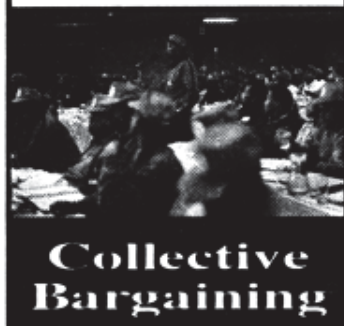




Congress Season

It's union congress time. Many of the major unions met in the last two months. LABOUR BULLETIN takes a quick look at some of the decisions which emerged.

New leadership

New faces can be seen at the helm of a number of unions. The Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU) elected Abram Agulhas, a worker at a Western Cape oil company, as its new president. And the Paper, Wood & Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU) saw general secretary Sipho Kubheka replaced by Obed Zimande; and a SAPPI employee from the Eastern Cape, Pasco Dyani, elected as union

president. All these changes were expected as the incumbents had indicated a desire to stand down.

After internal dissension over the past two years, the South African Railways and Harbours Workers Union (SARHWU) elected a Germiston ticket collector, Nelson Ndinisa, as its new president. Derrick Simoko was elected general secretary and Tsedisio Moshao his deputy.

In the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) the major surprise was that there were no surprises. Moses Mayekiso was re-elected general secretary despite widespread speculation

that another candidate was being sought by a number of the regions. More surprising was that the congress also vetoed a proposal to elect an assistant general secretary, leaving NUMSA as possibly the only major union in the country without one.

The Metal and Electrical Workers Union (MEWUSA) elected a new president, Western Cape-based Russell Sabor.

Elections in the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), and in the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) were less than cordial – see boxes.



FAWU congresses have been conflict-ridden for a number of years and this one was no exception. The agenda was not completed, key decisions were deferred to a later conference, and two senior leaders were defeated in elections.

A ballot for the position of union president resulted in Ernest Theron defeating incumbent Chris Dlamini. And assistant general secretary Mike Madlala unsuccessfully challenged Mandla Gxanyana for the position of general secretary, before losing the race for his own post to Ernest Buthelezi.

The ousting of Dlamini was particularly significant. An active unionist since the



Dlamini and Madlala not re-elected by FAWU

1970s, and former president of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), Dlamini is

currently COSATU's 1st vice-president. He retains this position – the 1991 COSATU congress elected him for a three year term. He also remains a shopsteward at Kellogs in Springs, a precondition for retaining national office in COSATU.

Mike Madlala's failure to win re-election will also impact on COSATU. He currently heads the federation's team on the National Manpower Commission. Whether he will continue in this position is still uncertain.

The leadership changes do not appear to be political in any way. Rather they reflect organisational dissatisfaction with the leadership.

	IN		IN
Ernest Buthelezi		Mandla Gxanyana	
OUT		OUT	
Chris Dlamini		Mike Madlala	

The SACCAWU congress saw the re-emergence of long-standing differences within the union. Prior to the congress conflicts had emerged around allegations of financial irregularities at head office, and the suspension of the Witwatersrand regional leadership by the union's national executive.

The underlying problem, however, was political with delegates and regions being split according to their sympathies for, on the one hand, the ANC, or for a 'coalition' of PAC and a variety of socialist groupings, on the other.

The Congress elected a new treasurer, restricted the powers of the financial co-ordinator, and called for a re-audit covering the last two years. But it accepted the bona fides of general secretary Papi Kganare, clearing him of corruption charges.

Congress also confirmed the suspension of the union's Wits regional leadership. But it is unclear what this means in practice. Constitutionally a regional congress must be held to elect new leadership. But the balance of forces within the Wits region is such that the ousted leadership is likely to be re-elected.

