

ANC emerges with pro-poor agenda

The recent ANC policy conference looked set to be overshadowed by President Thabo Mbeki's opening remarks on the 'ultra-left' and their attempt to discredit the national liberation movement. Delegates did however, get down to some serious debate ...

As mentioned in the previous *Labour Bulletin*, 26(4) the ANC has been involved in a lengthy policy review process, which culminated in the policy conference held from 27 - 30 September 2002.

The conference, held against the backdrop of the impending anti-privatisation strike, provided President Thabo Mbeki the opportunity to challenge the ultra-left.

Mbeki said: 'The issue of the offensive of the ultra-left against our movement is also important because this ultra-left works to implant itself within our ranks.'

In his closing remarks Deputy President Jacob Zuma did not focus directly on the issues raised by Mbeki but stressed the need for unity. He highlighted the extent of debate and consensus reached on the various commissions. 'This applies even to the resolution on the economy on which public perceptions do not accord with the character of our debates, within the ANC and within the alliance.'

The key resolutions adopted include the following:

Social transformation

A draft resolution was adopted calling on government to continue, with a sense of great urgency, with plans

towards a comprehensive social security system. This should include the consolidation of all existing social measures such as the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and all social grants. The expansion of existing programmes, such as the child support grant and the school nutrition programme, was agreed upon. It was proposed that the age eligibility for the child support grant be raised, and that the school nutrition programme be extended beyond children in grade R, as well as to secondary schools where possible.

In regard to health care, a call was made for the strengthening of the distribution of drugs so that they reach all people as well as for access to affordable medicines for all, including through the speeding up of the implementation of Act 90 of 1997, on generic substitution and parallel importation. In relation to HIV/AIDS, it was agreed that the national AIDS strategy should be strengthened and its implementation accelerated.

Economic transformation

The conference called on government at all levels to embark on programmes that combine short-term measures for immediate relief with longer term interventions for sustainable job

creation, skills training and alternative income generating opportunities. A major extension of community-based public works programmes using labour-intensive methods was proposed.

With regard to state-owned assets, the conference reaffirmed ANC policy on restructuring of state owned assets in a manner that enhances the developmental capacity of the state. To this end, the mandates of state-owned assets and enterprises must continue to be aligned with the social and economic mandates of the developmental agenda. Furthermore, conference affirmed the importance of the National Framework Agreement, and proposed that it be extended to apply to all spheres of government. Conference also identified the need to give priority to job retention, job creation and social plans in the process of restructuring.

Conference took note of the recent escalation of the price of basic foodstuffs and proposed that urgent and sustainable measures be introduced to mitigate the impact of these on the poor.

A range of other resolutions was adopted around infrastructure development, inflation targeting, food security, transformation of the state (and public service), safety and security and building the ANC.