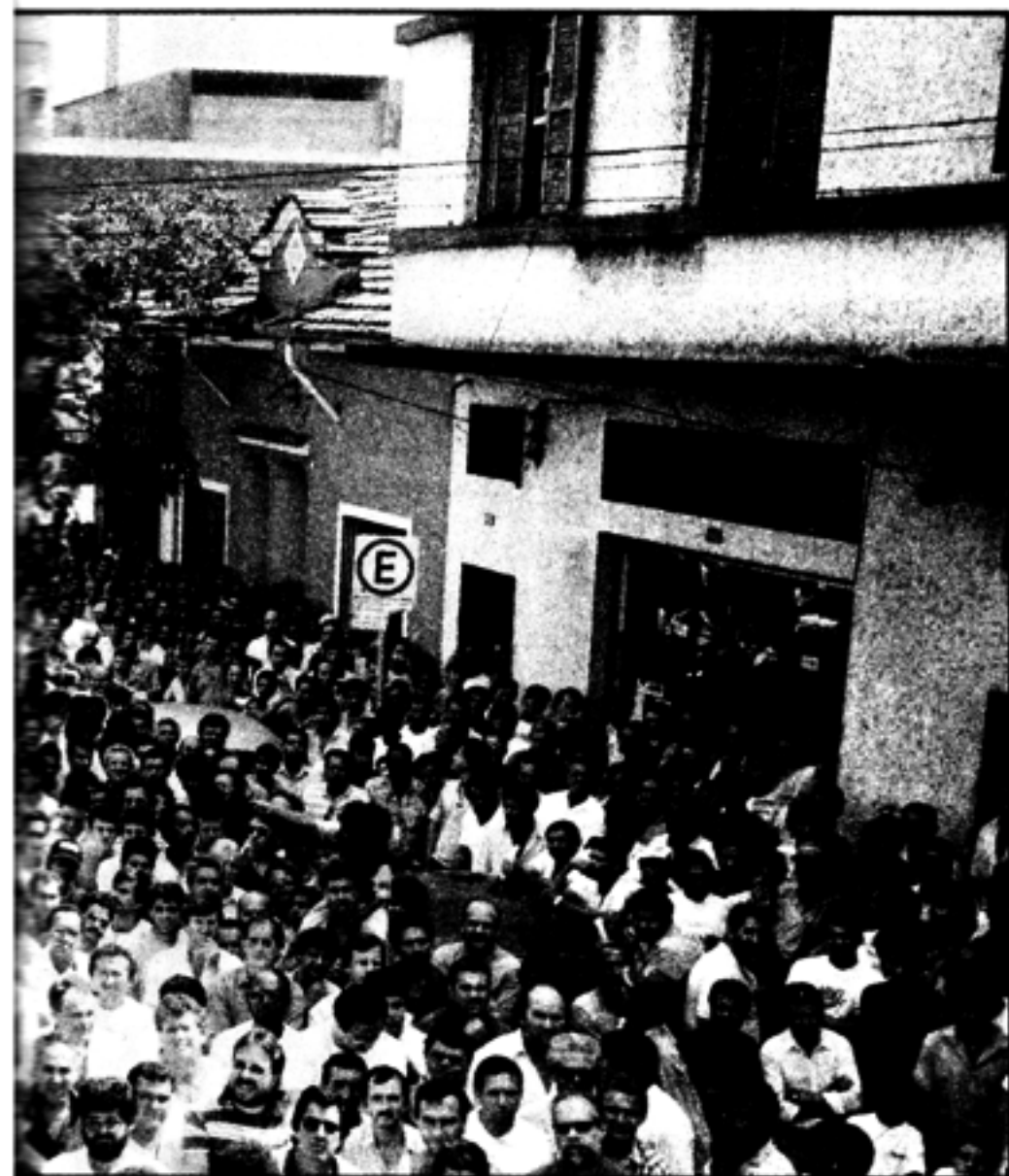
inside the factory. We call this trade unionism from outside the factory or 'factory gates unionism'. If we want an assembly of workers we have to go to the factory gates with loud speakers and hold a meeting for 10 or 15 minutes before workers go into the factory. We have managed to establish factory committees in a number of workplaces only through very hard struggle. This is one of the priorities of our struggle. We understand that you cannot have a strong union without strong organisation in the workplace."

This makes it impossible to develop policies or struggles around restructuring of the workplace. Until CUT can overcome this problem it will have very little influence on industrial restructuring.

The structure of the Brazilian trade union movement

It is impossible to understand why CUT has no workplace rights and very little workplace organisation without understanding the history and structure of Brazilian trade unionism.

The corporatist trade union system was established by President Vargas in the 1930s. It



NUMSA president Mtutuzeli Tom also addressed the meeting

Photo: Mtutuzeli Tom

was imported from fascist Italy. The labour code established a system of local unions, union federations at state level, and union confederations at the national level. The system worked according to the following principles:

- Only local unions were allowed. A union could cover one city or sometimes several cities and occasionally a state.
- Only one union per sector or work category was allowed in a locality. This was like a closed shop – you could not start a rival union.
- Each union negotiated with the employers in its sector at city or regional level. Trade unions had no right to negotiate at plant level and had no factory structures or rights.
- In negotiations, the trade union represented all workers in its sector. For example, the Sao Paulo metal workers union represents all metal workers in Sao Paulo even if only 20% of them are members.
- Every worker had one days' pay per year deducted as a trade union tax, whether he or she actually joined the union or not. This tax was divided up among the local unions, state federations and national

confederations. Thus trade unions became wealthy, owned their own building and provided medical and dental services to their members.

- Local unions would join together in state federations for their sector and national confederations for their industry. Trade unions in different sectors were not allowed to have any link except at national level.
- The state had the power to 'intervene' a trade union - in other words it could remove a leadership and place it under state control whenever it felt it necessary.

This system established a massive trade union structure and bureaucracy which was financed by workers but did not rely on their support, as the tax was automatically deducted. Bargas told us, "The structure was there to control the struggle of the workers. Its task was to co-operate with the state and provide charitable services such as dentistry or health."

This system still exists today, and can still prove effective in preventing the emergence of progressive trade unionism. For example, the Sao Paulo commercial workers union only has 3 000 members, although there are 400 000 commercial workers in Sao Paulo, all of them contributing one days' salary to the union. With this money the union leaders can deliver very good benefits to their 3 000 members. So they are always re-elected. They do not allow any new members. Bargas told us, "If you want to join you have to go to court, and meanwhile the union will tell your boss and he will fire you for trying to join the union!" So it is impossible for progressive activists to join the union and form an opposition movement. And because the law only allows one union for commercial workers in Sao Paulo, it is not possible to start another union.

CUT was born out of opposition to this state corporatist system of trade unions. The 'new unionism' as the Brazilians call it, emerged in a wave of strikes in the late 70s. According to Bargas, "The new unionism is a combative unionism. It is born out of confrontation. The new unionism was going to question the whole system as it existed and which prevented the organisation of workers and the defence of

their rights.”

The centre of the new militancy was the massive auto and metal factories in the Sao Bernardo region near Sao Paulo. The new unionism was built in the factories by nuclei of activists working patiently through the 1970s. It was essentially an opposition movement and during the strikes activists elected plant committees and strike committees. In the massive 1980 strike a core demand was for the recognition of shopstewards and establishing factory floor representation in the trade unions [see David Fig ‘Brazil: labour movement in crisis’ in *Labour Bulletin* Vol 9 No 6].

However, already the trade union movement was changing. The progressive opposition movement was strengthened by this wave of strikes and they managed to take over hundreds of local unions. This was the obvious strategy to use. The law prevented them establishing new unions, but it presented them with old unions which they could capture by winning union elections. As Jose Paul, a CUT education official, told us: “We have a history of organising opposition trade union movements and taking over the official structure, and building outside the union a parallel structure. We work both inside and outside the structure.” By 1983, when CUT was launched, it had some 800 or 900 local unions affiliated. There are now 1 700.

But this meant that the activists’ focus was shifted from the factory floor to the trade union offices. Each union is controlled by a board with 24 members, which is elected at a union congress. The board members are therefore not direct delegates from factory structures, although a number of them continue to work in their plants while others become full-time officials. Obviously, most factories do not have a member on the board. Full time board members lose contact with their factories. So there is very little link to the factory. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that unions have no right to negotiate at factory level. The focus is on negotiations with, for example, all metal employers in the city or region.

In the early 80s workers continued to struggle for factory structures. The first breakthrough



PT leader Lula addresses the workers. Next to him is Sao Bernardo metal workers' leader Vicentinho, widely expected to be the next CUT president

Photo: Mtutuzeli Tom

came in 1982 when Ford recognised the factory committee in Sao Barnardo. When we visited Mercedes Benz in Sao Bernardo we entered the factory as guests of the workers committee, which has also won recognition from management. It has negotiated grievance and disciplinary procedures, but has no right to call general meetings.

In general, however, unions have very little workplace organisation. For example, the metal workers union at Betim, outside Bello Horizonte, told us about the difficulties of organising in the giant Fiat plant there. The union only has 2 000 members out of the 14 000 employed at Fiat. They cannot hold general meetings in the factory. When they try to hold general meetings outside the factory gates, the bosses instruct the bus drivers to leave without delay, so workers are forced to board the buses. On one occasion, management welcomed visitors from Fiat unions in Italy, but refused to let their Brazilian comrades enter the factory! Fiat workers elected on to the board of the union are immediately dismissed, although it is against the law. Management knows that it takes at least three years for the courts to reinstate a worker. In the meantime they want a union-free factory.

