

# Culture

# Bring culture to the factories!

*A proposal from the Culture and Working Life Project, Durban*

**W**e hereby motivate for the inclusion of a series of cultural rights in the agreements between shopstewards, trade unions and managements.

1. Our research has noted a fundamental shift in South African industrial life. In these times of broader political changes there is a growing search for new principles of shopfloor relations between management and labour. This search is for ways to start making factories something more than alienating environments dedicated only to production and profits.

Some managements are searching for new ways to encourage worker participation, new ways to motivate workers and a new perception which views labour as a human resource. This new approach has begun meeting half way the demand by trade unions for more worker participation at work. It seems we are in a new era which recognises, on the one hand, the conflicting nature of

factory life, and on the other, has moved beyond paternalism to seek new solutions.

2. Trade unions (and in this COSATU has been the most successful) have stimulated the development of hundreds of cultural groups, have tapped an untold talent which has been mobilised for trade union campaigns and educational purposes. Dance groups, choirs and theatre groups have sprung up all over the country, and have played a predominantly political role. However, as the climate of negotiation has introduced new political processes, these groups will increasingly be playing a more *educational* and *social* role. They will be increasingly reflecting an occupational culture in a new industrial environment. Sustaining these cultural activities will be an important area of trade union concern.

3. Workers are faced with poor infrastructures in the townships, which hampers cultural activity.

The design of townships (and here in Natal the townships have become places of fear), the lack of transport facilities and the minimal leisure time workers have, exacerbate these problems. There will have to be pressure for cultural activity to take place in the most convenient and safe places. Once again, the place of work might offer some solutions.

4. Most black workers have been excluded from broader cultural developments, locally and nationally, both as producers and consumers of cultural activity. They feel cut off from the dynamics, skills and resources around them.

For these reasons it would be rational and desirable to open up a space within working hours for the creation and consumption of culture which would begin making factory life less of a functional, alienating environment.

### Proposed rights

We propose the following rights should be negotiated between shopstewards and managements:

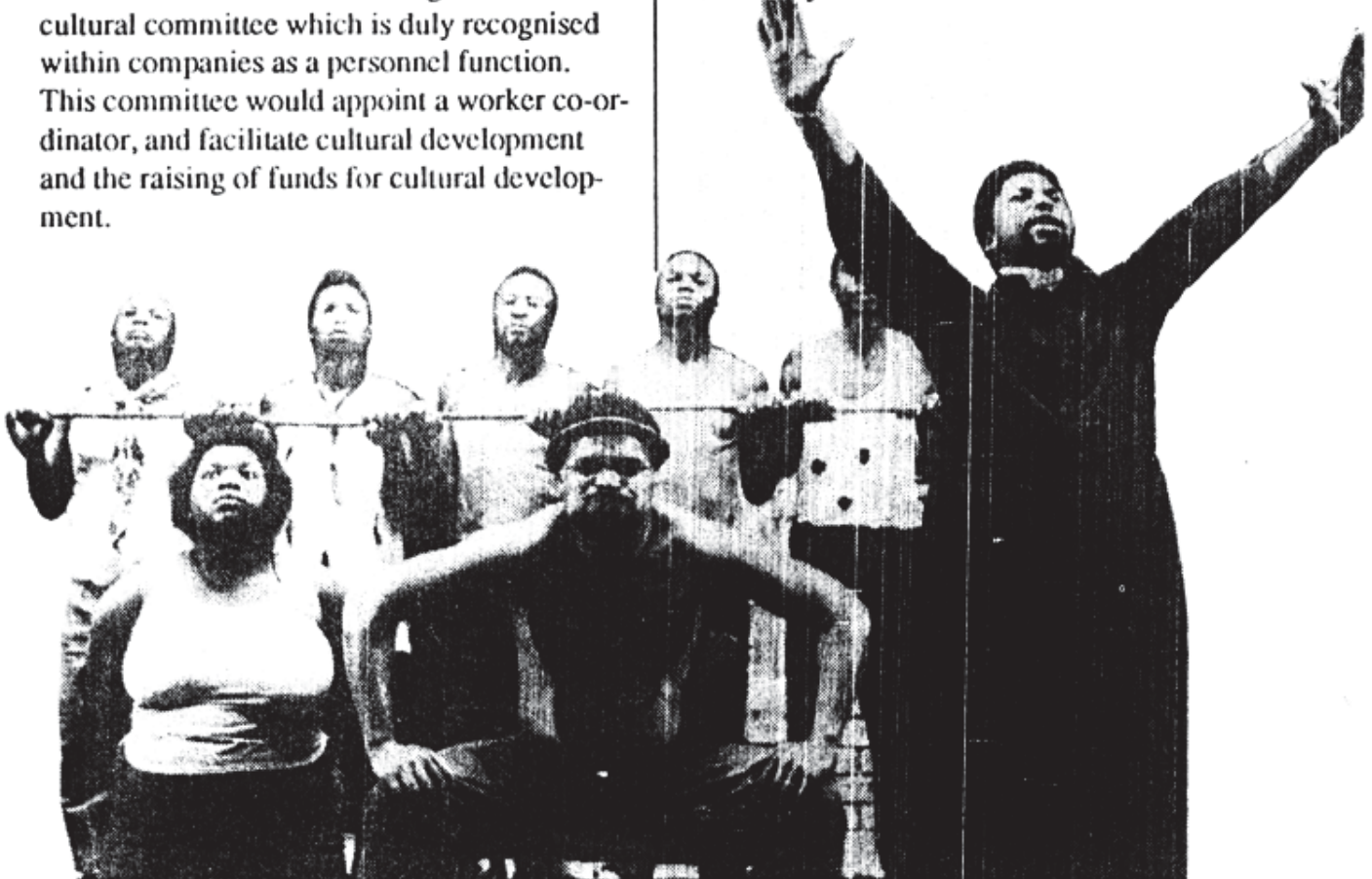
1. Workers should have the right to elect a cultural committee which is duly recognised within companies as a personnel function. This committee would appoint a worker co-ordinator, and facilitate cultural development and the raising of funds for cultural development.

2. The committee should have the right to make use (within reasonable bounds) of factory space and premises, for the encouragement and development of cultural activity.

3. The committee should have the right to enter into agreements with cultural organisations to bring performances and activities to factories without disrupting production. For example, through the Natal Culture Congress, the committee could enter into agreements with the Durban International Film Festival for screening films on the shopfloor; with the South African Traditional Musicians Association for performance groups; or with LIWO, the Librarians Organisation, to create a mobile library facility, or with sporting organisations.

4. The worker co-ordinator and its committee should be entitled to 40 hours per year for training and education work in the field of culture through his or her trade union.

5. The committee should also be a consultative forum for managerial decisions about sponsoring cultural skills and venues in the community. ☆



Worker theatre

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