



EDUCATION

Speeches by COSATU Office Bearers



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Introduction

These speeches bring together thoughts and issues related to education. They have all been delivered by COSATU Office Bearers during 1986 but are not as such official COSATU documents. However, invitations to COSATU to speak have to be approved by the appropriate Committee so the speakers were speaking with the knowledge and approval of COSATU.

These speeches are reproduced so as to provide COSATU members with information on what their office bearers and officials are saying. By doing this it is also hoped to stimulate debate amongst COSATU members around the issue of education and the role the working class should be playing.

Comrade Erwin analyses the present education system stressing the importance of workers taking part in the education struggle. He goes on to focus on COSATU's education programme and what it aims to do.

Comrade Mohlomi's speech covers the history of education, showing how it has always been used by the ruling class to justify and bolster its position. He encourages workers to attend alternative education that is offered, but stresses that this can only offer short-term solutions. The long term solution is for the working class to become the ruling class and so decide on the education that will be appropriate.

The way in which the SA education has oppressed workers is touched on in Comrade Erntzen's first speech. But, trade unions have helped to rebuild workers' confidence and now it is time for workers and students to unite on the basis of working class liberation. Students must build up their constituencies just like workers are doing.

Comrade Erntzen in his second speech reviews the history of trade unions and teachers and their contributions to the struggle in South Africa. He also covers the issue of teachers organisations and feels that they must be trade unions and perform 2 major roles — to act on behalf of their members and to move their members into working class struggles. Principles like those adopted by COSATU unions should form the basis of a teachers trade union

1. Education and the Working Class — COSATU's role

Comrades, on behalf of COSATU I would like to congratulate NUM and your NESCO on organising this conference. As many of you may know it was your union that proposed the COSATU Education resolution and you are now showing us the way as how to fully implement and carry out that resolution.

Comrades we are part of a great workers struggle and if we are serious about that then we must place education in the very front of our struggle - it is our spear in the struggle for socialism. Education must be the same thing as organisation.

But the most important point that we must start with is this - when we talk of education we do not mean what is presently taught in schools, universities and the training courses of the capitalist bosses.

Education as Ideology

Let me very briefly try and clarify this point. The present education system instructs people - it teaches you what the instructors want you to know. What the present education does is to prepare you to be a willing participant in your own exploitation. It does this in many different ways. However, let me cover just four of the ways in which this is done.

The first is the way in which history is taught. You are taught to remember dates, kings, queens, chiefs, battles and wars. This way of learning history hides the struggles of people, it hides how things were changing and it only teaches you to remember what happened. Even in teaching what happened you are never taught what happened to workers or the peasants who were oppressed.

The real purpose of teaching history in this way is to hide the power of organisation to hide the success of struggle. Capitalists fear that if people are taught these things then they will be inspired and encouraged to themselves organise collectively against oppression and exploitation.

The second point is linked to the teaching of history but goes wider. Present education always deals with the individual. In history they look at individuals. And if you think about it, most stories and books deal with the achievements of individuals only. There

Education is our spear in the struggle for socialism

The present education system prepares you to be a willing participant in your own exploitation. I will give some examples.

(i) history teaches you to remember dates, kings, queens, chiefs, battles and wars. It hides the struggles of people.

(ii) the present education system concentrates on individuals only — it encourages people to think of themselves as individuals and not as part of a group.

are very few, if any, programmes that deal with organisation, collective action and struggle. This emphasis on individuals is of great benefit to the capitalist bosses. People are taught to think of themselves and deal with their problems by themselves. In this way the bosses can successfully disorganise workers by promising them promotion and higher wages. They can use bonuses and piece rate systems to get each worker to work harder because each worker is trying to advance their position. Yet the benefits of this harder work go to profits and not higher wages.

It is clear that not all workers can be promoted to higher positions - the gateway to success is a very narrow one but because our education has taught us individualism, we all try and get through that gate to the great benefit of the capitalists and their profits.

(iii) the present education system asks no questions about the capitalist system and how it came about. We learn nothing about socialism.

Thirdly, the present education asks no questions about the capitalist system. How did people lose control over the land and the means of production? Is it correct that production should be for profit and not to meet people's needs? Our education as it now stands does not ask any of these questions. We learn nothing about socialism or socialist countries. They know that if we were given full information workers would choose to fight for a system that benefits them and not capitalists.

In South Africa the regime assists capitalists further by making support of socialism a crime. But on top of this they make sure that the education system makes people accept capitalism and be fearful and suspicious of socialism.

(iv) the present education system teaches people anti-democratic values and practices. The whole system from headmaster down to teachers and prefects is an authoritarian system. It teaches students to wait for instructions and to listen to people in authority.

The fourth and final point is that the present education system is the most important force teaching people anti-democratic values and practices. When our children go to school it is the first time that they become part of a large organisation. But this organisation only teaches them how a dictatorship works - the headmaster, teacher and prefects have all the power and use the stick and punishment to ensure discipline and control rather than participation. From their very youngest years people get no experience in how to come together and collectively decide and organise. They are taught to wait for instructions and to listen to people in authority. IT is clear how useful this is to capitalists when those same people

come to work for them.

In these ways and others the present education system tries to shape peoples' minds and ideas. They want those ideas to fit into a pattern - what we call an ideology - that will be supportive of the capitalist system. In South Africa the regime went even further and tried to control through racism and tribalism. Bantu education was the ideology of apartheid and apartheid is the most brutal form of capitalist control in the world.