We heard similar stories in many other places. This means that although CUT controls the biggest and most important unions, it does not necessarily have majority membership. For example, the Betim union only has 4 000 members out of the 20 000 metalworkers on whose behalf it negotiates. The Sao Bernardo union, on the other hand, has 70-80% membership. Overall, unions affiliated to CUT represent about 15 million workers, but have 4,5 million members.

Nonetheless in many workplaces workers are organised strongly enough to curb management power. For example, mine workers in Anglo American-owned mines in Novas Limas told us that before any change is introduced in the mines, management has to consult with their union.

Although many CUT unions have no grassroots structures and weak links with the factories, others maintain strong grassroots contact through activists in the factories, informal factory structures, and mass general meetings. In Sao Bernardo, for example, union leadership cannot make any decision without democratic discussion in the factories. CUT is still a militant and mobilised movement capable of waging struggles at factory, industry and national levels.

CUT itself as a trade union centre exists outside the corporatist labour system - in fact under the old labour code it had no legal existence at all. However, although CUT exists outside the system, it is based on the local trade unions which affiliate to it. These unions are the basic building blocks of the corporatist system. As Jose Paul told us "We work within the contradictions between the old and the new. We are building a new city on top of an already existing city. The problem is that the old city isn't really a ruin. It is a very strong city still. This is very difficult."

Paul points out that not everything about the corporatist system is bad: "There is a culture that unions have structures. There is a culture that unions negotiate which is preferable to having negotiations factory by factory. There is a culture of the trade union professional which is important for a modern union."

Organisational renewal

Now CUT is a large and respected organisation, the most powerful trade union group in the country (the rival national centre Trade Union Force (FS) is much smaller and more conservative). It is in a position to start actively reshaping the industrial relations system as well as the economy and society more broadly. This has stimulated a new organisational debate.

Organisational renewal is focused on three areas. Firstly, CUT has identified a campaign to establish factory committees and workplace rights as the key to revitalising the organisation. As Paul says "The problems of corporatism will only be resolved the day we have a guarantee for organisation in the workplace. This will enable us to implant our ideas about leadership and unionism in the factories."

The labour code lays down that a health and safety committee has to be elected in every workplace and that those who are elected cannot be victimised by management in any way. Union strategy is to elect union activists into these positions so that they have protection while they organise the factory.

CUT is complimenting the struggle to organise on the shopfloor with the campaign for Brazil to sign ILO Convention 87, which provides for the autonomy of trade unions. "This will give us a guarantee that trade unions can establish representative structures inside the factory," says Bargas.

Secondly, CUT is taking a step towards national industrial organisation by bringing all the local unions in a specific sector together in a national confederation of unions. This year the first two were launched - the National Confederation of Metal Workers and the National Confederation of Bank Workers. In June, CUT decided to form national confederations in 18 different sectors. Each of these would be affiliated to CUT.

It is going to be very difficult to combine the hundreds of local unions into functioning national structures. Currently each local union negotiates its own collective bargaining contract with employers in its area. These

Political tensions in CUT

Last year serious political divisions emerged in CUT. These surfaced in bitter conflicts and even physical fighting at CUT's national congress in September. CUT was polarised into two blocks at the congress: the dominant tendency, Articulation, which has been in the leadership since the founding of CUT, and an alliance of anti-Articulation groups. The opposition bloc accused Articulation of being reformist, bureaucratic and undemocratic. Articulation accused the opposition of being ultra left and of lacking strategy or political understanding. The conflict focused primarily on elections and the composition of the leadership (see *SA Labour Bulletin* Vol 16 No 3).

The congress was regarded by many as a disaster. According to Jose Paul, relations have improved substantially. The newly elected leadership - which contains representatives of all factions - issued a joint statement on the need to co-operate and compromise. However, there was clearly still a great deal of bitterness and anger among activists on both sides of the divide when we visited. Some activists from Articulation said they had considered splitting CUT. "An organisation cannot last for very long with an internal war."

Clearly the new challenges facing the unions have exacerbated political tensions. But, coming from outside, it seemed to us that the structure of the Brazilian labour movement helps to make the conflict worse. Elections take place at union congress, where two or more slates of different candidates are put before the workers. When the 'new unionism' movement was first emerging, they would put forward a slate of candidates to oppose the old union officials. If they won the 'new unionists' would then take over the union.

However, as CUT developed and different tendencies established themselves within it, each tendency would start to put forward their own slates of candidates for union elections. Union delegations to CUT congresses are elected on a slate basis as well. The leadership elected in CUT congresses is also elected according to the slate system.

negotiations take place at different dates with different unions. CUT aims to replace this system with what Bargas calls "an articulated national collective bargaining contract in which there is a national agreement which sets minimum levels, a state agreement, an agreement negotiated at the union level and also factory agreements. This will happen in each sector."

This will not be easy. The trade unions will have to campaign long and hard to force employers to agree to a national contract. One of the obstacles may be an anxiety in the local unions that national agreements will weaken the power of the local leadership.

Currently the leadership in each local union derives its power and support from leading local struggles and negotiations. Each union controls its own finances and has resources such as buildings, pension funds, benefit funds, etc. Each union is autonomous and answerable only to its members. Thus innumerable local

worker leaders have built their base and power in the system of local unions. Any movement towards national industrial bargaining and ultimately national industrial unions could threaten this base in the old structure.

Finally, any renewal will have to involve a radical overhaul of the country's labour legislation and industrial relations institutions. CUT has defined certain principles of a new labour dispensation: these should include the right to trade union pluralism, trade union rights in the factories, independence from state and employers, no compulsory deduction of dues. However, beyond these principles, which are born out of CUT's historical opposition to the corporatist system, the debate on a new labour dispensation has barely begun.

CUT as a national trade union centre

Unlike COSATU, CUT consists of local union affiliates rather than national affiliates. This makes it much more solidly *the* national and

Thus elections are contested on the basis of different political platforms. This means that delegates to union executives or to CUT structures do not represent lower structures such as factory committees or union structures - they represent political platforms.

The majority slate wins control of the union and its resources. Thus there is intense competition between different political platforms every time there is an election. This kind of political competition has caused serious damage to CUT. For example, the CUT activists have been unable to take over the metal workers union of Sao Paulo - which is the biggest metal workers union in Latin America! - because of divisions among themselves. They could not agree on a common CUT slate for union elections, and put forward two slates. The result was that the rival FS slate won elections and controls the union.

CUT unionists we spoke to were not critical of the slate system as such. They felt increasing political maturity would solve the problem. In fact a metal worker in Rio pointed out that the slate system "stirs up a lot of discussions because each political platform presents an analysis of the Brazilian situation of the international situation and of strategic questions. This increases the awareness of the workers and enriches the debate. When you finally go to congress you discuss all these political documents. This gives dynamic to the whole movement."

We were also told that serious consideration was being given to a system of direct election of CUT leadership by the membership, instead of congress delegates electing the leadership. Congress, we were told, is dominated by political activists who do not necessarily reflect the views of the membership.

If CUT succeeds in establishing workplace structures and integrating these into trade union structures the current system of elections may well have to change. In such a situation, union leaders would consist of delegates from specific union structures (branch committees, factory committees, national affiliates, etc), rather than representatives of political slates. ❖

political centre of the progressive labour movement. CUT has been well resourced so that it can play this role. For example, it has twelve full-time elected national presidents and secretaries. Non-workers cannot be elected to these positions. These positions are president, vice president, general secretary, assistant general secretary, treasurer, vice-treasurer, secretary of education, secretary of international affairs, secretary of organisation, secretary of union policy, secretary of media, secretary of social policy. Each of these office bearers has several full time officials in his/her department. This situation produces highly developed and experienced worker leaders with sufficient resources to run effective departments. We experienced the CUT leadership as highly cultured with a rich and acute understanding of their own history and their role in Brazilian society.

CUT has won a central role in Brazilian society. A recent survey showed that trade

unions and the church have the most credibility among the public, while politicians and businessmen have the least!

One of CUT's strengths is a highly developed education programme. Brazil has five trade union schools, and 800 educators work within CUT and its affiliates. The CUT education programme reaches some 10 to 15 000 trade unionists per year.

CUT has developed interesting relations with several universities in Brazil. Many university staff members are members of professional or teachers' unions which are affiliated to CUT. The intellectuals in these unions are able to feed their knowledge and information into CUT education and research programmes.

These unions have also given CUT influence in the universities. In addition, CUT has stood up for the independence of universities from the state. CUT has also been able to facilitate international funding for

universities through its trade union links in Europe. As a result, a number of universities have started to enter into teaching and research contracts with CUT and in at least one university it has a representative on the university council. Such linkages obviously strengthen CUT not only as a trade union federation but as a social actor.

CUT is strengthened by its ability to organise such a wide range of working people into one labour centre. Even so, some unionists feel it is not broad enough. Jose Paul comments that, "It may seem incredible but CUT represents the most organised and educated sectors of Brazilian society. CUT has two very important sectors historically: metal workers and bank workers. These are the cream of the working class. After this came the universities, the public sector and the rural workers, the small producers in the countryside, not the wage earners. Only now are we able to reach out to the poorer and unorganised sectors, such as the construction industry, commerce and the rural wage earners."

