

COSATU policy discussion paper

Labour Bulletin publishes a discussion paper produced by COSATU in preparation for its important National Congress in July.

This paper is presented by the COSATU secretariat to the membership in all structures - locals, regions and affiliates. We are presenting our ideas and thinking on four key areas:

- ☐ Organisational tasks
- ☐ Political questions
- ☐ International links
- ☐ Economic development

We call on all members to debate and discuss these ideas and the direction we are suggesting. We hope that these discussions will assist our CEC to steer the federation during 1991. In particular we hope that they will assist delegates to contribute effectively to our July National Congress.

We have tried to keep this paper short. Only the main issues are highlighted. Many questions are extremely complex and require further debate. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these points with affiliates and regions. ➡



ORGANISATIONAL TASKS

1.1 Organising is the engine of our work. We can be strong only if we are strongly organised. We must restructure the federation to enhance our organising abilities. This means re-aligning resources towards organisation - strengthening our regions and locals; assisting our weaker affiliates; improving the quality of service to members.

1.2 More attention must be paid to this by all COSATU

affiliates and departments. This means, for example, more effort towards staff training and development. We must equip union organisers to cope with the demands of the 1990s. Our media must have more organisational content. We must develop a journal to help arm shop stewards and organisers for the day-to-day struggles on the shop floor.

2. We still need to organise the unorganised. There are three areas which need attention.

- a) in many existing sectors the vast majority of workers are not unionised - this includes construction; railways; printing; transport; municipal and others.
- b) there are many new sectors to organise. We must learn to accommodate the demands for unionisation from 'professional workers' and those in white-collar occupations. This includes employees in financial institutions, nurses, civil



servants and even policemen and prison warders. We also need

to make progress in organising a farmworkers union. Our achievements in this field have been disappointing so far.

c) there are new areas of the country to organise. We need to be more responsive to calls for unionisation from workers in the rural areas and homelands. We must also explore the possibility of pooling affiliate resources in smaller towns so that we improve the service given to members in these areas.

3 Many new issues are emerging at the bargaining table. We should not negotiate every issue separately in each affiliate. A number of national issues can be taken up which will strengthen the organisational ability of the federation and the affiliates. Priorities for 1991 should include:

- a) exploring the possibilities of developing our provident fund strategies. What advantages would there be to pooling our experiences, and using the enormous assets in these funds to make investment decisions which would benefit the economy and help to restructure it?
- b) developing a new LRA suitable for a post-apartheid South Africa.
- c) developing the range of issues which could be the subject of national collective bargaining between COSATU and employers. These

could include negotiating appropriate collective bargaining forums for all industries; negotiating an agreed calendar of apartheid free public holidays; negotiating a practical and effective programme for upgrading the skills of black workers and for conducting a nationwide literacy programme.

d) conducting a massive campaign against AIDS. AIDS will devastate our country and its people in the years ahead. Since there is no cure for this deadly illness, we must develop a campaign to educate workers about ways to avoid AIDS.

4 Trade union unity remains a priority. Our slogan of "one country, one federation" is still the correct one. Despite the apparent reluctance of some to discuss unity, we stress that our doors remain open. We call for a joint meeting with NACTU to discuss trade union unity and the role which we envisage for trade unions in a future, democratic South Africa.

4.2 We must also pay more attention to bringing independent and unaffiliated unions under our umbrella.

5 There is an urgent need for COSATU to re-examine its constitution. There are discrepancies between our actual structures and those in our constitution. These anomalies must be corrected. We also need to make our constitution more appropriate to the needs of the 1990s. We are aware that only our National Congress can amend

the constitution. In preparation for this we believe the CEC



should establish a preparatory commission to do the groundwork for congress.

5.2 We are also calling on all members, all structures and all affiliates to consider the following:

- a) **defining a role for locals** in our constitution so that they can be represented in regional structures;
- b) **increasing the number of national office-bearers** to eight with the addition of two more vice-presidents. Each vice-president would then take responsibility for a specific area of work.
- c) replacing the present Exco with a **20-person executive** (8 office-bearers plus 12 others) elected by delegates at the National Congress.
- d) abolishing the practice of having separate education of office-bearers elected at a separate education conference. This would mean **closer integration of education** into all our structures. We need to explore the possibility of electing the education secretary and chairperson at the National Congress and including them as part of the executive.
- e) including **affirmative action for women** within our constitution. This could begin by ensuring that not less than one-third of all positions on the new national executive should be occupied by women.
- f) rethinking our attitude to-



wards worker control. In some respects we are prisoners of our

history. We often retain the appearance of worker control, but sacrifice it in practice. We must ensure real worker control in our key structures. At present there are many cases where worker control is not meaningfully practised.

g) The time has come to consider electing a person who will leave the factory to be a full-time president. We are aware that this is a controversial proposal and we believe it should be considered deeply. It could be possible to avoid possible dangers by limiting the person to not more than two terms in office.