The Education Crisis

But, comrades, something very important is happening in South Africa at present. The youth are rejecting Bantu Education. In doing this they are in fact challenging capitalist education.

Comrades as organised workers we must join in this struggle.

Firstly, these are our children and surely parents cannot easily abandon their children.

But Comrades what is very important for us is that this challenge to Bantu Education must become a victory over capitalist education. As I have tried to show above capitalist education has the purpose of disorganising workers even before they enter the workplace. Youth enter the mines and factories ignorant of the struggle of the working class, of the power of organisation and real meaning of democracy.

The power of the working class will be much greater if education in the schools deals with the history of the liberation movement and the struggles of the working class.

To build a real People's Education workers must give guidance so as to make sure that we do not end up with a new education system that remains trapped within capitalist ideology.

An education system uses part of a country's wealth. Workers produce that wealth. If we are struggling for workers control then workers must have a say in how this wealth is used. Workers must be part of planning the education system. They must not take the view that planning for education must be done by education experts.

In these ways the present education system tries to shape people's minds and ideas so they will support the capitalist system. Bantu education is based on the ideology of apartheid which is the most brutal form of capitalist control in the world.

As organised workers and as parents we must join the youth in their struggle against Bantu education so that this challenge becomes a victory over capitalist education.

Workers must give guidance to make sure People's education does not remain trapped in capitalist ideology.

Workers produce the wealth to build the education system. We must have a say in how that wealth is used.

What kind of education?

I hope that in what I have said above two very important points will have come out. Firstly is the primary importance to the working class struggle of breaking the capitalist ideology that now dominates the education system.

Secondly, is the importance of organised workers taking part in the present education struggle in South Africa.

COSATU must build an education programme that will deal with all the problems.

For COSATU to deal with these problems we have first to be aware of the problems. If you look at the COSATU Education Resolution you will see that it does raise the issues and it does state that COSATU must build an education programme that will deal with these problems.

The programme must be built on 3 important points:

We must build this programme on three important points.

(i) education must not be separated from organisation.

Firstly, education cannot and must not be separated from organisation. Only through this link will education be used to solve the problems that people face. It will be a step toward liberation and not a means of instruction and control.

(ii) education can take place anywhere — at meetings, strikes, during lunch breaks.

Secondly, education can take place anywhere, at any time and involves people of all ages. We must break the idea that education takes place in schools and is for our children. Any meeting, any strike, any wage negotiation and any lunch break can be used as places where education takes place.

(iii) respect the knowledge people already know.

Thirdly, always respect the knowledge people already have. Do not make the mistake of believing that in education the teacher has the knowledge and the pupil is blank. In fact both teacher and pupil have knowledge. We must mix this knowledge through discussion. It is this mixture of knowledge that makes new knowledge and advances our understanding.

COSATU's Programme

COSATU's programme was set out in the COSATU education resolution.

Let me now turn to COSATU's own programme. The direction for this programme was well set out in the COSATU Education Resolution.

Our first job was to appoint officials, decide on

offices and then convene a National Education Committee. The first meeting was held in May.

In that first meeting we identified certain priorities. These were to start education on COSATU policies. However, for this to be done we had to build the Regional and Local education structures. In doing this it could not be done before the COSATU Regions were established. After the establishment of COSATU Regions it was left to them to establish Education Committees.

In this we have experienced problems caused by the State of Emergency and the lack of unity in certain Regions.

The National Education Committee placed priority on building Regional and Local education structures because of the size of COSATU. Having so many members spread in so many different places we had to have a very decentralised education programme. If we had centralised courses nationally it would have reached too few people and cost too much money.

To assist with the spread of education the Education Office has mainly concentrated on producing resources that can be used by educators in different areas. These are not courses that are followed from start to finish but are there to help those who are doing education.

At the last National Education Meeting it was agreed that in 1987 there should be certain national courses run by COSATU so as to bring people together from Unions and Regions. This could also help to cement greater unity.

Also in 1987 we are running a joint programme with the Commonwealth Trade Union Congress where 21 people from COSATU will visit 7 different countries - 3 to each country. They will visit unions and education programmes in these countries.

Comrades the COSATU Education programme has moved slower than we would have liked. However, the expansion of our programme depends heavily on building and consolidating our structures. There are good signs that this will be done. The second edition of the COSATU News is now also out and we have got the equipment to now bring out more frequent editions.

The priority was to decentralise education by building Regional and local structures.

The Education office has provided resources for educators.

In 1987 a number of national courses will be run by COSATU.

Expansion of COSATU's education programme depends heavily on building and consolidating our structures.

If COSATU is going to truly contribute to liberation and working class struggle then its Education programme must get priority.

A successful education programme will give us clear minds and wisdom to build and lead organisation in the struggle for liberation and socialism.

Our programme is only really about 7 months old. However, one very encouraging sign is that some of our affiliates have a very active education programme. NUM is showing the way in organising this Education Conference. I hope COSATU will take up this idea in 1987.

If COSATU is going to truly contribute to liberation and the working class struggle then its Education Programme must get priority. However, we must not wait for seminars and courses only. Education can take place now. Education can take many forms. One of the most important of these is to educate and train workers so that they are fully capable of running the mines and factories. Worker control requires that we are able to do this. If we cannot we will leave the economy and power in the hands of the monopolies that now exploit us.