In fact there is a debate in the CUT rural workers department about whether the interests of their wage earner membership and their small producer membership are too diverse to be contained in one organisation. According to vice president Avelino Ganzer, CUT hopes that the unity of these two sectors in the countryside, and of rural workers in general with urban workers, can be built around an economic programme of reform and restructuring the agricultural industry, so that food can be delivered to the masses of Brazilians who are now hungry.

CUT is a social movement and sees itself as part of a broad alliance of social movements, of women, of black Brazilians against racism, of the disabled, of community organisations, of students etc. The new unionism was part of a social movement even at its birth. According to Osvaldo Bargas, at the time of the strike wave in the late 70s "popular movements were already pressing the military dictatorship – cost of living movements, student movements and others. Starting then, the workers took on their

role as citizens and also expressed themselves as a class. This would help drive the movement for democratisation of Brazil."

CUT is also intimately linked to the Brazilian Workers Party (PT). Indeed the PT was launched by trade unionists before CUT. "Although CUT and PT and the social movements are autonomous, they are all part of what we call a political project. It is a political project of social movements transforming society. The different social movements and the party are autonomous and this means that there is a lot of conflict because they all have their different concerns and different challenges. This means a lot of dispute. Sometimes too much!"

Bargas sees the launching of the party as a revolution in Brazilian political culture. "Up until then workers had always been used by political parties – the communist parties or the liberal bourgeois parties. Now something new was beginning to happen. The workers who were part of the new militant unionism decided to launch their own political party. In our view a party should be an instrument of the trade union movement and the other social movements, not the reverse."

Several unionists we met are also town councillors for PT. We asked the young mine workers in the small mining village of Novas Limas why they supported the PT, they waved across the square to the town hall. "If we can win control of the town hall, we will have a completely different relation to the local mining companies." ☆

Thank you

Labour Bulletin would like to thank Ibase, particularly Sergio Ferreira and Fernanda Carvalho for organising our tour, the many CUT unionists who gave us their time, CUSO and Oxfam for finances, and Ana Carolina Friedmann, Mariella Santiago, Marcio Oliveira and Liv Sovik for help, translation and kindness.



Threads of Solidarity: women in South African industry 1900-1980 by *Iris Berger (Indiana University Press and James Currey Ltd, 1992)*

No Turning Back: fighting for gender equality in the unions by *Lacom (Sached), Speak and COSATU Wits Women's Forum (1992)*

DEBBIE BUDLENDER looks at two new books on women and labour

Both these books are about women workers in South Africa. Both push a strong feminist line and make important, interesting and enjoyable interventions. But the books are very different from each other.

The Lacom, Speak & COSATU book was written by a group which included staff and workers from COSATU unions and women from organisations (Lacom and Speak) who have worked with COSATU women over the years. It is aimed primarily at a worker readership.

On the other hand, Berger is an American historian. She has obvious sympathies with, and understanding of, South Africa, particularly workers and women workers. Her book will appeal mainly to academics.

No Turning Back

The COSATU book is a 100-page paperback of discussion and pen-sketches based on interviews with 40 union women and four union men from Natal, Transvaal and Eastern and Western Cape.

There are five chapters. The first looks at the obstacles to women's participation in the unions. The second identifies specific problems of working women. The third traces the "roots" of



gender inequalities in childhood. The fourth deals with past successes, including both gains in the workplace and union and those made on a more personal level. The final chapter makes suggestions about "the way forward".

The book is a pleasure to read. The language is clear and simple, without being patronising. The tone is optimistic. The layout is attractive. Every chapter is illustrated by large, clear and telling photographs.

The COSATU group workshopped every page and picture. Writing "by committee" is not easy. The group writes: "We know not everybody will agree with all the ideas in the book. We ourselves may not agree with each and every quote. Between us there are differences of opinion, and we believe this is healthy."

Nevertheless there is a common understanding and approach. The book is openly feminist. It speaks frankly about past criticisms

REVIEWS

and hesitations of many organisations in accepting this ideology in South Africa. It states boldly: "now many women in the struggle have seen it is time to fight their own battles. A new South African feminism is developing."

As part of the development of this ideology, the book includes some "theory", slotted easily and digestibly into the rest of the text. Concepts such as gender oppression and socialisation are introduced and explained.

The editors do not hesitate to raise difficult, often personal, issues. For example the regional secretary of a union describes the effect of her union work on her family. Her child accuses her: "You don't care - you only care for your job."

On the organisational level, the book raises the gender oppression faced by many union administrators who have played an active role in COSATU women's structures but are subjected to male domination within union offices. The book questions whether unions, and COSATU as a whole, have given womens' structures and initiatives a fair chance to prove themselves. One woman challenges the criticisms levelled against the NUMSA Women Workers' Committee: "We argued that the structure is still new, hardly two years old, but you people are talking about us disbanding. What about the education committee? It was set up at the launch of NUMSA, but up until now it's not clear what they are doing."

My one criticism of an otherwise wonderful book is that it does not go far enough in questioning gender roles at work. In writing of "fighting for women's issues", the book says women need to raise "equal pay for equal work, the need for special women's health programmes, sexual harassment, adequate maternity benefits and pay". But it ignores the way the majority of women are ghettoised in certain (low-paying) sectors and certain (low-paying) jobs. Nor does it express the need to re-evaluate the relative worth of jobs usually done by men and those usually done by women.

Threads of solidarity

Iris Berger's book is equally impressive. It is the result of more than a decade of dedicated research and writing.

Berger too used interviews as one of her sources. She interviewed 28 women - union officials and ordinary workers - in three visits to South Africa between 1979 and 1989. She consulted

many hundreds of books and documents and shows a thorough knowledge of work of previous labour historians and sociologists. Her book also explores areas not previously covered.

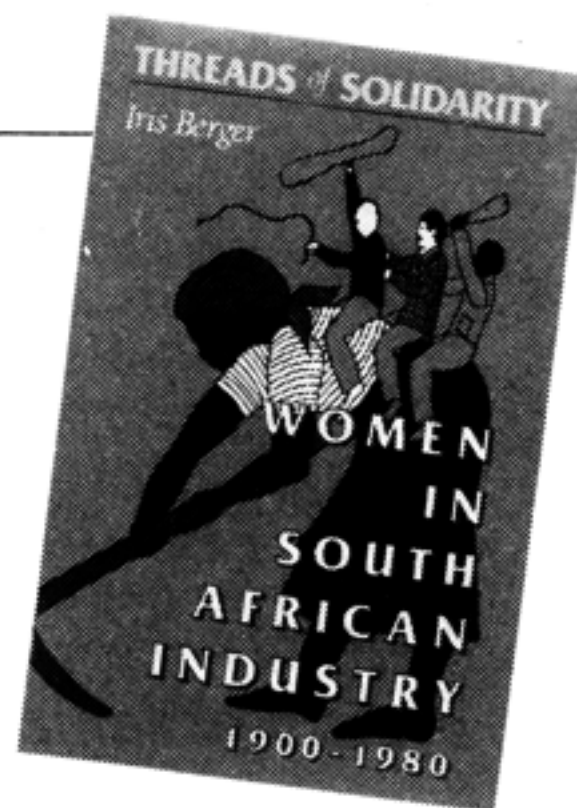
Berger divides the 15 chapters into four periods. These follow each other chronologically, and are arranged and argued on the basis of what she sees as the defining characteristics of the period.

The first section on gender and industrialisation covers 1900-1925 and describes how white women came into the cities from the poorer rural areas to look for work. It sets the scene for a recurring emphasis - the links between gender, community and working-class history.

The second section, titled "Women in the new industrial unions" deals with 1925-1940. These were years of depression and hardship, but also of the entry of black men into industry and the growth of unionism. Berger describes the effects of the depression on the white women of the earlier period. She also looks at how their emergent organisations interfaced with those of black men and of white men.

The third section, "A new working class and the challenge of diversity", covers the war years and beyond. Berger continues to concentrate on the garment workers focused on in earlier sections. She introduces the other industry central to her study, the food industry - particularly in the Western Cape where workers were organised by the Food & Canning Workers Union. She also looks at the women who were recruited to take the place of men absent on military duty.

The final section is "Decentralisation and the



rise of independent unions". It takes the story from 1960-1980, through the years of repression and the re-emergence of strong black unions.

Like the writers of the COSATU book, Berger persistently points out the links between the personal and the political, between the domestic and what happens at work and in the union. Her evidence of early attempts in organising around the problems of women workers is sobering in showing how slowly we have moved. She describes how in the SACTU pound-a-day campaign of the mid-1950s, guidelines for speakers asked that housewives be recognised as workers and that household tasks be shared where women were employed in waged work.

She also describes the formation of a Federation of Women Workers, established at a conference in Johannesburg in August 1938 "to co-ordinate the activities of the trade unions, which have large numbers of women members, for the purpose of championing specifically the cause of the women workers". (The success of the venture is somewhat doubtful. Berger could not find evidence of much activity after its formation). She describes the formation, activities and reaction to the Women's Engineering Workers Union during the war.

In the course of her history we find all the issues which are still of concern today - deskilling, training, pay equity, and so on - some of which are not raised adequately in the COSATU book.