The Congress also elected a new assistant general secretary, 'Bones' Skulu from the Eastern Cape to replace

Tensions within SACCAWU



Kaiser Thibedi – no longer holding national office

Kaiser Thibedi; and replaced the national treasurer, Amos Mthapo with Alinah Rantsolase. Technically, both Skulu and Rantsolase were elected unopposed. But the incumbents refused to make themselves available for nomination, perhaps realising that had they stood they would undoubtedly have been outvoted.

The outcome is that all six

of SACCAWU's national office-bearers are ANC sympathisers. In the past the office-bearers had represented a broader spectrum of views. There was talk, especially prior to the congress, that a Wits and Eastern Transvaal-based breakaway union might be established. This, potentially, could take away up to 20% of the union's membership and would largely be a re-run of the divisions which plagued the union in the late 1980s.

A split has not materialised and now seems unlikely to. The consequences would have been disastrous, giving management greater flexibility to implement dramatic restructuring and slash employee complements.

Since the last division within the union, the balance of forces has clearly shifted towards ANC-aligned workers, perhaps reflecting national trends. At that time the union was split almost 50:50. Today the majority grouping commands about 65% support; and faces a minority not always internally united.

While a formal split seems unlikely in the short-term, the tensions may well deprive the union of much-needed cohesion. In trying to rebuild unity it remains to be seen if the newly-elected national leadership can rise above political differences and act as a truly unifying force.

Support for the reconstruction accord

In general the union congresses supported the idea of a reconstruction accord between COSATU and its alliance partners – although they did so with varying degrees of enthusiasm. COSATU's special congress can be expected to support the federation putting its full weight behind the ANC election campaign. A number of unions questioned how long the tripartite alliance should last after elections. These questions are examined in a longer article elsewhere in this issue of LABOUR BULLETIN.

COSATU's alliance with the ANC and SACP was an issue in two other union congresses. The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) postponed, yet again, its long-awaited decision to affiliate to COSATU. Despite most delegates to the SADTU congress being overwhelmingly supportive of the ANC, the union decided to remain politically independent and non-aligned.

Two concerns emerged. Firstly, it was felt important to accommodate a significant minority of members who opposed affiliation, believing that COSATU's membership of the tripartite alliance would imply SADTU's support for the ANC. Secondly, as



public servants teachers have to deal with government. What would being in alliance with the ANC (as political movement) mean when negotiating with ANC (as future government)?

The union is looking for clarity from COSATU on these questions, and has postponed its decision for a few months. But, as its general secretary Randall van der Heever points out, "there is a strong feeling we should affiliate. It's a matter of time".

The NACTU-affiliated MEWUSA also debated the possibility of merging with its COSATU counterpart, NUMSA. But it decided to first concentrate on concluding the merger process among metal unions within NACTU. According to newly-elected assistant general secretary

Zithulele Cindi, the issue of COSATU being part of the tripartite alliance did not come up directly. But it is something "at the back of people's minds". "Our affiliation to different federations," says Cindi, "is a hiccup which needs to be addressed."

Economic policy

A number of the unions discussed economic policy. NUMSA's congress called for extensive nationalisation, without compensation, of the "leading heights" of the economy. SACTWU, by contrast, developed a more pragmatic and moderate approach, becoming the first South African union to explicitly call for a social market economy. The economic policy positions of both SACTWU and NUMSA are explored

LABOUR ACTION

elsewhere in this issue of the LABOUR BULLETIN.

SACTWU's congress was significant in other respects. The union has now formally changed its name to cover Southern Africa, rather than only South Africa. The goal of building a regional union has been part of SACTWU's agenda for years, with the union arguing that worker organisation should mirror the single regional economy which exists in practice. The name-change resolution was supported by delegates from the Lesotho Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. It remains to be seen how governments in the region will respond.

Women in the unions

SACTWU can also claim a first on the issue of women's leadership. The majority of its worker office-bearers – both vice-presidents and the national treasurer – are women. However, while three out of four worker office-bearers are women, the three full-time secretariat posts were retained by the incumbents, all of them men.