Comrades our struggle for a living wage will give us and our family the strength to struggle, a successful education programme will give us the clear minds and wisdom to build and lead organisation. With strength, clarity, wisdom and organisation our struggle for liberation and socialism must be victorious.

**A. Erwin — National Education Secretary, COSATU
Talk given at NUM Education Conference, 8 November 1986**

2. Education — The Tasks Ahead

We are gathered here today to discuss one of the most important matters in this country which is education. The issue of education together with all the matters related to apartheid has led this country into the crisis in which it is today. So it is very important for us to be clear what education is really all about so that we can come with solutions to this problem and work out a programme that will directly deal with and overcome the problems facing us in this present apartheid education.

To be really clear about the role of education and its contribution to society we need to look at it historically. Since civilisation and the advent of class-divided society, education, like everything, fell into the hands of the ruling class. During slavery education was the privilege of the slave masters and their children. Only those slaves who were co-opted into the ruling class had a chance to get educated.

Education during this time served to justify the slave system and make it acceptable to the slaves. Under the feudal system the same thing happened. Education fell under the control of the church which was an institution that was like a great feudal lord, owning close to a third of all European land. The church also used education to justify and defend the feudal system. People were taught that the order of things existing on earth was pre-ordained by God. The class structure in the world is the same as that in heaven where we have God at the top, the arch-angels, the angels and the people. On earth we had the King, the feudal lords, the bishops down to the peasants and serfs. People were taught that this is the order of things and no one could change it. Even during this system education was a privilege for the few from the ruling class and those individuals who decided to join the church from the oppressed classes.

The advent of capitalism brought about a lot of inventions which assisted in producing books and a lot of materials needed to advance education. This assisted a lot in democratising education and making it accessible to many people. However because of class division even under the capitalist system, capitalism could not really allow education to be equal in the true sense.

Since civilisation and class divided society, education fell into the hands of the ruling class and became their privilege.

Education has from the slave system, through to the feudal system been used to justify those in power.

Capitalism made education more accessible to people but it was still not equal in the true sense.

Today there are differences between the type of education offered to the working class and to the children of the bourgeois class.

In South Africa 3rd grade Bantu Education enables people to be better objects of exploitation.

Under capitalism education is used to reinforce virtues of individualism and the belief that only the educated are important.

In 1976 the students challenged this type of education as other progressive organisations such as the ANC had done when Bantu education was first introduced.

In 1986 the government agreed to offer free books but workers must see how we advance this struggle.

We must see how to link up with organisations such as the NECC to strengthen both our organisations.

Today we find that there are differences between the kind of education offered to the children of the working class and education given to the children of the working class. Today there are private schools where only the children of the well to do can attend and public schools where the children of the oppressed classes attend.

In South Africa because of the presence of apartheid, the kind of education offered to the African children is of a lower standard than that offered to the children of the white working class. It is in fact not even a second but a third grade education which only enables us to be better objects of exploitation.

The capitalist class also realised that education is a very powerful weapon in the hands of a ruling class and the capitalists are actually using education to reinforce their ideas of individualism and justifying the capitalist system. How often do we hear our teachers saying "You must learn so that you don't become a street sweeper in future". This gives an idea to children that street sweepers are lowly people for whom one has to have no regard and the important people are doctors, lawyers etc.

This is the kind of education which the students of 1976 challenged. And were prepared to lay down their lives to see to its destruction. It was not of course the first time that this kind of education had been challenged. From its inception the progressive organisations such as the ANC challenged Bantu Education. With the banning of these organisations there was a lull in the resistance to Bantu Education until 1976.

Since 1976 there have been a lot of developments on the education front. For the first time this year we saw the government agreeing to offer free education to the African children in the form of free books. This is a major victory for the people and it is up to us the workers to see how we advance this struggle.

Today there are organisations such as the NECC which has its structures all over the country at a regional level and local level. It is up to us to see how we link up with these structures so as to strengthen our organisation. COSATU attended the 2nd Consultative Conference of the NECC and was party to the resolut-

ions taken at that conference. Now it is our duty to put those resolutions into practice and to decide how we do that.

Organisations such as SACKED are doing a very good thing by offering to workers alternative education to Bantu Education. That is why COSATU encourages its members to attend education classes organised by SACKED because it helps to advance the level of education and understanding among workers.

However, such arrangements are short-term measures and the ultimate solution to this problem is for the working class to assume power and put itself in the position of the ruling class. Because as we have seen through the development of society, it is only when one has put oneself in the position of the ruling class that one can decide what kind of education should be in operation.

Therefore comrades we can see what a heavy task lies ahead of us if we want to really solve just one aspect of our lives that is education. We have to do away with the whole socio-economic and political system that exists and establish a new one where the workers will be the ruling class.

This is not an easy task comrades and it will need a lot of sacrifice and dedication on our part. However this does not mean that we should not involve ourselves in the ongoing struggle to improve education in this country and to start short-term measures to offer better education to our children and ourselves.

AMANDLA

FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

T. Mhloni — Regional Secretary, S. Natal, COSATU
Talk given to LACOM organised Worker Education Day,
31 August 1986

COSATU encourages workers to attend courses that offer alternatives to Bantu education such as SACHED is doing.

But these are short term arrangements — only when we are the ruling class can we decide what education should be in operation.

This task needs a lot of sacrifice and dedication on our part — this doesn't mean that we must abandon the short term struggle for improvements in the education offered now.

The De Lange and Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions although disguised as reform were really designed to maintain control.

The time has come for workers to intervene directly in education.