Berger's focus on the clothing and food industries allows her to explore the interplay of class and race, and the changing composition of the labour force over the years. She tackles racism, deskilling and the increase in the numbers of African workers, both male and female in industry. Not all the information is new, but Berger both introduces new original research, and brings the findings of previous work together in a way which is coherent and sharply focused on women workers.

Berger is skilled in extracting patterns and arguments from the little available statistical evidence. She points out the position of women has been virtually completely hidden in previous analyses and descriptions of the 1973 strikes.

She presents evidence which suggests women formed a large part of the workforce in many of the most active factories. She also describes how their objective position was worse than that of men. In 1973, 62% of African women earned less than R10 per week, compared to 13% of African men. There were, however, fewer African women than men in the lowest skilled group, suggesting wages were determined more by gender than by skill.

Berger includes discussion of failures and problems in the history of the organisation of women workers. She describes a situation in the organisation of women remarkably similar to the 1922 male mineworkers' "Unite for a white South Africa" strike. In 1935, members of the Garment Workers Union went on strike against their displacement by lower-paid black workers. A Labour Party conference resolution urged all other workers to "support these women workers who are defending the great principle of a white South Africa".

Berger does not confine her discussion of ambiguities to white workers. She quotes a black shopsteward in the garment industry: "The shopstewards are there to see everything goes right in the factory, that the girls do not fight. They must try and help the boss to see that they don't steal, they must try and get the girls to live like friends, not enemies, and things like that because some girls can be very nasty, like fighting over the work."

Berger notes male antagonism wherever she finds it. I have no quibble with this but do find her lack of acknowledgment of men disturbing. She writes of Solly Sachs and Oscar Mpetha. But how can one write a history of clothing and food workers in South Africa without mentioning John Copelyn and Jan Theron? Women have often been left out of histories in the past. Are we now turning the tables on them?

The book is nearly 400 pages long, with more than 50 pages of endnotes. The typeface is small. There are no pictures. It is much harder work for the reader than the COSATU book, albeit as fascinating, absorbing and well-rewarded.

My biggest criticism of the book is the price. R66,50 is a lot of money! ☆

“Are we going to government and address gender should we seize now to implement that would take



wait for a new constitution, to imbalances or the opportunity the practical steps us forward to

non-racial, non-sexist workplaces?”

SACTWU's national treasurer CONNIE SEPTEMBER suggests ways in which COSATU could become more gender sensitive.

In COSATU there are two prevailing views on how and where to take up gender issues. The debate, however, is becoming stagnated and loaded with rhetoric.

The question of gender imbalances in society and in the labour movement is not, and should not be, a debate conducted in isolation of our overall political and economic fight for liberation in South Africa. It must be part of our mainstream activity in all spheres.

We need to accept that COSATU has not adequately begun to address gender imbalances within our own

ranks, let alone within the broader society. We need to take up the challenge now in the federation if we are to avoid making the same mistakes that have been made in Africa and elsewhere where workers decided to obtain political and economic freedom first and then fight for women's rights.

It is no longer a question of merely coming up with the rhetoric that women's voices must be heard, and insisting that women's forums must address imbalances. Let us move beyond all of this and become practical. If we analyse our workplaces

carefully, we see our worker leaders are being elected by the members in a very clear-cut democratic way. There is nominating and voting. Workers vote for leaders of their choice, be they male or female, and not in a prescriptive, preferential way to advance and protect their rights and interests. There is a good gender balance among shopstewards – but it stays on the shopfloor. Our membership teaches and shows us true democracy in practice, and worker leaders in COSATU should start implementing that democracy. This would result

in a proper gender balance among the leadership, without resorting to quotas. COSATU needs to take more creative steps, to show clear commitment, and not leave important gender issues to a sub-committee that meets from time to time.

It is premature to advise that we need to resort to quota systems and proportional representation in a federation as young and able as COSATU, as a vehicle to bring about political change. All other attempts to address gender imbalances have not failed, yet, but by the same token have not actually been tested.

If we implement such measures we would be guilty of undemocratic, prescriptive measures and tokenism whilst going through a political and economic transformation. Big countries like America, Britain and Canada which still have to practice quota systems because affirmative action has failed.

Instead we should learn from the big studies conducted in the Scandinavian countries which give evidence of women's leadership in different organisations and institutions. They have achieved this through conscious practice, not quotas. They have won social security for all and of course regularly change their tactics to maintain the gender balance.

One could argue that there is a need for affirmative action, but it is a hollow cry

without a clear programme. COSATU is not a Mickey Mouse organisation, it is built on solid organised factories, powerful constitutional structures and campaigning abilities. It should begin to offer opportunities for participation and be able to make the necessary changes. The original gender imbalances might continue for a while, but the struggle has taught us that practice can master theory.

There are several practical steps that can be taken.

- South Africa is in desperate need of a proper national *health care system*. To obtain proper ante-natal and pre-natal care you must be able to pay for it. Women workers cannot afford this.
- State policy on family systems changes when it comes to the 'black population'. Women workers are daily confronted with contraceptives which are banned in other countries, but are allowed to be used in South Africa.
- Our factories, mines and shops need improved *health and safety mechanisms*. Workers are currently exposed to chemicals, radiation, back strain during pregnancies and so on. Our collective bargaining efforts should respect paid time-off for attending ante-natal clinics.
- Our campaigns should include fighting for non-discriminatory employment practices and equal tax pay-

ments but should also ensure that the taxes should be directed into proper social security, health care and equal education.

- Our own employment practices in the federations should become gender sensitive. We should not employ women as typists only.
- Our education in the unions should totally integrate gender issues; we should not only be discussing gender issues in women's workshops.
- A programme of affirmative action should include keeping recorded statistics of leadership development and apply creative and changing tactics when necessary.
- The campaigns' conference should begin to focus on gender-related issues so that we can start fighting inequality wherever we encounter it. Our own media should reflect gender successes in our federation and in other countries and offer advice to workers.

These are just a few practical steps we can start taking. There are many others.

The key question is: are we going to wait for a new government, a new constitution to address gender imbalances or should we seize the opportunity now to implement the practical steps that would take us forward to non-racial, non-sexist workplaces in society? ☆

chemical *cracks* consol

Chemical workers at Consol Glass draw the lessons of their recent strike

Shootings, death threats and drunken scabs trying to do our jobs...these were just some of things we had to face during our three-week strike at five plants. The first ever legal strike by Consol Glass workers organised by Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) started on 12 August. CWIU represents more than 2 000 workers at Talana in Dundee, Bellville, Pretoria, Clayville and Wadeville.

In one incident a group of armed men shot at strikers; in another a shopsteward's family received death threats. Management employed white scabs only and paid them more than the striking workers; non-strikers were given free food and drinks. Management also tried to cause ethnic conflicts among workers.

But we were not discouraged and nor did the management succeed in breaking worker unity. Quite the contrary. Workers outside the bargaining unit joined our strike voluntarily and members of other unions physically supported our strike. Our demands were an increase of R1,20 an hour on the lower grade, back-payable

to 1 July, with a moratorium on retrenchments for the next 12 months. The bosses' offer was an increase of 90 cents an hour with conditional job security and no offer of back-payment.

Although the plant was operating 24 hours a day, the scabs produced rubbish, not fit for any customer. Some of the bosses and supervisors confessed to workers that this was the case.

Workers were very concerned that the scabs did not have the skills of the permanent workers to handle the sophisticated Consol machinery. The scabs had no training or experience and did not understand the safety requirements.

Memorandum

Noting the inferiority of the Consol products produced by the scabs - many of whom drank alcohol on the job - we delivered a memorandum to management on 25 August demanding:

- the removal of all scabs from the premises
- the banning of alcohol during working hours
- that only trained people be allowed to work, in order

to maintain good quality products.

Management was given 24 hours to respond to the memo. After that, we said, we would take over the company to ensure the survival of the factory and its machinery.

When the deadline was up, workers in each plant marched and toyi-toyed to their local manager's office to demand a response.

Management reaction varied; mostly it was negative. In Clayville, negative management response led workers to peacefully take over the factory. The administrative buildings, security officers and the production floor were occupied by workers. The scabs ran away, leaving machines unattended. In no time, workers had seized control. They stayed at their posts for the next two hours.

A week later, the bosses agreed to back-pay and job security and to an increase of 95 cents an hour.

Background

Thus ended four months of wage negotiations, which had started in early May but deadlocked at a conciliation

board hearing on 21 July 1992 after four national negotiation meetings. The strike had started after the CWIU conducted a strike ballot. More than 90% of the workers within the bargaining unit voted 'yes'.

All the plants formed strike committees of shopstewards, active union members and one negotiating team delegate. For the Transvaal plants (Wadeville, Pretoria and Clayville), a regional strike committee was formed with

representatives from all the plant strike committees.

The main duties of the strike committee were:

- to form a strike fund;
- to plan the overall co-ordination and to liaise with other plants on strike;
- to inform the union offices at branch level of the developments and to keep all other union branches, national office and head office informed;
- to ensure unity and discipline among the strikers;
- to issue press statements;
- to seek solidarity within COSATU affiliates, especially with Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), who are organising Amalgamated Beverages Industries (Coca-Cola) and South African Breweries' companies, and Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), whose members transport Consol



Consol shopstewards assess their strike

Photo: William Matlala

products, especially bottles;
 to educate and mobilise workers about the working class struggle.

