

Cosatu celebrates 30 years

Founded 30 years ago, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) had its 30th anniversary at Curries Fountain in Durban and the federation's president **Sdumo Dlamini** reflected on its history, current activities and plan of action for the future.

Cosatu's 12th National Congress held in Johannesburg in November was 'clear about our weaknesses and confident about our existing strengths and even more confident about our future'. Tribute was paid to the federation's predecessor the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) and also to the Freedom Charter.

ON NELSON MANDELA

Dlamini paid tribute to former president, Nelson Mandela, who passed on two years ago. He described Mandela as 'Isithwalandwe, the volunteer in chief in the active resistance, the first real Commander-in-Chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the first black president of democratic South Africa, a rare human being who joined the galaxy of iconic symbols representing the best in humanity to ever walk on planet earth ...'

'Mandela, remains an outstanding revolutionary of all times, similar to other outstanding iconic revolutionaries such as Simon Bolivar who led the Hispanic American people's revolution, Samora Machel who led the liberation struggle in Mozambique, Antonio Agostinho Neto of Angola, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Patrice Lumumba of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso,

Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in Cuba. All these are leaders who wanted nothing for themselves but everything for their people!'

Mandela 'signed into law a Constitution with a Bill of Rights that elevates and protects workers right to strike' among other laws. For instance, section 25 of the Constitution allowed the 'government to effect laws that will ensure redistribution of wealth to the people'.

'Mandela signed these legislations despite a serious and heightened campaign by the Democratic Alliance-led opposition who went all out to mobilise against those laws'.

'As workers we know, respect and cherish comrade Mandela as our own leader, and a true freedom fighter who insisted that 'the organisation of the workers had a crucial role to play, ensuring that the poor and the working people remain at the centre of our national efforts, thinking, planning and execution'.

ON 12TH NATIONAL CONGRESS

Dlamini introduced the newly elected leadership of Cosatu: 1st Deputy President Tyotyo James, 2nd Deputy President Zingiswa Losi, National Treasurer Freda Oosthuysen, General Secretary Bheki Ntshalintshali, and Deputy General Secretary Solly Phetoe. Phetoe is a former Cosatu provincial

secretary for the North West Province.

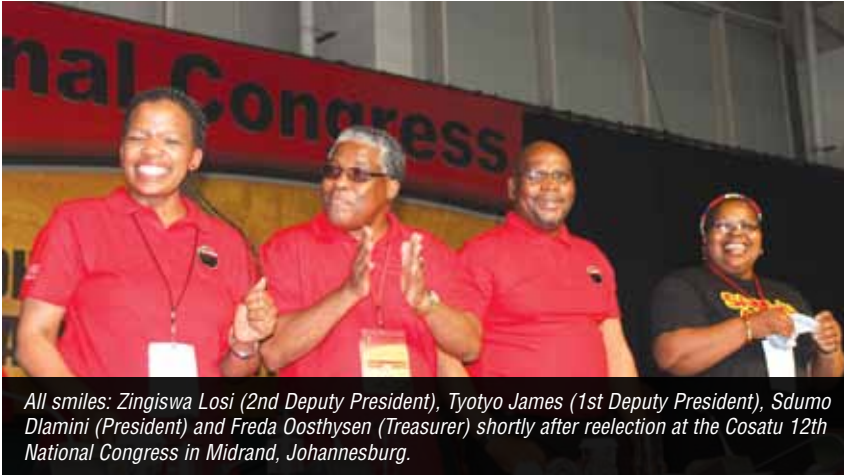
'... 30 years ago workers declared that they wanted a Cosatu that was based on its constitution and founding principles of one country - one federation, one union, one industry, paid up membership, worker control, worker solidarity, non-racialism and unity. It is these principles which we have continued to practise and defend with our lives'.

'As this leadership collective including leaders from all our affiliates, we are ready to lead you to battle based on these principles based on our battle cry "An injury to one is an injury to all".'

PRIORITIES

The three main priorities from the congress were 'back to basics', an aggressive political programme' and 'building and strengthening the South African Communist Party (SACP) to advance the struggle for socialism'.

'Going back to basics means going back to ensuring that leaders, organisers and shop stewards must spend their time and the resources of the organisation servicing workers at the workplace. No leader must spend the resources on anything else except on advancing workers' interests. Leaders' primary responsibility is to defend workers' interests and not employers' fears and profits'.



All smiles: Zingiswa Losi (2nd Deputy President), Tyoty James (1st Deputy President), Sdumo Dlamini (President) and Freda Oosthysen (Treasurer) shortly after reelection at the Cosatu 12th National Congress in Midrand, Johannesburg.

‘No one must go to a constitutional meeting without a mandates from workers. We are going back to ensuring that leaders report to workers about every decision and resolution taken in meetings and also to:

- ensure that for everything we do, it is done on the basis of mandate from workers
- defend the Constitution and the founding principles and policies of Cosatu
- fight corruption inside our ranks, in the private sector and in the public sector.

‘We will work to ensure that Cosatu remains independent and is conscious of the dangers of being co-opted by employers and politicians.’

‘We will continue to strike a balance between the immediate concerns of our members to the need for “stability” and “national development” without subordinating each to the other.’

On Cosatu’s political programme he added: ‘It includes waging campaigns on the ground to build the Alliance (African National Congress (ANC), SACP. We will work on the ground to build an alliance which respects and implements its own resolutions. We want an alliance which is at the centre of driving the National Democratic Revolution (NDR)’.

On the SACP he said: ‘We will also consciously work to build a strong SACP that has the resources and capacity to advance the struggle to deepen and advance the NDR as a direct path to socialism.’

‘This work will include consciously working to strengthen the socialist axis under the leadership of the SACP and to advance in a programmatic way the struggle for socialism. This will also include participating in the SACP process towards a decision on how it will relate to electoral politics in the future guided by our 9th Congress resolution and the SACP’s 12th National Congress and its Special National Congress resolution in this regard.’

Cosatu will mobilise for an ANC victory in local government elections in 2016. ‘We are going back to our communities to mobilise our people for the overwhelming victory of the ANC in the forthcoming local government election.’

NATIONALISE STRATEGIC SECTORS

‘We want our government to nationalise specific strategic sectors of the economy. We want a state mining company, a state bank, a state pharmaceutical company, SASOL and Accellor Mittal to be nationalised now. We

want the implementation of the National Health Insurance now. We want free education at all levels as agreed in Polokwane and in Mangaung. Cosatu also wanted to be involved in determining the figures for the national minimum wage.’

On the African continent Cosatu will campaign for re-industrialisation and globally against neo-liberalism.

‘The South African Students Congress (Sasco) and the progressive youth alliance has led the way in the fight for free education which included demands against outsourcing in many higher education institutions.’

FIGHTING CORRUPTION AND BUSINESS UNIONISM

‘We will be leading a campaign exposing corruption in the private and public sectors and call for decisive punitive action against perpetrators. The current framework is not hard hitting enough against offenders in the public sector. It allows business to pay their way out and get away with murder as in the cases of collusion as exposed by the Competition Commission. We demand the strengthening of the legal framework so that responsible company executives can face prosecution.’

‘With regard to the scourge of business unionism, we shall systematically develop binding policy frameworks, which must address challenges arising from our investment arms, union-linked retirement funds, procurement of goods and services and fund raising.’ ^{LB}

This article is based on a speech by Cosatu President Sdumo Dlamini made at the 30th Anniversary rally at Curries Fountain in Durban where Cosatu was founded in 1985.