Political questions

6.1 Events have moved rapidly over the last year since the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and others. The challenge facing us is how to redefine our role at a political, economic and ideological level. While our primary activity is organising workers around shop floor issues we must, as trade unions, remain politically active. Indeed, this duty to engage in the political life of the country applies to all mass organisations and organisations of civil society (eg churches, consumer organisations, civics, youth movements etc).

6.2 We see the need for trade

unions to remain independent and politically active organisations both now and in a post-apartheid society. The major difference in the current phase is that we do not have to substitute for banned organisations as we sometimes did in the past.

6.3 In developing our policy we need to focus on the tripartite alliance, the negotiation process, the constitutional process and the question of trade union independence.

7. Tripartite Alliance (ANC/SACP/COSATU).

This was intended to be the engine of the struggle. We must develop policies that:

- a) elaborate a set of guidelines that ensure proper co-ordination and respect for the democracy of the component organisations;
- b) ensure a structured relationship and tighter co-ordination on major policy initiatives;
- c) ensure that the programme of the alliance relates to the concrete demands that the people are making on the ground - eg housing, land, education, and an end to violence. We must develop a people's agenda.

8. Negotiation process. Our view is that negotiations on the creation of a climate of free political activity (ie talks about talks) must involve the ANC and the government as the armed parties to the conflict. However, in the actual negotiation process, which should commence later this

year, COSATU should consider:

- a) allocating resources, including skilled people, to help strengthen the negotiating teams and the reporting back process;
- b) whether it sees itself becoming directly or indirectly involved in the negotiation process;
- c) how to ensure that our struggles impact on the larger political developments. We need to intensify our anti-privatisation struggles, our Workers Charter campaign, and ensure that our demands, such as the right to strike, are included in a new constitution. These struggles will also consolidate our presence as a vibrant mass organisation participating in the broader civil society.

9. Constitutional process

It is critical that our people are involved in the process of drawing up a constitution.

- a) We need to clarify the relationship between four aspects of our approach and the context in which we are demanding them. These are: the interim government, the patriotic front, the all-party conference and, most importantly, the constituent assembly. We see the constituent assembly as the democratically elected body responsible for drafting a national constitution. We see the patriotic front as the means for ensuring the greatest possible unity within the anti-apartheid movement.





We see the interim government as essential to ensure that the

existing government stands down and allows the constituent assembly to meet in an atmosphere of relative peace and 'neutrality'. We see an **all-party conference** as the means towards ensuring agreement on the practicalities of an interim government and on the process of movement towards a non-racial democracy.

b) COSATU needs to determine how key worker demands, such as the right to strike, and other basic rights are included in the constitution.

10. Independence

10.1 One principle of our alliance is the independence of organisations. We need to be more active in developing our position on issues before alliance meetings, in publicising the issues we intend raising at alliance meetings, and in publicising the outcome of such meetings. These meetings are not private. They are the property of the people.

10.2 There is much debate in our ranks over the question of one comrade wearing "many caps". This debate is healthy. It does not relate to dual membership of COSATU and political organisations, which we encourage. The debate concerns the issue of dual or triple leadership. This debate should be conducted with an

understanding of the ongoing needs of the struggle. At a practical level, it is clear that a comrade, no matter how committed he/she is cannot perform two full-time tasks with equal competence. Apart from the workload question, there is the issue of simultaneously representing two independent organisations.

10.3 We need therefore to debate:

a) whether to have a separation of leadership at national and regional level and, if so, who it should affect;

b) to what extent does dual leadership sacrifice our autonomy?

c) how does dual leadership affect the capacity of our comrades to discharge their duties?

International links

11.1 COSATU's international policy has been one of **active non-alignment**. However there have been considerable changes, economic and political, in the world situation in recent years.

11.2 The restructuring of the world has created **three poles of economic development**, namely: the European Common Market with Germany as the centre and having access to huge markets, raw materials in the East; the Pacific rim with Japan as the centre; and North America with the United States as a centre. Workers in the developing countries, mainly in the

Southern hemisphere, are increasingly going to be squeezed. The



inequalities between the North and South are going to be heightened.

11.3 In addition, the end of the Cold War is leading to **changed political alignments**. The collapse of the regimes of Eastern Europe and the turmoil in the Soviet Union has impacted on international political developments.

12 The collapse of the East European regimes have also largely led to the collapse of their established trade union movements. In several of these countries independent unions are being formed outside official structures. The WFTU has been severely weakened by these developments. The ICFTU on the other hand has been strengthened. Several national centres in Eastern Europe have already applied for affiliation. However, **the Cold War has not yet ended on the trade union front**. Indeed, the international trade union movement is lagging behind the political developments. COSATU has not been very active in this process of re-alignment.

13 At present COSATU's international relations are mainly as follows:

(a) bilateral relations with national centres from a number of donor countries - Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland.

(b) bilateral relations with na-



tional centres linked to joint projects - chiefly Italy and Canada and, to

a lesser extent, Australia and the United Kingdom.

(c) relations with the Commonwealth Trade Union Congress (CTUC) especially on our study tour programme.