Though guidelines and strategies were adopted by all workers, the implementation did not always go according to plan. Not all the plants established a strike fund.

This strike showed us that a working class united can never be defeated. Workers felt their victory directly and learned a great deal.

Our advice to other workers who are going on strike is this: As workers we must plan, prepare, mobilise and consult with all workers. We must build solidarity with other workers within the companies that our company supplies and build solidarity committees. Most importantly, we must allow workers to put forward their views at general meetings.

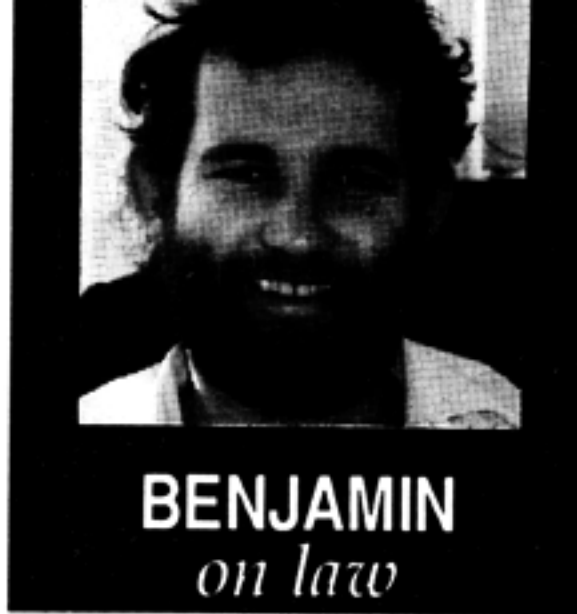
We have learnt it is very important to plan your strike

from the very first day you draft your proposals. It is also important to assess the strike once it is over, so that you can draw the lessons and prepare yourselves for the next round of battle.

CWIU members would like to thank everybody who participated in their struggle for a living wage, especially the organisers, COSATU affiliates, workers outside the bargaining unit and strikers' families who supported them.

Through our struggle we have learnt that the struggle for a better living wage has no colour and no party politics, it is a struggle for the whole working class. The bosses attack us, the working class; we therefore attack back as a united working class against them. ☆

**VIVA CONSOL
 WORKERS, VIVA!
 VIVA CWIU and
 COSATU, VIVA!**



In the last issue of the *Bulletin*, we discussed the duty to bargain, and strategies to compel hostile employers to recognise and negotiate with unions. This month we focus on the obligations on bargaining parties after the breakdown of talks and during the course of industrial action.

obligations *during* **industrial** **action**

by PAUL BENJAMIN of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand

The ERGO case

The starting point for this discussion is the decision of the Appellate Division in the case of *NUM v East Rand Gold & Uranium Co Ltd* ("ERGO"). This was the first case in which the Appellate Division, the highest court in the land, heard an unfair labour practice case on appeal from the industrial court and

the Labour Appeal Court. It is therefore an important indicator of the way labour law is likely to develop in the next few years.

The case arose out of the 1987 strikes in the mining industry. The NUM was recognised by the company as representing all employees in a defined bargaining unit. Negotiations over wages and

conditions of employment for the year from 1 June that year ended in deadlock. Two conciliation board meetings failed to settle the dispute and in early August the union conducted a strike ballot in which a majority of members voted in favour of a strike.

The employer then issued a notice to all workers in the bargaining unit informing

them that if they individually agreed not to strike the company would pay them the final offer made to the union during negotiations with effect from 1 June. A small number of workers accepted this but the majority rejected it and went on strike.

The strike ended three weeks later without the workers winning any further benefits. The company refused to back-date the increase for strikers to 1 June, they only received the increased wage from the end of the strike (late August).

The unfair labour practice

The union said that this was an unfair labour practice because the company had "by-passed" the union and negotiated directly with employees. The court accepted this and said that so long as the union was recognised as the bargaining agent of the employees, the company could not negotiate with individual workers. Deadlock did not allow the company to do this.

On deadlock, the company could unilaterally implement its final offer. In other words, it could start paying its final wage offer to employees and give effect to any improved conditions of employment. However, it cannot implement changes that are better than what has been offered to the union during negotiations because this would undermine the union.

It is important to remember that the judgment does not

stop an employer communicating with employees by, for instance, issuing a brief describing developments during negotiations. What it cannot do is impose any condition (such as requiring employees to agree not to strike) as a requirement for implementation. Once it does this, it is bargaining with individuals and this is not allowed where a trade union is recognised.

If an employer wishes to deal directly with individual workers it must terminate its recognition agreement with the union. Unless there are very good grounds for doing this it will be an unfair labour practice which the union could challenge urgently in the industrial court.

Could an employer ever negotiate with individual workers without cancelling the recognition agreement? The court did not give a definite answer to this question but did indicate that there may be circumstances in which negotiation in bad faith by the union might serve as justification for the employer to negotiate directly with the employees. This could only be done where the union's bad faith bargaining caused the deadlock.

The importance of this is that unions will have to be careful to avoid accusations that they are conducting negotiations in bad faith. In brief the requirement of "bargaining in good faith" means that the parties must

have the intention to reach agreement. An example of bad faith bargaining is the refusal to justify a negotiating position because this makes it impossible for the other side to respond.

Consequences

What are the consequences of the ERGO judgment? In essence, what the court did was hold the employer to the terms of the recognition agreements. It said that it had recognised the union as the collective bargaining agent of workers and that it could not disregard this merely because the workers wished to strike.

The first lesson is that unions will have to pay very careful attention to the language used in recognition agreements, particularly central features such as the terms of the recognition of the union and the employer's obligation to negotiate.

This attitude of the court applies to both the wording of the agreement and the bargaining practices that develop. This will be most important where the recognition agreement states that the union represents its members, but the deal struck by the union has (as is usually the case) been extended to non-members. In such a case, the employer will also not be able to deal with non-members differently from members as a way of undermining the union.

The judgment may also offer a basis for trade unions to extend the range of issues

that are the subject of collective bargaining. An employer who has agreed to negotiate over wages and conditions of employment will not be able to change conditions of employment as and when it pleases. It will have to enter into negotiations and only on deadlock will it be able to make unilateral changes.

The judgment will prevent employers from adopting tactics like offers to individuals that have been common in recent years and which undermine the solidarity of workers. A likely result is that employers will make increasing use of lock-outs to resolve collective bargaining disputes. A lock-out like a strike cannot be an unfair labour practice and like a strike hurts both management and workers through the loss of production and wages.

A central feature of the judgment is that it recognises the strike as a legitimate extension of the collective bargaining process during which the normal rules of collective bargaining apply. This is in sharp contrast with the approach of the labour appeal court in some recent cases which have stressed the right of employers to dismiss strikers. Hopefully, this will mean that the Appellate Division will adopt a more enlightened attitude to the dismissal of strikers when it hears a strike case later this year. ☆

Institute of Social Studies – Vacancy

The Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, The Netherlands, is a post graduate centre specialising in international policy-orientated social science teaching, research and advisory work in the field of development studies and the Third World. Most students come from developing countries. The staff is also of international composition and all teaching is in English.

VACANCY FOR LECTURER/ SENIOR LECTURER

The ISS would like to appoint, as from 1 September 1993, a lecturer/senior lecturer for the multi-disciplinary MA-Programme **LABOUR & DEVELOPMENT**.

The Labour & Development Programme focuses on the economic, social, policy and managerial aspects of labour in the process of development. The programme includes an MA with various sub-specialisations and participation in an institute-wide research-oriented PhD programme. The Labour Studies programme concentrates on research and teaching of Labour studies with a specialisation on Third World experience and countries. Primary areas are: labour in the process of industrialisation, comparative labour relations, contemporary labour management practices, organised labour, and labour policy and theory.

The person is required to be competent in the labour studies field with interest in socio-economic analysis of the impact of economic policies. The work requires a familiarity with labour market analysis, social policy and institutional development in the Third World. The post entails, in particular, teaching and supervision of research at the post-graduate (MA) level. Active participation is also expected in research projects and staff are expected to publish their work in recognised academic journals. Some administrative work is also required.

The post is for two-years and is renewable, subject to satisfactory performance and the continued availability of funds.

Required:

- a PhD degree in one of the Social sciences
- teaching experience at post-graduate level
- a proven record of academic publications
- Third World experience

Employment conditions: similar to those of Dutch universities. Salary from 4858 Dfl to 7832 Dfl gross per month over 12 months per year plus 8% holiday allowance.

Research time is included in the work profile and staff appointed are expected to publish their work regularly in recognised academic journals and contribute actively to the various research activities and managerial tasks of their teaching group and of the ISS as a member of an interdisciplinary team.

Applications:

Accompanied by a curriculum vitae, copies of research output and the names of three referees should reach the ISS, not later than 31 January 1993, addressed to: The rector, Institute of Social Studies, PO Box 90733, 2509 LS The Hague, The Netherlands. Additional information can be obtained by telephone or by letter from Mr F B Schiphorst, Convenor Labour & Development Programme (tel +31 70 - 3510 329) or Dr H Thomas, Professor of Labour Studies (tel +31 70 - 3510 336).