Since the formation of the Union in 1910 workers have been made to feel they cannot decide things for themselves.

3. Worker/Student Democracy

I have been asked to speak on the question of worker democracy and student democracy. In so doing let us examine the position of workers and students. I am sure that all of us will agree that the one is inseparable from the other. In the South African context the emergence of the de Lange Commission (on the educational system) went hand in hand with the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions (on labour and influx control respectively). All were designed to maintain control under the guise of reform. The one was complimentary to the other. They all had one final goal in mind however viz to drive a deeper wedge between urban and rural workers, tightening of control over workers, the struggle for the minds of the students and continuing the vicious repression of those who resist.

Having said this I want to make COSATU's position absolutely clear. And that is the recognition that the time has come for workers to intervene directly on the question of education.

For many years now there has been talk that parents must take an interest in education. And everyone agrees. Parents have in actual fact done so.

But what has been noteworthy, over the years, is that workers have always left the question of education to the educated. There has always been great respect - even awe - for the educated so much so that workers have always pushed them to the front. A feature of this has been that at meetings it has been the educated who speak. The teachers, lawyers, doctors and so forth. No one has any problem with them speaking because after all it is the working class who produced them. But workers are now beginning to assert themselves. They want to be heard. They are being heard.

But this point needs to be understood. Ever since the formation of the Union in 1910 - and before - workers have been suppressed and divided and made to feel that they cannot decide things for themselves. They are there to carry out instructions. They have no say in the productive and distributive process. They were not allowed to unionise. Black workers were not permitted to take part in the process of collective bargaining. In law they were not recognised as "employees".

All of this was part and parcel of the whole question that workers cannot take part in the decision-making

process in any aspect of their life. Allow me to illustrate this point further:

- (a) in the factory: workers have to work according to instructions; they are directed as to what to do and what not to do. It is not their concern about what they produce.
- (b) on housing: workers have no say about their housing- needs, the size or quality or where they may stay or what happens to the taxes that are collected.

And there are other examples as well. So too, with regard to education, and in the same way as all other features of life, this aspect is under the control of classes other than workers, other than the working class. And over the years therefore workers have been made to feel that they cannot decide for themselves.

A useful illustration of the linkage between student and workers is the way in which the ruling class attempts to deny both groupings decision-making powers. An example is contained in the following quotation from a report of the Technical and Vocational Education Sub-Committee of the de Lange Commission

"The present general academic (sic) type of high school (for blacks: LC) should therefore in time develop into separate Secondary Academic High Schools or Secondary Vocational Schools, the latter being comprehensive and technical schools."

And

"The majority of pupils require vocational training at school to enable them to enter the world of work. The minority of pupils require the development of academic skills with a view to continuing their academic training at tertiary level... 50-80% of children in standards 5-8 receiving vocational education is in line with the manpower needs of South Africa."

"Thus it is proposed that the majority be destined for vocational, job-specific education, while provision is

This was part of the myth that workers were unable to take part in decision-making processes for example in the factory and on issues like housing.

As with other features of life, education is under the control of classes other than the working class.

The de Lange Commission, like the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions attempted to co-opt a small black middle class while at the same time increasing control over the working class.

But since the 1970's workers have begun taking decisions themselves on factory floor issues.

In the '80's workers have moved the struggle to the areas where they live. They are taking matters into their own hands.

Student revolts have brought an awareness that the students' place is in the working class struggle.

made for a minority to receive academic, general education."

In this way the de Lange report, together with the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions, represent a part of the strategy adopted by the State and "Big Business" to co-opt an emergent black middle class and to increase control over the working class.

But ever since 1970 the workers have entered the arena in force. Firstly on factory floor levels - at their place of work. Workers began taking decisions for themselves and on their own eg the fight for higher wages, pension benefits, maternity benefits and so on.

By the 1980's a new phase emerged. This was a period when workers became involved in struggle not only on a shop floor level but also in the areas where they were forced to live. And later in the 80's workers were combining the struggle - both on the economic and political level. They were taking matters into their own hands.

Having said this about workers what then of the students?

What is noticeable is that the student revolt criss-crossed both periods of the '70's and '80's. Throughout the 70's it became clear that all student revolts brought a greater awareness that the vast majority are the children of workers and their place was in the working class struggle in this country.

And in this way students allied themselves with workers' struggles under the slogan:

"The workers are strong; our parents the workers are strong; it is only supporting them that our struggle will be won."

We are all aware of the heroic battles on the part of students during 1985. I am not going to go into detail but noteworthy is the fact that at student meetings, assemblies and joint rallies, the constant theme that emerged centred around worker/student unity. Students were learning from workers - their parents. They too became engaged in the decision-making process. They too made many mistakes - and will continue to do so. But a new concept had been

awakened - the concept of democratic decision-making. The right to decide for themselves. I want to make it clear that this right has never been seen in isolation to the consultative process with parents, teachers and others. It has never excluded the concept of joint decision-making on different levels.

And therefore as a representative of COSATU and the workers movement as a whole I want to say we claim the student movement and their struggles to be ours - they belong to the workers.

But at this stage I also want to issue a warning. There are many attempts being made to divert our struggles and to prevent the liberation of workers. On the international level, for example, imperialism wants to make a deal. Their attempts to apply pressure for freeing Mandela and others is designed to make a deal. But COSATU has allied itself to the struggle to gain their freedom so that they can take their rightful place in the organisation of the people. This is a decision that only the organisations of the people can take - not London or Washington but right here.

