

## CWIU debates alliance

Attempts to throw a wrench into the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance were dampened once again as the 300 delegates to CWIU's 5<sup>th</sup> national congress in June threw their weight behind the ANC in the build-up to the 1999 general election.

The union's Wits branch called for the organisational components of the alliance to be broken as it did not see the challenges of working class leadership and socialism being realised under the political hegemony of the ANC-in-government.

Although there were no sharply defined lines of political cleavage, the debate on the now age-old question of whether the alliance should continue to be the vehicle through which the interests of workers is politically and organisationally expressed was extremely lively. While the majority of delegates held to the belief that the working class see the ANC as representing their material interests, this did not prevent serious questions being raised

### Problems of transition

Delegates were clear that the transition from apartheid to democracy is merely a change from one form of capitalist state to another. The congress noted that:

- The ANC's political victory has not given workers political and economic power.
- The RDP has been ditched.
- The ANC's economic policy is anti-working class.
- Alliance leadership is not accountable to workers.

by Malcolm Ray

- The mass movement has become bureaucratised.
- Workers are spectators in the struggle for transformation.

A source within the union says virtually all the deliberations on the nature of the present period pointed to the fact that the ANC has been "weaned off any residual notion of revolutionary change." Rather, the task of workers is to "rubberstamp the smooth transition to a modified capitalist system. This is clearly a political issue and calls for bold political alternatives." Yet, he says, delegates saw the problem as one of "objective and subjective weaknesses that confront the alliance and the ANC in particular."

### Workers' Party?

This analysis notwithstanding, the call by the Wits' branch to break the alliance was deemed "premature". Delegates believe that workers are not yet sufficiently disillusioned to sanction such a step.

Musi Buthelezi, who was elected General Secretary at the Congress, says delegates were wary about any political alternative "even though the ANC has its problems". He says the question of "how to build an alternative" was not on the agenda because the idea was rejected: "The feeling was that COSATU does not have the capacity to form



*A delegate addresses the congress.*

a new political party. The resolution said that it would be politically dangerous to abandon the ANC."

### **Strengthening the alliance**

Instead, the congress sought organisational solutions. "CWIU will work to strengthen the alliance by ensuring that its structures and leaders are accountable to workers. The future of the alliance will come under review from time to time until the 1999 general elections," the resolution reads.

Not all delegates were happy. A Wits branch delegate retorted: "The fact that a mass party of workers does not exist surely points to the need to build one."

### **Investment**

The CWIU is one of the few COSATU affiliates which does not have an investment arm. The congress also passed a resolution rejecting 'business unionism'. Buthelezi says this is nothing new: "We are aware of the danger of co-optation by the capitalist class and the loss of workers' control over

investment capital." It was agreed that CWIU should campaign for the independence of the unions from capital. "The union should manage its resources by fighting for control of its provident fund, not chasing profits."

Other resolutions included the rejection of GEAR and a commitment to fight for the implementation of the RDP. A resolution on women leadership emphasised the politically oppressed and economically exploited position of women workers, both in the workplace and at home. It was noted that women leadership is lacking in the union and society is lacking. Affirmative action measures should be implemented to remedy this situation. A campaign to create an awareness of discrimination against women and to defend women workers from sexual harassment will be given pride of place in the coming months.

Musi Buthelezi was elected General Secretary, Nelson Buthelezi Assistant General Secretary, Welile Nillno President and Ronald Mofokeng Treasurer. ★