ECONOMIC NOTES

Economic Notes is supplied by the Labour Research Service (LRS), Cape Town

Union representatives to the Community Growth Fund announced

The names of union representatives to the board of Unity have been announced. They will be screening all investments made by the Community Growth Fund (CGF), South Africa's first and only union-directed investment fund.

So far seven unions from both COSATU and NACTU are participating in Unity. Unions making large investments – more than R10 million per annum – in the CGF can nominate three representatives; smaller investments qualify for one or two representatives.

Unity is the union-owned organisation which owns a share of the Community Growth Management Company, which in turn controls the unit trust, the CGF. Unity has final decision-making on all

investments made by the CGF.

The NUM and PPWAWU can nominate three representatives each. The NUM nominees are Irene Barendilla, Martin Nicol and Senzeni Zokwana (a shaft steward at the President Steyn gold mine). Their alternates are Thabo Makgoba (shopsteward at Samancor's Tubatse Ferrochrome), Jesse Maluleke and Derrick Engelbrecht (an Eskom shopsteward).

Unions appoint representatives

PPWAWU's first representative is Apolis Solomons, a shopsteward at Kohler and a trustee of PPWAWU's national provident fund. The other two nominations will be made by worker trustees of the two largest provident funds linked to the union.

CAWU is represented by Dumisane Ntuli. The Transport & General Workers' Union representative is currently Jane Barrett. Further representation will depend on the outcome of seminars to be held within the union later this year.

The MEWUSA

representative is general secretary, Tommy Olifant, who has also been elected chairman of Unity for 1992. His alternate is Johnny Mokoena. The TAWU representative is president, Alex Mahlatjie, a Putco worker, and his alternate is Moses Makaleng, vice president of the union. The NUFWSAW have nominated William Makhunga, education officer, with Fatima Mandy, general secretary of NUFWSAW, as alternate.

Decisions made by the board

The board has now met three times to consider the selection of investments. Before making their decisions, board members consider a detailed report prepared by the Labour Research Service. LRS investigate each proposed investment according to 17 criteria laid down by Unity. A number of companies have been rejected as a result of unfavourable reports. Others have been approved for investment, while others still have been referred back for further intensive investigation.

Says Mark Anderson, leader of the LRS investigation team, "We are

getting active involvement in the research by shopstewards and officials. After we have completed our desk research, we interview the responsible union official and shopstewards at the company. The shopstewards in particular have been incredibly helpful in pointing us in the right direction". The LRS then interviews management in the presence of a shopsteward. For example, at Lenco's clothing company, the SACTWU shopstewards elected a senior shopsteward to accompany the LRS at the meeting with management.

Three key issues

Three key issues are emerging at many of the companies under investigation. The first is racial discrimination. The companies generally claim that they have eliminated this, but information from shopstewards shows that this is far from the case. Often overt racial discrimination has been replaced by other criteria, such as seniority. But shopstewards see this as simply a ploy to keep the status quo.

The second key issue is Bophuthatswana. Companies are hiding behind homeland legislation to keep union membership down. At least two companies have been rejected mainly because of their industrial relations practices in Bophutatswana.

Finally, failure to agree to centralised bargaining is

damaging companies' reputations. While centralised bargaining as such is not a "make or break" issue, highly decentralised companies tend to have bad industrial relations at some of their branches. This is because local managements then have autonomy. Unions find it difficult to correct bad practices at such local branches, as head offices refuse to intervene. This "hands off" policy of the controlling company means their industrial relations profile is very mixed, and inevitably there are some very bad managements spoiling the overall picture.

Decentralised companies are therefore less likely, on balance, to gain acceptance by the Community Growth Fund.

Giving unions a say

The CGF aims to give unions a say in how their members' money is invested. Certainly, there has never been such intensive involvement of unions in the investment of their members' money, both during the company investigations and at the final decision-making. ❖

Secret salary survey tells all

The chief executive of a company is the most senior manager. And, as usual, chief executives in South Africa have continued to award themselves big increases.

That is what a recent *secret* survey of executive pay reports.

Basic pay for South Africa's most senior managers rose by 14,7% in the first half of 1992 – about on line with inflation.

Basic pay now represents just over half of a chief executive's total salary. Bonuses, perks and share options make up the rest. It was this part of their pay that has grown the most in 1992. The secret survey says chief executives' bonuses and perks increased by a whopping 28,8% (or R578 per week) to R2 605 per week.

This large increase is most surprising as bonuses are normally linked to profit performance. And nearly everyday chief executives report on the *poor* profit results of their companies!

The recession is bad, but not for everyone. The secret survey says a chief executive now gets R6 650 in total per week. This is the average, so some get even more than this.

What a chief executive gets

Basic pay:	
R4 045	14.7% increase
Bonuses, etc:	
R2 605	28.8% increase
Total:	
R6 650	20.0% increase

So when management next wants you to link pay with performance ask them how the chief executive's bonus pay is calculated! ❖

Company profile: Malbak

Malbak is South Africa's fourth largest industrial company. In 1991 it employed 56 000 people. The company is owned by Gencor.

expects them to be similar to 1991 figures. Malbak's sales were a massive R8,4 billion. Out of these sales it made profits of R720 million before paying interest and tax. Profit per worker in 1991 amounted to R12 857. Shareholders got dividends of R68 million in 1991.

With the exception of the paper and packaging operations, all Malbak

This is mainly as a result of rationalisation programmes and the economic slowdown. Rationalisation programmes at the newly acquired companies, SA Druggist and Fedfood, are also likely to reduce employment.

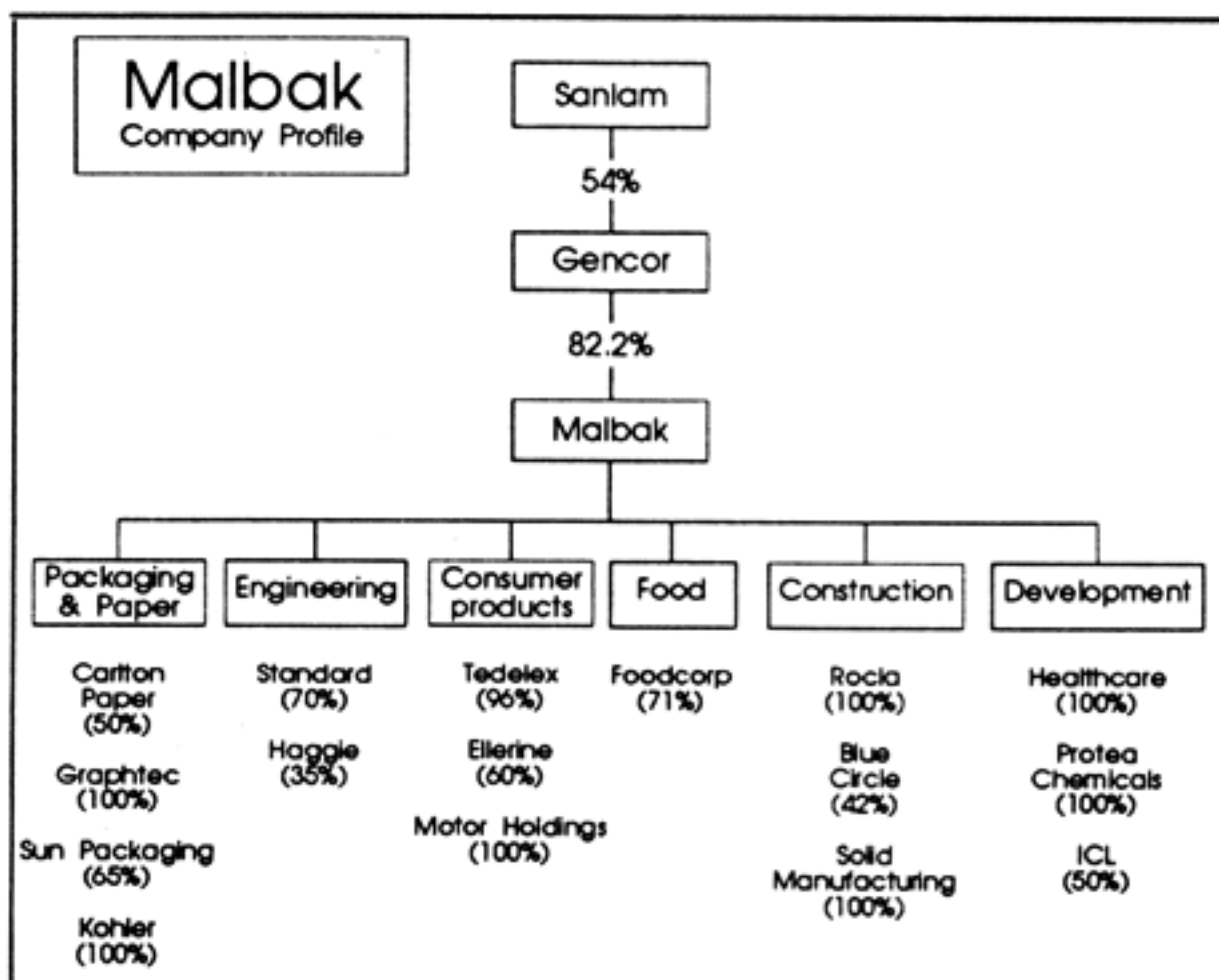
Management says it wants to be seen to be "just, equitable and fair" on wages. Most workers employed by Malbak have their wages set by industrial councils. Where there is no industrial council, wages are normally centralised at company level, such as at Carlton Paper.