SACCAWU also spent some time at its congress trying to integrate issues of gender into its broader programme of action. It decided to appoint a

Inflation		
	Consumer Price Index (1990=100)	Annual rate of inflation (%increase over 1 year)
Area	May 1993	May 92 – 93
Cape Town	145.5	10.8%
Port Elizabeth	142.9	10.2%
East London	144.4	10.7%
Durban	140.5	9.9%
Pietermaritzburg	145.8	10.4%
Witwatersrand	143.7	10.4%
Vaal Triangle	138.3	10.1%
Pretoria	143.9	10.6%
Klerksdorp	143.3	10.4%
Bloemfontein	140.4	11.9%
OFS Goldfields	145.7	13.2%
Kimberley	145.7	13.0%
South Africa	143.7	10.6%
Area	June 1992	June 92 – 93
Cape Town	146.1	10.3%
Port Elizabeth	142.9	9.5%
East London	144.4	10.4%
Durban	141.1	8.7%
Pietermaritzburg	146.6	10.0%
Witwatersrand	144.4	10.1%
Vaal Triangle	138.8	9.4%
Pretoria	144.4	10.0%
Klerksdorp	144.0	9.9%
Bloemfontein	140.9	11.1%
OFS Goldfields	146.4	13.0%
Kimberley	146.8	12.8%
South Africa	144.3	10.0%

Source: Labour Research Service/CSS

full-time national gender co-ordinator and establish a gender commission within the union.

The South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU), whose

membership and leadership is overwhelmingly comprised of women, held its congress in May. This sector is notoriously difficult to organise; there

is little supportive legislation and most domestic workers face their employers as isolated individuals.

The SADWU congress decided, in line with discussions within COSATU, that it could "never be a viable union

without legislation..."

Unable to develop a core of members on stop-orders it would always be financially dependent. SADWU has decided to enter into merger talks with a number of other unions aimed at establishing a service sector union which

could accomodate domestic workers around a more stable, organised core. The major problem expressed by delegates was that, as women, they would end up in a union dominated by men.
(*Labour Bulletin correspondents*)

The auto industry has broken new ground, being the first to agree to implement an agency shop. Workers who are not members of the unions which bargain with management will, in future, have a bargaining fee of R4,75 deducted from their pay weekly. This money will be paid over to the unions on a proportional basis, depending on their membership in the industry.

The agency shop provision forms part of the auto industry's annual agreement which provides for a 10% wage increase. The agreement also contains some path-breaking decisions regarding training, grading and certification in the sector – which we hope to examine in a later issue of LABOUR BULLETIN.

The agency shop is an attempt to deal with 'free riders' – workers who benefit from bargaining without paying for it. It is an implicit acceptance by the auto employers of the majoritarian principle in the industry.

In practice the agreement

Agency shop – auto industry first

will affect workers belonging to non-party unions (in this case a handful of UWUSA members at Toyota in Durban, and a few United African Motor Workers Union members at Nissan); as well as workers who are not members of either party union.

Approximately 26 000 employees fall within the relevant bargaining unit. 20 000 of these belong to the party unions – approximately 18 500 to the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), and the remaining 1 500 to Yster en Staal (a union of white, skilled workers). Apart from a few hundred workers belonging to other unions, the remaining 6 000 workers are

not union members. They will not be forced to join any union. But they will have to pay the bargaining fee.

In practice the money will be forwarded to the auto industry's bi-partite National Bargaining Forum, and will then be distributed on a quarterly basis to the unions. Close to R1,5 million per annum is expected. NUMSA should receive over 90% of this, with the balance going to Yster en Staal.

It is not yet clear if the funds will go into NUMSA's general pool or whether the money will be earmarked for special uses – such as an industry fund or for use in research or development work.

The agreement is also subject to employers obtaining exemption from the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, to make the agreed deductions legal. Many unions are exploring the agency shop notion and demanding it from management. The progress of this pathbreaking agreement will be closely followed. ☆