Then there is the further attempt to divert students and workers and to divide them so as to prevent them from playing the kind of role they have been playing.

As a unionist and as a workers I want to make a call tonight. And that call is for total unity between workers and students - not on the basis of student independence; not on the basis of parents' control, nor on the basis of careers, but on the basis of working class liberation, because working class liberation implies the liberation of students as well.

In summing up therefore I have attempted to show how workers democracy has Worked and how students must learn from their parents, the workers, both organised and unorganised. And it is important in all this to remember that democracy also means accountability. It is necessary for students to build up their constituencies just as workers have to build strong effective trade unions and be answerable to their members. In so doing the decision-making processes will be developed.

I appeal to parents, particularly those parents who

Students are learning the right to decide for themselves the importance of democratic decision making.

The student movement and their struggles belong to the workers.

There are many attempts being made to divert our struggles and to prevent the liberation of workers. There are also attempts to divide students and workers.

I want to make a call for total unity between workers and students on the basis of working class liberation because working class liberation implies the liberation of students as well.

Students must build up their constituencies just like workers are doing.

are workers, to defend the rights of students because just as we fight for workers democracy so we should fight for student democracy. And so too should we fight for the right to stand up on our own feet so as to achieve the liberation which we are fighting for.

J. Erntzen — General Secretary, CTMWA, Executive Member of COSATU

Talk given to Conference hosted by Athlone Education Crisis Committee, Parents Action Committee, ASAC, Athlone Students' Joint SRC's, 22 March 1986

4. Should Teachers Organisations be Trade Unions

I am not a teacher. Nor do I possess any inside knowledge of what happens in the teaching profession or in teachers organisations. And whilst I make no apologies for my views, I do not pretend that what I say is gospel. I have divided my talk to you into two parts:

- (a) some general observations; and
- (b) some thoughts relating to the question before us.

(a) General observations

Teachers

The question, "Should teachers organisations be trade unions" cannot be answered by a simple yes or no. The question presupposes the existence of teachers organisations. In this regard I assume that one should have both a national as well as a regional perspective. Looking at teachers organisations nationally, how would you characterise the expressed aspirations and aims of these organisations? What interests would you say they represent? From my limited knowledge they vary considerably. Historically looked at, it would be a very bold - if not blind - person who would assert that teachers and their organisations looked at nationally and historically, could be regarded as representing workers or working class interests. Indeed strange as it may sound, over the decades in South African history teachers as a whole have been very proud to regard themselves as non-workers - as being amongst those who have "graduated" from the working class.

And yet this is an over-simplification because there have been individual teachers all over South Africa over the years who have not only identified themselves with the cause and aspirations of the working class, but who have also played an active part in furthering such interests. So we have the general rule and we have the substantial exception.

We would be making an absolute mockery of social definitions and our approach and method of analysis, if we were to categorise teachers as being workers simply because they earn a salary. On such a basis most of the managers for Anglo American and other monopolies would all be workers; doctors and lawyers employed in such capacities would also be workers.

Historically teachers as a whole have been proud to regard themselves as being among those who have 'graduated' from the working class.

The exception is that individual teachers have played an active part in furthering the interests of the working class.

Generally speaking, therefore, the organised teaching profession on a national level cannot be said to represent working class interests.

This does not mean such teachers do not play a progressive role in South Africa. Because of the reality of the apartheid system, group areas and job reservation, there are sectors amongst the oppressed other than workers who find themselves in opposition to this system or to aspects of this system. In this regard too, one does not have to theorise. This is evidenced in the concrete campaigns and activities in which they have participated on one or other level over the years, whether it be in stayaways, defiance campaigns, anti-pass campaigns, educational struggles, anti-removal campaigns, anti-election campaigns and so on. So also in the case of anti-conscription and anti-apartheid groups in the so-called white communities. It is this kind of activity which creates the basis of co-operation in specific campaigns in this country.

Coming back to teachers, then, it would be wrong to assume on the basis of our individual commitment and individual teachers whom we know, that the teacher class in South Africa generally is committed to the cause of the working class. It will be equally wrong to assume that individual teachers or groups of teachers and possibly large groups of teachers cannot identify themselves with or become part of the working class movement of our day.

Trade Unions

I hope you do not think that I am being unduly harsh towards teachers. I think we would be making a very big mistake if we were to gloss over those things which cause people to think and act differently from each other - in other words, class differences in the South African context. But in case you think that I have a romantic vision with regard to workers, let me dispel that illusion immediately. One cannot hold simplistic theoretical views with regard to trade unions and, irrespective of the actual situation, think that this theoretical vision is equally applicable to South Africa. I do not want to be romantic about workers and trade unions. I say that we must not speak of trade unions and their role in abstract. What we must do is to look at the concrete situation in South Africa. This does not mean that historical experience has no bearing on the matter. Certainly

Because of the apartheid system it is not just workers that find themselves in opposition to this system.

For this reason it is possible for individual teachers or groups to identify with and be part of the working class movement.

historical experience is relevant and assists one in formulating general positions. What we are doing, however, is to place the spotlight on South Africa and not on general positions with regard to trade unions. One must speak about the role of specific and actual trade unions or trade union groupings in South Africa. I am mindful of the various trade union groupings which have existed since the advent of unionism in South Africa beginning with the first whites-only craft unions, also of the co-option of the white working class and its trade unions into the system in the 1920's. I am also mindful of the role which TUCSA and its predecessor has played.