Director's got paid R5 million in 1991. As there are 10 directors on the board, each director therefore earns R9 615 per week! So, Malbak's directors got 52 times more than a labourer at Tedelex, who earns R184 per week.

Derek Keys, the minister of finance, is still a non-executive director of Malbak.

Workers at some of Malbak's companies say that racial discrimination is still present, although not visible. In response, Malbak's management says that in its large subsidiaries there are programmes to eliminate racial discrimination.

Malbak has set a target of 1,5% of profits for spending on community projects at its subsidiaries. At the moment unions are not directly involved in any spending decisions, on what would amount to about R8 million each year. ❖



Malbak's subsidiaries	Union	Employment
Holdains (Carlton Paper/Kohler)	PPWAWU	11 120
Haggie/Standard Eng.	NUMSA/MEWUSA	13 346
Tedelex	MEWUSA	} 12 235
Ellerine	SACCAWU	
Motor Holdings	NUMSA/MEWUSA	
Foodcorp (Fedfood/Kanhym)	FAWU	18 250
Darling & Hodgson	CAWU/BCAWU	6 679
Protea Chemicals	SACWU/CWIU	8 347
International interests		1 039

Given the poor economy, Malbak's profits increased by a healthy 14 % in 1991. 1992 results have not yet been released, but management

companies have reduced employment. Total employment decreased from 63 898 in 1990 to 56 595 in 1991, a decrease of 11,4%.

Electrification: power to the people!

Electricity creates jobs and raises living standards. But the majority of black South Africans are still without it.

First some facts.

- South Africa produces about 60% of all the electricity generated in the entire African continent. But over two thirds of the people in South Africa – 23 million people in 3 million households – do not have access to electricity.
- Only 30 000 of the three million households which need electricity got connected in 1991, says Eskom.
- In its 1991 annual report, Eskom also admitted that it has sufficient generating capacity to supply everyone in South Africa with electricity without having to build a new power station!
- A recent University of Pretoria study has concluded that if one million households could be electrified by 1995 then 268 000 jobs would be created.

What then is preventing the progress of electrification?

Electricity supply is ultimately controlled by the Electricity Council. There is no representation on this

Inflation

Consumer Price Index
(1990=100)

Annual rate of inflation
(% increase over 1 year)

Area

July 1992

July 91 – 92

Cape Town	133.9	15.7%
Port Elizabeth	132.3	14.2%
East London	132.6	15.0%
Durban	131.2	15.3%
Pietermaritzburg	134.1	16.4%
Witwatersrand	130.0	12.0%
Vaal Triangle	132.7	16.8%
Pretoria	132.6	15.6%
Klerksdorp	131.7	13.7%
Bloemfontein	127.8	15.1%
OFS Goldfields	130.4	11.6%
Kimberley	128.1	11.4%
South Africa	132.4	14.6%

Source: Central Statistical Service

Area

Aug 1992

Aug 91 – 92

Cape Town	135.4	15.1%
Port Elizabeth	134.6	14.6%
East London	134.0	14.7%
Durban	131.3	14.0%
Pietermaritzburg	135.8	16.5%
Witwatersrand	133.9	13.8%
Vaal Triangle	129.0	12.4%
Pretoria	133.9	14.6%
Klerksdorp	133.0	12.9%
Bloemfontein	129.5	15.6%
OFS Goldfields	131.0	10.9%
Kimberley	133.3	14.5%
South Africa	133.8	14.3%

Source: Central Statistical Service

council from COSATU or NACTU unions, civics or rural communities.

About 400 local authorities distribute electricity in South Africa. Such a large number of electricity distributors will always provide plenty of opportunity for corruption and mismanagement.

In February 1992, the ANC called a national meeting on electrification.

The present government refused to attend.

Eskom and the municipalities present at the ANC meeting accepted that the present electricity industry must be restructured. Since then a steering committee has been appointed. Is power about to be given to the people? ☆

'Before advocating one federation, workers must unite at plant level'

November Nkosi, president of the NACTU-affiliated National Union of Food, Wine, Spirit and Allied Workers (NUFWSAW), talks to Snuki Zikalala.

I fully support the question of having one union in one industry. NACTU's initiatives of merging unions organising in the same industry is a great step forward. I believe before one can advocate for one federation, workers must first be united at plant level and a single union formed in that industry.

Our union is affiliated to NACTU. We have no problems with workers wanting to cross the floor and join FAWU (Food and Allied Workers Union - affiliated to COSATU) as long as they are not forced to. I have always maintained workers should not be swayed by politics and political differences should not affect worker relationships during the production process.

I would be naive if I said we have a cordial relationship with FAWU. We did have some serious problems with the COSATU affiliate during its formation. FAWU tried to make inroads in areas where we were organising. This nearly became a serious issue. Presently we have maintained a working relationship with a number of unions, and would like to see these relationships developing.

Early life

I was born on 14 November 1947 in Daggaskraal in the Eastern Transvaal. My father had four wives and 36 children.

I started my primary education in 1957 at

Senzeleni primary school in Daggaskraal and completed my secondary school at Amanzimtoti Training College in 1968.

Immediately after leaving school, not at my own will, I came to Johannesburg and started looking for work. On 28 June 1968, I was employed at General Electrical Company (GEC) as an electrical assistant.

My first involvement with workers was in 1968. The conditions of employment and poverty wages made me organise workers at GEC. I had hardly been in the company a month when an illegal strike was organised. The management accused me of being responsible for the strike and I was summarily dismissed.

On 3 July 1968, I joined the Distillers Corporation in Wadeville where I am still employed.

Having an interest in workers' problems, I was co-opted into the liaison committee. After one year of fruitless struggle with the management, I resigned. It was not worth it.

The Natal strikes in 1974, and lack of union activity in Johannesburg and at Distillers Corporation pricked my conscience. Though it was illegal during those years to talk openly about the formation of unions and political parties, intensive discussions were going on in safe places. Unionists like Ms Vilakazi from the National Union of Clothing Workers and

Thomas Mashinini, an organiser of the Garment Workers Union, encouraged us to form secret cells and recruit workers into a union. Mashinini assisted actively in organising workers in the liquor manufacturing industry.

Organising begins

In 1978, because of pressure from the workers and the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations, Michael Botha - who was then the personnel manager of our company - allowed Mashinini to organise in the factory.

Initially, Mashinini was frustrated by management's strategy. He was allowed to come into the factory during working time, but management would deliberately make it impossible for him to talk to the workers. Because of lack of contact and the absence of workers in arranged meetings, management told Mashinini it was not worth his coming as workers were not interested in a union.

Working very closely with Mashinini and knowing management's strategy, I organised six buses to take workers home after work one day. Permission was granted for a meeting on the company's premises and workers were allowed to stay on after work.

On that day, more than 600 workers stayed behind and listened to Mashinini's gospel. The meeting was very lively and emotional. For the first time workers had the freedom to talk openly about a union and had a feeling of belonging.

The management was shocked. For no apparent reason, there was a power failure and we were requested to leave the premises. I persuaded management to let us stay and organised workers to get candles. The meeting continued.

Working in the wages department as a clerk, I had the advantage of knowing all the workers. I wrote all their names and requested them to sign the prepared stop orders. It was unbelievable. The following day, we submitted the required 50%+1 membership.

The management could not believe that within a short space of time and without cohesion we had recruited the whole factory.

They demanded that their 34 depots be represented before they could give us recognition. Undaunted, we travelled with Mashinini throughout the whole country and organised workers.

Our initial strategy was to organise workers nationally and once each area was organised, a branch executive committee was formed. In every factory we organised we asked workers to elect their own shopstewards. Within a few months, we had set up structures in all the South African wine manufacturing industries.

In an effort to defuse our initiative and stifle our organisational ability, management formed a staff association. This was totally rejected by the workers and we prepared ourselves for the formation of a union.

NUFWSAW is formed

In June 1978 we held an inaugural congress at Kaross Hotel. We had delegates from the already established branches in Natal, Transvaal, Port Elizabeth, Orange Free State, Western Cape and Northern Cape. On that day, the National Union of Food, Wine, Spirit and Allied Workers (NUFWSAW) was formed.

I was elected president of the union, a position I still hold.

Though the formation of NUFWSAW was a major victory for us, we encountered a number of problems in terms of gaining recognition and organising workers from other racial groups. When the act was amended, we applied for registration and strategically we registered as two unions. You must remember that during those days we were not allowed to have a non-racial union. We merged again after the act was amended.

It was only in 1981 that we registered and negotiated an agreement with the South African Wine and Spirit Manufacturing Employers Association. During our first wage negotiations, we struck a 10% wage increase. This agreement applied to all those employed in this sector. Since then we have been negotiating nationally.

NUFWSAW is a worker-controlled union. If you look at our structures, everything comes from the plant. Elected leaders are just servants

of the membership and can be recalled anytime. Our head office deals only with administrative matters and the office bearers have no mandate to take decisions without consulting membership structures.

As the president of the union, I run union affairs from the factory. This is where important decisions come from. The union does not have full-time organisers in Orange Free State, Transvaal and Northern Cape. Shopstewards are the ones who recruit at plant level and negotiate with the employers. They thus develop a sense of independence and become more creative.

