

# Com Dot Com

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## The other side

*Due to an email virus, the Bulletin unexpectedly received not the usual commentary from our intrepid reporter, but the replies that Com dot Com receives from his anonymous respondent...read on if you dare! We have however decided to protect the innocent by blanking out the name.*

*Dear XXXXXX,*

*Look, let me make it clear. I like receiving your Com dot Com postcards. I enjoy the attempts at being witty, I like the touch of sarcasm and time to time you make a good point. But do you really have to send them to the Bulletin so that everyone reads them before me? Its hard enough being in here. The old state nurses had time to stop and talk, but since the privatisation of places like these, we are no longer patients but 'units'!*

*The nurse is watching me. I think she knows that I have been hiding the tablets.*

*Dear XXXXXX*

*I think your last Com dot Com piece on the build up to elections was interesting, but I think you missed a key point. The masses in this country are in love with elections! It is all well and good talking about the implications of several million voters still not being registered, and a*

*couple of more millions not bothering to vote. It good to draw attention to the longer term effect of a low turn-out, and how this might lead to mass alienation that can be exploited by reactionary forces, but don't go too far. This is not Blair or Bush's version of democracy yet, where a miserly 17% of the electorate is enough to put Georgie the Lonesome Cowboy in charge of the nuclear button. Millions of people celebrated their own sense of what democracy meant to them by voting on election day, and mostly for the ANC. By the way it is clear that without Cosatu's contribution in mobilising the vote, things could have been different in the Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal. The point now however, is to make sure that the ANC keeps its side of the deal and delivers to the poor and unemployed. I hope you will write about that in Com dot Com.*

*The nurse is watching me. She says I am making loud speeches as I type this to you, and that if I am not quiet she will unplug my computer. Its hell in here.*

*Dear XXXXXX*

*Some on the left got into a muddle about the significance of elections when they called for a no vote, the spoiling of papers or an abstention. Let me ask a question. Is the right to vote an advance for the working class, or is it a bourgeois diversion?*

*Remember that old anarchist slogan? 'If voting changed anything, they would ban it' Is that what we should believe? I don't think so, what about you? The more I think about this world we live in, the more I think that we must consciously defend the rights we have gained through struggle, and not let the rotten ruling class take them away from us....even by default. But let us not have any illusions. No one I know believes that voting in itself is going to bring about the socialist revolution! Its just one tool and we must use it to forward the struggle of our class. But lets remember that we have other tools at our disposal too, mass action, serious mobilising work on the ground to give*



solidarity to those in struggle now, developing practical answers to the critics of socialism on our own terms, and finally, showing by deed that we mean what we say, and say what we mean! Why don't you say these things in Com dot Com? What is the matter, are you afraid? You sound more paranoid than I am! Want to swap places?

This is a helluva place. They keep giving us more and more tranquilisers to cover for staff shortages since they de-recognised Nehawu. It's more like being in a prison than a hospital. Maybe Manto should have been moved from Health to Correctional Services!

Dear XXXXXX

Anyone reading your Com dot Com stuff in the Bulletin will know that you are more sympathetic to Cosatu and its affiliates than the other federations. That's fair enough. I was secretly listening to John Perlman's debate the other day (we are only allowed to listen to John Robbie here) on the future of trade unions. Chez Milani from Fedusa was phoning in to say that only those unions that focus on members personal benefits will survive. Get a life Chez! Where have you been? That's exactly what the American and British and lots of other union movements did in the eighties. They called it 'Business Unionism' and look at them now? Membership is a fraction of what it was, and worse, those remaining members see the union movement as just another part of the service sector. Is that really what your members want from their unions Chez, cheaper insurance and deals on time-share

cottages on the outskirts of Benoni? Individualism plays right into the hands of our class enemies! If anyone believes that class struggle is an outdated concept, they should read the Financial Mail and the Economist. The ruling class, even the black elements of it, are very clear about their own class interests, and are not afraid of fighting for them either. I wish we were as clear and determined about ours!

The nurse wants to give me another sedative and has threatened to restrain me if I get any more excited. Made me think, its not just me that is going to end up in a straight jacket!

Dear XXXXXX

Lets look again at the Satawu strike that you wrote about last month. It doesn't take a genius to realise that the balance of class forces has tilted dramatically in favour of the ruling class over the last ten years or more and that there is hardly a workforce anywhere in the world that can win a clear-cut victory by taking strike action by themselves. Solidarity messages, collections and one day marches are important, essential even, but they are no longer enough. Too much is set against us. Let me try and explain.

The Cosatu leadership embraced the Satawu strike at an early stage, and tried to give it a high profile locally and internationally. The union itself said out loud, this is an employer from hell, he doesn't respect our rights, our constitution, our history, our grievances, our ways of resolving disputes, and is just out to super-exploit workers and crush the democratic

union movement. Cosatu did issue a call to its unions for solidarity action, and to its credit, Samwu responded. But the rest?

Isn't it obvious? We have got to be able to mobilise workers for solidarity strike action beyond their own workplaces and sectors, to defend and support each other as a class. I am sure that if the ground work had been done for this, a different outcome would have transpired. Even the threat of solidarity strike action would have forced the rest of the ruling class to pull this rogue employer into line, would have forced the government to intervene more vigorously, and it would have sent a clear message to all the other opportunistic bosses that this way of behaving is not acceptable, and so don't even think about it! Most of all, workers giving support would have seen the value of solidarity action for their own struggles. It would have boosted class confidence. Of course this doesn't take away from the magnificent display of solidarity amongst the Satawu workers themselves, or from the brave attempts by the union leadership to win all the demands of the strike. The fact is, that sub-sector union action is no longer enough to win disputes in the type of environment that we find ourselves in. Right now we need more CLASS ACTION. Not less!

There is a guy in here who says that he has just had a call from Thabo asking him to replace Trevor in the Cabinet, and must be let out immediately to defend the Rand. Anyone who wants to be a Finance Minister must be mad! Looks like he will be in this place a long time. LB