There is no doubt when one looks at this phenomenon that the South African system of political oppression and economic exploitation, together with its various mechanisms, has played a crucial role in determining the role played by various classes in South Africa including the trade unions. In the case of trade unions it has created, through privilege, a bureaucratized labour movement playing a conservative and often a reactionary role. I therefore have no romantic illusions about the role of trade unions in general in South Africa. I am aware of this conservative, backward and often reactionary tradition.

When one speaks of trade unions, one speaks of organised labour in South Africa. We take note of the fact that less than 10% of the oppressed workers in this country are organised. In other words only 10% of workers belong to trade unions. A large part of the organised labour movement has, as I have indicated, a reactionary and conservative tradition in South Africa. Also many unionists drawn from the ranks of the oppressed have also found themselves drawn into bureaucratized structures and have played no better role. There are countless examples, whether one looks at unions for building workers, wood workers, garment workers, textile workers and so on. There is therefore not one "beautiful" labour tradition in South Africa. The progressive trade union movement, which is the movement which I am sure you defend and stand by and the movement of which I would like to believe I am a part - this movement - had to fight not only capital, not only the state but also the reactionary and bureaucratized unions and their representatives as well.

So you see, when I refer to teachers and say that one

I do not want to be romantic about trade unions. In looking at trade unions we must look at the concrete situation in South Africa — their history and the specific trade union organisations.

By looking at the concrete situation we see that South Africa's system has created through privilege a bureaucratic labour movement which has been conservative and reactionary.

The progressive trade union movement has had to fight capital, the state and bureaucratized unions.

Although all workers are exploited it doesn't follow that all the unions represent the interests of the working class.

The Wiehahn strategy tried to restrict the activities and thinking of workers and their unions to matters of wages, conditions of service, various benefits and so on. The strategy is to co-opt unions out of and away from the political struggle. In the same way the State tries to co-opt the petty bourgeois layers in the ranks of the oppressed.

But the most exploited and oppressed workers are different in the following ways:

(i) they are exploited and do not enjoy privileges and so cannot be coopted in this way.

(ii) They can only solve their own problem by creating a new society free from exploitation and oppression. This factor makes the working class the only consistent revolutionary class in South Africa.

cannot look at them in abstract, I try to do exactly the same in respect of workers and trade unions. We cannot in dealing with unions - as also with teachers and other social strata - look at them in abstract. We must ask: "What unions or organisations are you referring to?" We will then find that we must distinguish between one union and another, one federation of unions and another, but we must also in all cases almost draw a distinction between workers on the one hand and the unions to which they belong on the other. The implication is that notwithstanding the fact that all workers are exploited, it does not follow that all the unions represent the interests of the working class. How do we see trade unions? In traditional terms a trade union is an organisation which organises workers at their place of work. The union represents the day to day economic interests of its members, such as wages, conditions of service, various benefits, etc.

The Wiehahn strategy is designed to restrict the activities and thinking of workers to these limited matters. In such a scenario workers in their unions will not consider or act on matters involving their homes, education, exercise of political power etc. The strategy is to co-opt unions out of and away from the political struggle. So you see you as teachers do not have something which is peculiar to you. You have something in common with workers. The State, in as much as it is trying to co-opt the better off or petty bourgeois layers in the ranks of the oppressed, is also trying to co-opt the trade unions and thereby prevent the struggle for political power by workers.

What, however, makes the most exploited and oppressed workers different, is that:

- (i)) they are exploited and do not enjoy privileges. As you know privileges form the broad basis for co-option in South Africa.
- (ii) in order to improve their own condition, these workers have to throw off the shackles of exploitation. They must fight to abolish all exploitation. To end their own exploitation, they must fight all exploitation. To humanise themselves they must humanise the whole of society. They must solve their own problem but can only do so by creating a new society free from exploitation of all kinds. It is this factor that

makes the working class the only consistent revolutionary class in South Africa.

If as we say, the working class cannot within the confines of existing capitalist society find a permanent solution to its problems, this is not the case with other sectors of South African society. Other sectors see the possibility of resolving their problems within the confines of an exploitative society. For some, their well-being is dependent on the continued existence of capitalist exploitation. It is primarily because of this that the concept of class suicide has arisen.

The effect of this is that- no single person is written off by the Labour Movement. Every individual has the capacity and the right to participate in the workers struggle. But s/he cannot serve two masters. You cannot be "working class" and at the same time uphold bourgeois interests, values or practices. Such bourgeois interests, values and practices must be abandoned and you have to adopt interests, values and practices which arise from your commitment to working class struggle. It is this phenomenon which makes it possible for individuals and groups to identify with and participate in working class struggle in South Africa.

Since I was asked to speak about teachers and teachers organisation specifically, I make the following points - stressing that I may be wrong and stand to be corrected:

1. A very large percentage of black teachers in South Africa come from the ranks of the working class and are therefore easily able to continue their identification with the cause of the working class.
2. For the working class movement and trade union movement it is essential that they have within their ranks persons, who can, from within, assist in the dissemination of ideas and the development of working class ideology and outlook. Teachers can play some role in this process - not for one moment suggesting that that would be their only role within a trade union movement. A working class outlook and ideology would involve assisting workers to see themselves not only as the exploited, not only as the down-trodden, not only

Other sectors of South African society see the possibility of resolving their problems in the confines of an exploitative society.

No single person is written off by the Labour Movement. But s/he cannot be 'working class' and at the same time uphold bourgeois interests, values and practices.

