

COSATU congress

from the floor

On worker participation

'Workers participate at branch level in preparation for the congress. Through caucuses workers are able to table their concerns and queries which are then expressed at the congress through the office bearers. And office bearers report back to the shopstewards who then report to the rank-and-file.'

Participation by women is extremely minimal at this congress - men are dominant. Perhaps, women are taken as incapable of discussing trade unionism.'
Nontsasa Libaka, NEHAWU shopsteward

'Office bearers are dominant at the congress and their articulation of ideas cannot always be correct and/or correspond to the original idea expressed at the shopfloor level. Furthermore, they by and large ask the questions and ask for clarity on resolutions. Therefore, participation by workers at the congress is minimal. It is dominated by the office bearers.'
Moses Dzlyana, FAWU shopsteward

'Ordinary delegates are just to sing and clap hands as far as participation is concerned. Besides that, they did not receive conference documents on time, and that further made their participation impossible.'
Luvo Moulana, SADTU branch chairperson

Xolani Ngonini spoke to delegates at the COSATU congress and captured their personal views on a range of issues.

'Workers are not capacitated to participate at the congress, because they only participate at branch level, which makes them passive participants at the congress.'
George Leutlwest, SAMWU shopsteward

'There must be a conference before the congress in which affiliates will have discussions around the workers' concerns and thus resolutions will be informed by those discussions.'
Anonymous

'Proposals should be sent to the rank-and-file so they can have input. They must also send their proposals up to the leadership to assess. We need to develop reciprocal relations as far as policies are concerned.'
Moulana

On building the alliance

'We need to define the roles of each party in the alliance. We also need to develop stronger policies that address the needs of the poor. There must be mechanisms by which we ensure that comrades follow the

mandates of the alliance, for example, the macroeconomic policy was not mandated by the affiliates of the alliance. There needs to be proper and extensive consultation that will bring about consensus, because as of now there is no consultation and consensus within the alliance.' *King Sigudla, SADTU shopsteward*

'Affiliate members should participate at the local structures of the ANC and join SACP, COSATU local branches.'

Anonymous

'We need to revisit the policies and accept the fact that Gear has dismally failed the people of South Africa. Workers also need to redefine their role within the alliance. All members of the alliance should monitor policy implementation collectively.' *Libaka*

'SACP and COSATU members are not playing any role in the ANC structures hence the ANC is weak. More above that, there are certain individuals who are utilising the ANC to their advantage, so workers need to partake in its (ANC) structures so as to usurp the ANC from these evil forces, which have hijacked the ANC. By participating in the ANC meetings, workers will be able to influence its policies.' *Anonymous*

'We need to mobilise all the federation's members to join ANC, SACP, and COSATU. We need to ensure that decisions are informed by the views, or at least tally with, what people on the ground feel and need.' *Mvulana*

'The ANC is an ideological omnibus - it accommodates all classes. This is a big problem faced by the alliance. We need to have a workshop together with SACP and ANC members on the need for the alliance and its purposes at large.' *Leutlwest*

'We need to start workshops and educate people about the alliance, policies and thus create greater involvement of the communities.' *Maria April, provincial educator*

'The alliance has a top-down approach - we need to develop a bottom-up approach to solve the problems we face.' *Madimabe, NEHAWU shopsteward*

'Vigorous worker participation in ANC structures can serve to strengthen the alliance and minimise conflicts. However, the leadership uses the alliance as election machinery - there must be constant meetings by the alliance members, so as to establish a genuine alliance.' *Vell Dlamini, SAMWU media officer*

On President Mbeki's speech

'The President told us what united us, but not what divides us. He didn't tell us anything about the spate of retrenchment currently gripping the entire economy. He said nothing about Gear, nothing about employment creation. Probably, the President might not have finished his speech had he touched on his controversial policies; in fact, he might have had to be hushed under heavy security back to his house.' *Anonymous*

'The President's speech did not cover issues that workers were interested in hearing about.' *Anonymous*