(d) relations with Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC), the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

14. Given the above, we propose that a much clearer international policy be developed along the following lines:

(a) that we affiliate to OATUU. Although many problems exist in the African trade union movement, it would be valuable for COSATU to play a more active role in strengthening OATUU.

(b) that we also attend SATUCC meetings as a member country while simultaneously encouraging bilateral contact especially with NUNW (Namibia), OTM (Mozambique) and ZTUC (Zimbabwe). Affiliates must also play a role in strengthening industrial sector unity in Southern Africa. South Africa's political and economic future is strongly connected to the region.

(c) that we maintain and strengthen our relations

with the CTUC as this gives us greater access to meet with many national centres in the developing world.

(d) that we remain unaffiliated to any international co-ordinating centre. We should also adopt a position of actively promoting the unification of the trade union movement - including ICFTU, WFTU and WCL. However we should participate in the ICFTU Co-ordinating Committee on South Africa and put forward proposals to restructure this committee.

(e) that we strengthen our links with national centres in developing countries, particularly in countries such as Brazil, India, Philippines and South Korea where militant union struggles are taking place.

(f) that we maintain all existing bilateral relations, especially with national centres which have assisted as donors or with projects. An additional focus should be to develop our expertise and technical skills programme, namely, human resource development, vocational training and industrial relations.

15.1 The question of sanctions and international pressure is being widely debated on the world stage. It is important to stress to the international community that the pre-conditions for negotiation have not yet been met. Not all exiles have returned and not all political prisoners have been released. ANC members and supporters still

find themselves detained by police, harassed and threatened by



askaris. Unionists and union property are attacked as they were in the past. De Klerk appears unable, or unwilling to bring his security forces under control. In this context we call for the maintenance of international pressure, including sanctions. It is important that, before the April deadline, no pressure should be eased.

15.2 As COSATU we must, however, note the steps which are being taken by sections of the international community to lift sanctions prematurely. We need to explore the possibility for linking the lifting of sanctions to concrete movement towards a non-racial democratic dispensation and a forward-looking investment code.

Economic policy

16 The economy faces a structural crisis.

a) apartheid is limiting expansion - eg illiteracy is an obstacle to the introduction of technology;

b) almost no investment is taking place in the productive sector;

c) we are still heavily reliant on raw material exports such as gold, coal etc;

d) we are still dependent on the importation of heavy machinery;

e) the quality of many of our manufactured goods is poor and not competitive on world



markets;
f) our agricultural policy is disastrous - food prices are

high, land allocation is wasteful and unjust, and subsidies to inefficient farmers are a drain on the economy.

17 There is widespread agreement that our economy needs to be restructured.

The struggle is to determine the agenda of that process.

17.2 The working class must develop an economic policy which provides for a democratically run economy and which ensures that:

- a) the economy grows and jobs are created;
- b) the standard of living of the working class is increased;
- c) the basic needs of the people are met (eg housing, health and education);
- d) the economy is able to compete internationally;
- e) the inequalities caused by apartheid are addressed;
- f) we have a mixed economy with a socialist orientation, and containing private, public and co-operative sectors.

17.3 The main economic issues which face us are the forms of ownership, the growth path we envisage, the problem of education and training, and the issue of collective bargaining.

18. Forms of ownership.

The democratic state must play an important role. More important is the role workers through their organisations play. Nationalisation in itself does not necessarily mean worker control. The key ques-

tions therefore are:

- a) what sectors of the economy should the state intervene in and set up state enterprises?
- b) how do we deepen worker participation in planning, production and distribution, as well as other key areas of decision-making?
- c) how do we ensure that enterprises are run efficiently and productively?

19. Growth Path. Questions we must address include:

- a) How should the economy grow to meet the needs of the people, at affordable prices, and at the same time create jobs and compete internationally?
- b) What role should COSATU play in economic restructuring?

20. Education and Training. Bantu education has left millions of people illiterate. Yet literacy is a precondition for the successful restructuring of the economy. Major employers have already embarked on projects in this area. As COSATU we need to:

- a) develop a comprehensive literacy programme with clear principles and engage the employers and the state on the content and details of their programmes;
- b) develop policy at a macro-education level - eg science and technology, role of universities, technikons;
- c) ensure that black people, including existing workers, are provided with the necessary skills and training to allow them to perform the most complex tasks in every

factory and mine.

21. National Centralised Bargaining.

We need to find ways to bridge the differences between white/black, urban/rural, employed/unemployed, and male/female workers. COSATU still represents only a fraction of the workforce. We have to avoid a situation where we create a labour aristocracy of unionised workers. The issues to consider include:

- a) do we demand a national minimum wage, a sectoral minimum wage, or no minimum wage?
- b) do we extend our negotiations with SACCOLA to cover other areas such as employment creation, education and training, bargaining forums, a 40 hour week, provident fund, and a national health system?
- c) what should be our relationship to a future democratic state?

We need to examine carefully the possibilities of a social contract. ✧

31 January 1991

[Note: COSATU's original document has two clauses labelled no. 19. We have taken the liberty of relabelling the second clause. Thus our document has 21 clauses where the original has 20.]