(i) a large percentage of black teachers come from the ranks of the working class.

(ii) teachers can play a role in the development of working class ideology and outlook. This would involve assisting workers to see themselves as liberators.

(iii) Teachers can help the working class to lead — but like professional classes and business persons they are too vulnerable a group to be entrusted with the leadership of the national liberation struggle or the workers struggle.

What kind of trade union should a teachers' organisation be?

as the most suffering sector of society, but also as liberators, as the one force which has the capacity and potential to bring about social change which would eliminate all exploitation. Teachers can assist in making workers aware of their potential and coming face to face with reality.

3. From the intense struggles which have been conducted at various places in the Republic over the last few years, one has observed that conservatism amongst teachers was often forced to take a back seat. Such was the pressure from the masses that the more progressive teachers were able to play a role which was more significant than their numbers. It is true that teachers followed rather than led during the events of 1985, but this is in the nature of things. I do not believe that the struggle requires teachers to lead as teachers. But if teachers find a place in the working class movement, then they can help the working class to lead. Teachers, like professional classes and business persons, are too vulnerable a group to be entrusted with the leadership of the national liberation struggle or the workers struggle - let alone their class interests.

(b) Specific questions before us

Let me now turn to the specific question before us, namely whether a teachers organisation should be trade union. The simple answer to this in the light of the above is "yes". But the question is not whether it should be a trade union, but what kind of trade union it must be and where must it, as a trade union, locate itself. In this respect the Union will have to take into account that amongst teachers you have those, first of all, who come from working class backgrounds and secondly those whose parents already in their time had raised themselves from working class backgrounds to become artisans, teachers, lawyers, doctors and businessmen, inter alia.

The background of the Union and its class context is therefore a mixed one and on the whole teachers will occupy a petit bourgeois position. In answer to the question what kind of Union we are talking about, I would say that a fundamental function of the Union will be to move itself and its members into working

class struggles, i.e. to consciously encourage and assist its members to commit class suicide in the best sense of the term. Also from my point of view, a teachers organisation should be a trade union in the sense that it must act on behalf of its members to protect them the way trade unions protect their members. The Union must concern itself with issues such as conditions of service, salaries, benefits and other day to day matters.

But by virtue of the peculiar position which teachers hold and by virtue of the very important social function that teachers also perform, they have special problems, namely what to teach, how to teach, who shall teach and who shall be taught. Also the facilities and buildings available, the nature of schools, syllabus etc. These are obviously matters which a Union must tackle.

In our experience it has been shown that where a Union does not deal with and intervene in issues affecting workers on a daily basis, the Union will not be able to record much success. Beautiful ideas and slogans and radical left phraseology are not enough. I think that only persons who live in relative comfort can afford the luxury of elevating or reducing every problem to the level of fundamental social change. In other words, on the level of workers, when you examine the question of low wages earned, it is not enough to tell workers that you earn low wages because of the system and therefore you must fight the system. What you must do is to fight for higher wages now. The long term solution cannot be fought in isolation from short term demands. That is our experience in the Unions. Any other approach, it seems to me, is sloganising and phrasemongering. I am trying to make out a case for a Union which pays a great deal of attention to the day to day problems of its members without in any way forgetting about or sacrificing the long term ideals and broad vision we have for a new society and the need to struggle for it.

At this stage I think it is necessary for me to state categorically that I am in a Union which is affiliated to COSATU and I speak as a COSATU person. I defend COSATU's principles and since the question of unionisation of teachers is not an academic matter but a practical issue, I would say that if a teachers organisation is to be a Union, it will have to be a Un-

A fundamental function of the Union will be to move itself and its members into working class struggles. It must also act on behalf of its members.

A teachers Union must also tackle the special problems that teachers face — what to teach, facilities and so on.

A Union must pay a great deal of attention to day to day problems of its members without forgetting to struggle for a new society.

If a teachers' organisation is to be a trade union it must take the following principles into account.

ion which takes these principles into account. The main elements of these principles and guidelines, are the following.

Worker control — if the principles of membership decision-making at grassroots levels is adhered to, then when circumstances demand that the leadership acts, then the membership will understand.

Democracy — there will be no workers' power or a society ruled by workers unless there is democracy.

Workers need democracy in order to free themselves.

Democracy is not something one can take for granted — conscious moves must be made and structures created to encourage the process.

1. The principle of worker control. In the progressive union movement this means that the members must control the Union. There is a great deal of authoritarianism which exists in our society. Unions too suffer from this disease. Many unions are governed by bureaucratic Executive Committees. Decisions are made at the top and conveyed to those below. The progressive union movement and COSATU believe that there should be decision-making by workers themselves at every possible level. Naturally one has to work out the relationship between leadership and membership and often a leadership must act decisively in the interests of the membership. But if the principle of membership decision-making at grassroots levels is adhered to, then when circumstances demand that the leadership acts, then the membership will understand.
2. Democracy. This element is linked with the first. But it needs to be stressed. We live in an undemocratic society and there is often the misconception that what we need is workers' power and not democracy. It is a misconception because there shall be no workers' power or a society ruled by workers unless there is democracy.

As I see what has happened over the past few years, the demand for democracy is a demand of workers, not really of the other social groups. Other social groups are often prepared to accept formulae which dilute the democratic process. This is not good enough for workers. Workers need democracy in order to free themselves, in order to equip themselves and in order to provide them with the necessary experience, to build up confidence, to make them realise that they are capable of decision-making and to make them realise that they in fact are capable of taking over the reins of control and power.

