

German labour speaks...

*Both the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) and Cosatu have a lot in common aside from being aligned to their countries' governing political parties. While Cosatu challenged Gear, the DGB has its country's version, the Agenda 2010. **Moloto Mothapo** spoke to the head of the DGB's department of International and European Trade Union Policy **Dr Jurgen Eckl**.*

Moloto Mothapo: *There is a view amongst unions in the South that the ICFTU is being ruled by union federations of the North, such as Germany. What is your view?*

Dr Jurgen Eckl: During the period of cold war and its ideological confrontation, the general impression in the South were that of ICFTU as a northern donor organisation and a closed shop of unions of the industrialised countries, which delivered assistance to the unions in the South only if they had the 'politically correct' standing. This time has gone by, but something like forms of paternalistic donor's behaviour has survived.

With the development of a new trade unionism, especially in Brazil and South Africa, but also in other continents, that traditional behaviour had to change, learning that in qualities like representatives, prestige, organising and mobilisation capacities some of the Southern organisations such as the CUT of Brazil, Cosatu in South Africa, and others have been able to work as hard or better in the interest of their working classes and to get rid of the dependencies. The different experiences with this new trade unionism led the ICFTU structures towards a more

regional approach.

The challenges and dynamics of globalisation call more than ever for a real global union movement and ICFTU is the only remaining body to reach this common aim. As there is no realistic alternative to ICFTU we have to join our common efforts to restructure the organisation towards an internally more balanced power sharing between North and South, being aware of the simple fact that the big shots in numbers and money are still located in the North. That means we have to rebuild real cross-border solidarity between strong unions of the North and South. Cosatu and DGB can do a lot together in this long-term task.

Moloto Mothapo: The introduction of Agenda 2010 was met with resistance by the unions – what is the situation thus far?

Dr Jurgen Eckl: Many people, not only trade union members, are highly frustrated by the line taken by the Social Democratic (SPD)-Green government after the elections in 2002. With the pronouncement of Agenda 2010 by Chancellor Schroeder it was clear that the red-green coalition had turned to the neoliberal mainstream. The DGB criticises fundamentally the

social imbalance of the different reforms under the umbrella of Agenda 2010 and their direction to favour the capital side.

Reduction of social benefits in the fields of social security and workers' rights was met with resistance not only by unions but even by wide parts of civil society, as was shown in the massive demonstrations during the European Action Day on 3 April this year, with more than a half million people on the streets in Germany.

The permanent decline of the government in public opinion has come to a stalemate between the red-green coalition and the conservative opposition. It's by no way a comfortable situation for the trade unions because the opposition is even more aggressive against unions and social justice.

Moloto Mothapo: *How has your federation used the alliance with the ruling party, the SPD, to lobby against some of the reforms?*

Dr Jurgen Eckl: That strong alliance doesn't exist at the moment, but sometimes it seems that dealing with a 'friendly' government is more difficult than negotiating with a clear conservative counterpart. LB