I am totally opposed to a pyramid structure for a union. Decisions which affect workers must come from the factories. The national leadership intervenes only if there is an impasse.

Trade union independence

I am a member of the PAC, but I have never brought my organisation's politics into the union. When I enter the plant premises, my politics remain in my pockets.

As a worker, I believe one must have one's priorities correct. The only thing that unites workers is wages and conditions of employment. That has to be emphasised. It is rare to find political polarisation at my workplace. We have members of the ANC, PAC, AZAPO and Inkatha, but we have never experienced a situation where their political differences have affected production, working and social relationships.

I am totally opposed to party politics interfering in trade union work. Workers are workers and it is not political parties that brought them together in production.

I believe a trade union must always maintain its independence from a political party. Once a union aligns itself to a political party, it will be difficult for it to criticise that party.

Challenges

The legalisation of trade unions and political parties has to a large extent destabilised us. Workers are no longer militant and their

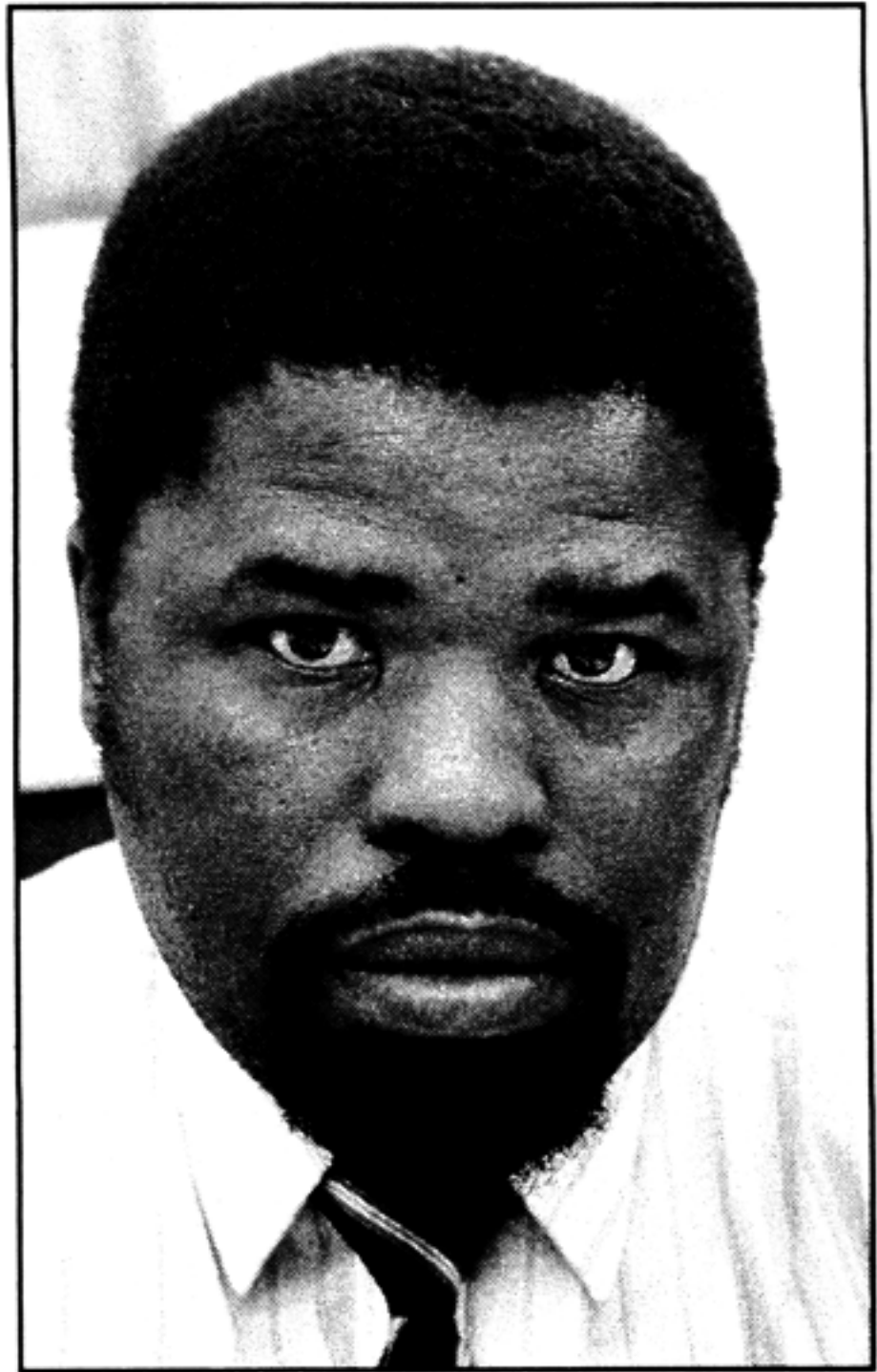


Photo: William Matlala

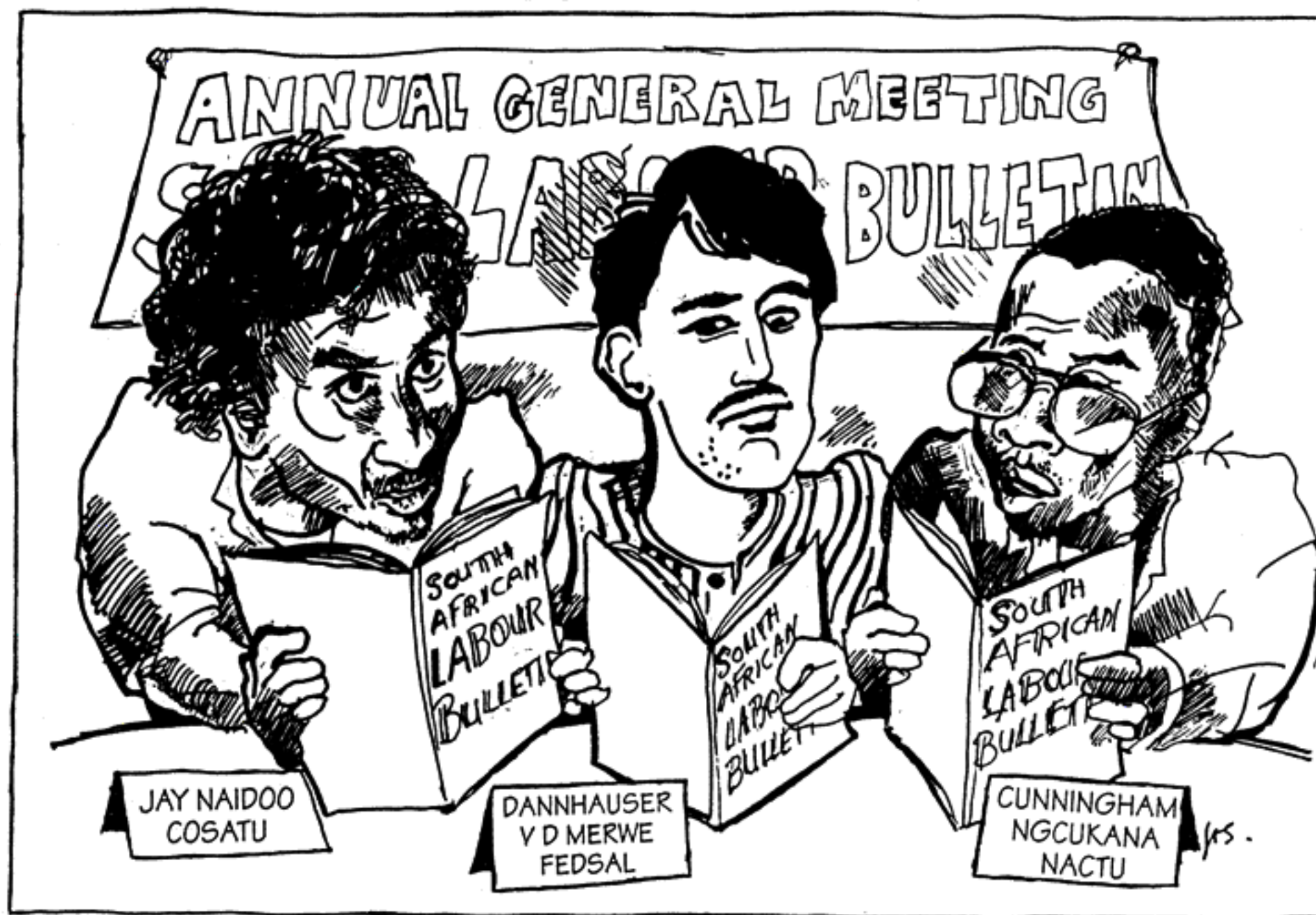
morale at plant level is very low.

Having a legalised union has made workers take things for granted. The management's politeness and tolerance of trade unions has disarmed us. Workers are no longer fighting for their rights at plant level since they know unions are there to represent them.

We have to find new areas of struggle. Our task as trade unionists is to inculcate a spirit of working class consciousness. Workers must be made aware that the coming government is not going to bring economic changes. Capital and labour have diverse interests and that is why we have to arm ourselves for the battle which is about to begin.

Family and social life

I am married with two children. I enjoy being a trade unionist and will hate the day when I get pensioned off. I really don't have a social life and my wife has accepted it. I would like to see my children being better educated so that they can meet the future with confidence. ☆



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