In a union not only does it mean that conscious moves should be taken to ensure that the democratic process is alive and well, but also that structures should be created to encourage this process. I know from experience that democracy is

not something that one can take for granted. It is something that one must fight for all the time in a very conscious way because of the undemocratic environment and traditions which are part and parcel of our society and which have seeped through into the practices of many, many people in the ranks of the oppressed, including workers.

3. Accountability

The principle of accountability is an important one. It means that the leadership is accountable to the membership and the membership must demand some accountability. I take it that this principle is so obvious, that it needs no elaboration. However, in the case of workers, it is a principle that has to be fought for every day for a number of reasons.

4. Non-racialism

We believe that we must create within the womb of present society a kind of society, a kind of Union, a kind of organisation which is a seed for tomorrow. A seed of the future society. A seed which will grow within the womb of the present society so that when the present society is no more, then you already have in existence a healthy baby which can continue to grow. Like the principle of democracy and worker control, non-racialism is not something that you can preach for tomorrow and not practise today. You must practise it today in order to ensure that it will live tomorrow.

Non-racialism — it must be practised today to ensure that it will live tomorrow.

5. One industry one Union

COSATU stands for one industry one union. Existence of a multiplicity of unions in one industry has the disadvantage that workers are unable then to act in a united manner. It retains division and makes possible the rise of splinter groups. The effect of this is to weaken the collective bargaining power of workers. Essentially then, the idea of one industry one union is to strengthen the collective bargaining power of workers by ensuring that they are able to act in a united fashion.

One Industry — One Union. A multiplicity of Unions weakens the collective bargaining power of workers.

Strangely - perhaps not so strangely - the bosses

Bosses also prefer one union per industry since it contributes to uniformity and stability in their factories.

Although One union One Industry can become counter-productive it is crucial for worker unity and united action.

National Cooperation.

would also prefer that situation, namely one industry one union. Of course the bosses must first come to terms with trade unionism. They must first recognise that they have no option but to deal with Unions. Once they have done this, then they would prefer dealing with a single Union because for them it assists in bringing about stability and uniformity on a national level. Bosses also want to know that when they speak to trade union leaders, the Union will in fact follow and that the members of the Union will carry out decisions taken. Imagine a situation where bosses negotiate with a Union in the Transvaal in a particular industry and come to an agreement. Imagine further that in the Cape in the same industry another Union fails to come to an agreement and workers come out on strike. This can happen in all industries and at different levels throughout the country. So for the bosses, once they come, to terms with unionism, uniformity and stability is of importance and therefore the slogan of one union one industry suits the bosses.

Whilst, however, that may be so, the principle is a crucial one for worker unity and united action and so despite the fact that the slogan can become counter-productive and can assist in the process of co-option within the capitalist system, at the present point in time the principle is important because it assists in building up the unity of workers. It will also make united action by workers possible.

6. National co-operation

The principle of national co-operation is a very important one in progressive trade unionism in South Africa today. Before the advent of COSATU, national co-operation on a trade union level hardly existed. We are, of course, not referring to the period 1955 to 1960 when SACTU played a crucial role in trying to unite workers throughout the country and to fight for the rights of workers. But after the 1960 State of Emergency, SACTU's activities effectively came to an end and national co-operation amongst workers hardly existed. This meant that whenever workers conducted a battle in a particular industry at a particular place, that battle remained an isolated one. The rest of the workers did not think or feel it nec-

essary for them to come out in support or in solidarity.

The advent of COSATU, I think, has dramatically altered this. Gone are the days when chemical workers at SASOL for example, would come out on strike and nobody bats an eyelid. You will recall what happened with SASOL. This was an example of national co-operation. SASOL workers had decided to take part in the national stayaway of November 1984. The price they paid for participation was instant dismissal. What has happened thereafter is not well known and in fact has been suppressed by the ruling class media. Indeed what happened, was that Unions who today are involved in COSATU got together and agreed to come out on strike if the workers in question were not reinstated. The ball was set into motion so as to ensure that workers acted within the framework of the law as far as possible. Once the bosses knew, and once the state knew, that a strike was in the offing, they were forced to come to terms. Most of the workers were taken back and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union is stronger today than it has ever been. This is a practical example of co-operation between Unions on a national level.

But there is another aspect of national co-operation. That is national co-operation between COSATU and other progressive organisations. One important area of such co-operation is education. In this regard COSATU has entered the National Education Crisis Committee despite the latter's limitations. This has enabled COSATU and other progressive organisations and forces, to act in a united way in order to pursue the struggle on the educational front. Take also the events centreing around June 16th. Here once more COSATU was supportive towards the activities and participated in June 16 activities with other progressive organisations. In the case of May Day, that kind of national co-operation took another form. The emphasis in the May Day stayaway and May Day activities was worker-student unity and wherever May Day rallies were held, this unity was reflected in practice and in the rallies themselves. In some parts of the country where there are titanic rent battles in progress, COSATU has been in the forefront with: other progressive organisations in participating in those rent campaigns. I would

National cooperation strengthens the power of individual unions for example in the SASOL dismissals a large number of unions pledged their support and in this way contributed to SASOL backing down.

Another aspect of national cooperation is that between COSATU and other progressive organisations. For example June 16th, education and rent battles have been supported by COSATU. On May Day the emphasis was on worker—student unity.