'The President's speech was pure electioneering and a strategic way of testing waters. It meant nothing to workers.' *Mvulana*

'His speech is appropriate for addressing an ANC rally. He came to criticise the opposition at the wrong place and time. He

missed the purpose of the congress - that of defending and advancing the interests of workers. We know by hindsight that the opposition is trying to break the alliance. He did not have to remind us about that at the congress. Instead he should have told us about the government's role in the R62-million earned from the Jobs Summit, eradicating poverty and so forth.' *Leutlwesi*

'The President was there to assess the mood and consequently reacted to mood. There was no substance in his speech really.' *April*

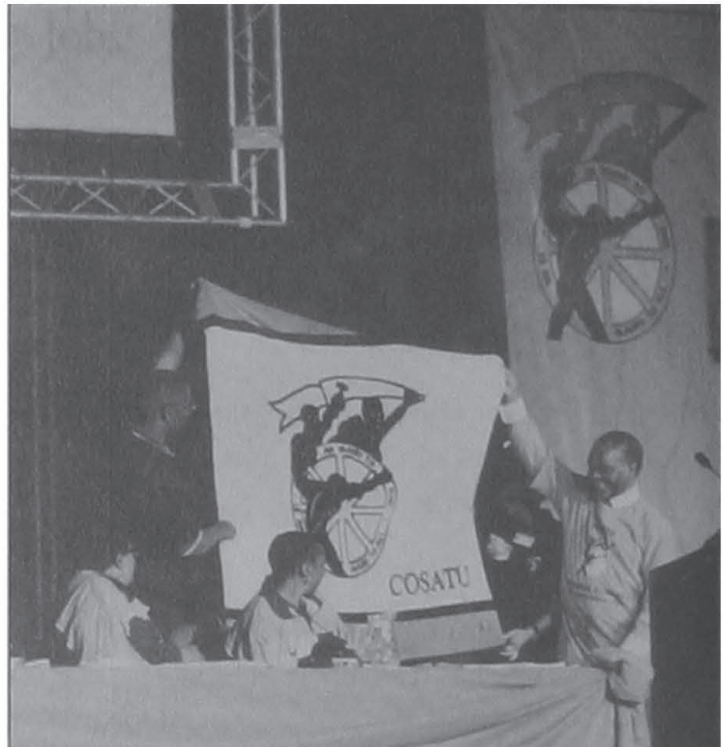
'We needed to hear more about job creation vs privatisation and less about those who claim to be better democrats than us.' *Dlamini*

On what may trigger a break in the alliance

'The ANC all-too-often forgets that it has followers rather than membership. It continues with its conservative policies which do not address bread and butter issues - it will lose even those followers.' *Stgudla*

'Problems and conflicts at local level can lead to breakaways that would have major implications both for the federation and the alliance at large. For example, some affiliates in the Eastern Cape wanted to contest the upcoming local elections due to lack of consultation and co-operation within the alliance.' *Anonymous*

'The adversarial nature of some parties in the alliance can break the alliance at some stage. Furthermore, the unilateral adoption and implementation of policies as well as the ANC's reluctance to accept workers' initiatives, sully relations within the alliance.' *Libaka*



'Mbeki's speech meant nothing to workers'.

'Unilateralism puts the life span of the alliance at risk and weakens its bonds.' *Moulana*

To implement policies

'Shopstewards need to report back to the rank-and-file to put the programme of action in place. This requires a bottom-up and top-down kind of interaction.' *Leutlwesi*

'Affiliates need to develop monitoring mechanisms and stipulate time frames for the programmes - these are not clearly specified in the resolutions.' *Anonymous*.

'The federation lacks implementation strategies and follow-ups on programmes and resolutions. In the next congress we will still be talking about the same things, for the 1997 resolutions were never implemented. Therefore, monitoring mechanisms are imperative in order for these policies to be adequately implemented.' *Stgudla* ★

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