

MASS ACTION FORUM



The week of mass action saw millions on strike and thousands marching and demonstrating. Business negotiations with COSATU were unable to avert the strike, and opposition by NACTU and others made little measurable difference to the result. *SA Labour Bulletin* asked a range of unionists, politicians and business representatives for their comments.



**Chris Hani,
General
secretary,
SA Communist
Party**

What did mass action achieve?

Millions of our people have been involved in various actions against the government. The rolling mass action was not confined only to Jo'burg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Our people marched in small towns, in Venda, Ciskei, Heilbron, Bop. It took our organisations to the people, to the grassroots, in a manner that was never done before. It went far beyond what we achieved in 1952 and the campaigns that we had from 1982-86.

Mass action established what we have always known, but which is disputed by our enemies, that the alliance led by the ANC is the major political organisation of the oppressed and exploited and democratic forces in the country. Doubting Thomases, both inside and outside the country, saw that the alliance was able to bring along in its campaign the majority of people of South Africa.

The political achievements have also been immense. They stopped the growing paralysis of our struggle at the time of CODESA negotiations. In my view, we were moving

gradually away from our support base, from our constituencies. Mass action addressed the imbalances between negotiations and the struggle.

Do you support a return to negotiations?

I support the return to negotiations, but at a price. We cannot go back if this government does not address our 14 demands, especially our core demands: violence, interim government and elections to a constituent assembly. So far de Klerk has not touched on this. We can only go back to negotiations if we are satisfied that they are going to be about a real accord - interim government and elections to a sovereign constituent assembly.

What difference has the action made to the alliance?

A lot of difference. We have emerged, as the alliance, quite confident. We have moved closer to our constituencies. We have managed to implement a cohesive and coherent strategy of mass action. Our relations have improved. We were able to meet and strategise together on a number of issues. We have placed ourselves on a better footing for the continuing struggle.

Could the SACP organise such a major campaign without COSATU support?

We would not embark on a general strike without COSATU. COSATU is the key element in the effectiveness of the struggle. That is why COSATU's role in the alliance is very important.

In terms of day-to-day happenings on the shopfloor, COSATU is the leader. We need COSATU, in the same way that the federation needs the ANC and the SACP in terms of leading the national liberation struggle.

What has emerged is that COSATU alone was able to bring out 4 million workers, despite the attitude of other trade unions who opposed the strike. This has shown us that COSATU has no peer in terms of the loyalty of the majority of black workers. ♦



Sipho Kubheka
General
secretary,
PPWAWU

Was the action a success ?

It was effective. Ordinary people on the ground gained confidence in themselves, rather than being bystanders while others talk at the World Trade Centre. The third day was not a stayaway but workers went to work then left the factory to join demonstrations and marches. It was a stayaway of a special type.

The action cast aside doubts within our ranks about our capacity. It also showed this clearly to the government. For PAC, AZAPO and NACTU it is clear that the ANC leads the liberation struggle. They could not pull off such an action on their own. Ordinary NACTU members could even be seen, wearing NACTU t-shirts, at the Pretoria march.

Did you support the COSATU/SACCOLA charter?

The document itself was good. What was problematic was the trade-off - exchanging rolling mass action for a one-day shutdown. Those wanting a trade-off wanted, legitimately, to minimise casualties (especially given the crisis in clothing and mining) and because, for the first time, we would be isolating employers from the government.

We, in PPWAWU, were against the

trade-off. We had promised unprecedented mass action. If we go back to the people, having mobilised and cancelled, then they will not support us in future. People in leadership got a bit carried away. The attitude was "let us wait for the outcome of negotiations", rather than "let's continue to mobilise and see what negotiations bring." For two weeks negotiations took precedence over mobilisation. The two should have been parallel initiatives.

Since negotiations failed, do talks with SACCOLA have a future?

The charter with SACCOLA is not dead, and should not be. We must take it forward and try to broaden the scope of employer participants, and act against employer hardliners.

Before the strike we saw the re-emergence of old rhetoric in COSATU - that talking to the bosses is a "sell-out". But this is a marginal voice. The draft charter talks of labour rights, violence and combatting poverty. Those problems still face us. We must engage as many forces as possible on this. It is not the same as an alliance with the employers. ♦



Cunningham
Ngcukana
General
secretary,
NACTU

Why did NACTU not support mass action?

We were for joint action with COSATU on the question of mass action, based on their 30 June CEC decision. It is lack of consultation and a different position taken by COSATU which made us not take part in the whole thing. COSATU was saying that mass action will be called off if the government meets the ANC's 14 demands. We felt that this was a sectarian position.

Also, there were a lot of changes in the complexion of mass action by that time.

COSATU had already met with big business and an agreement was about to be signed on a one day shutdown on the basis of "no work, no pay and no discipline". We are not opposed to an independent organisation meeting other organisations. We are actually in support of COSATU's political and economic demands.

NACTU's position is that before any negotiations can take place, the regime must agree on majority rule and the constituent assembly. We could not go along with COSATU's demands since we had no mandate.

A majority of workers, even NACTU members, supported mass action. What does this mean for NACTU?

Big business, through SACCOLA, sought to reach agreements at factory floor level with workers. For a worker, if you are given a holiday you will definitely take it. That happened to some of the factories. But AECI in Sasolburg and Modderfontein, and the mines, were in full production.

The other thing is that COSATU had prepared some protection for its members in the metal and motor industry, where workers had balloted for a strike.

We were prepared to go for mass action irrespective of the consequences. The problem was lack of proper consultation. The mass action that took place without our support has not weakened us.

Is NACTU still prepared to work with COSATU?

We remain committed to the question of trade union unity. The past mass action is but one example of political issues and differences affecting trade union unity. We will continue to search for possible ways of ensuring union unity in our country. ♦

Apology

In our last issue, we carried a book review by LANGA ZITA. Due to a computer error, we did not inform readers of his position as NUMSA INFORMATION OFFICER. We apologise for this error.



Sam Shilowa
Assistant general
secretary,
COSATU

Was mass action a success?

Yes. Despite being caught up in negotiations with SACCOLA, and with only one and a half weeks of popular and upfront mobilisation, the fact that we were able to get a huge number of people out into marches, both on 4 and 5 August, and beyond that, was a major success.

Casualties, in terms of dismissals, were relatively light. Even though the negotiations between SACCOLA and COSATU broke down, I think it set the tone for employers saying that they will not take disciplinary action. Also, the intervention by Mr Mandela who met about 33 national business executives helped.

NACTU says its non-participation in the action was largely due to lack of consultation?

They are not correct. We have been consulting with them ever since this question of mass action came up. Months ago, at the time when we were talking about having a Workers Summit scheduled for May, this question came up. At the Boipatong funeral, NACTU and the PAC and AZAPO all said publicly that they were going to join mass action. If there was no consultation then we are not sure what they were referring to.

There were three or four meetings between COSATU and NACTU prior to the mass action. We met twice at the time when we were actually having discussions with SACCOLA and they were supplied with documentation of the discussion between us and SACCOLA.

But perhaps the point NACTU is raising is not between us and them, but that there should have been a Patriotic Front approach to organising the action. Our approach was that the best way of ensuring that all sections

participate is to meet and outline a programme. But then they must do their own mobilising and we meet at the battle field. The May Day debacle, where there was no cohesion at regional level, taught us a lesson.

What did COSATU want to achieve from the charter with SACCOLA?

Our approach has been to dislodge big business' perception from that of the regime, because they constitute a major support base for the regime. They should realise that no economic stability can ensue our country unless we have political stability. They must realise what is needed to cross the democratic threshold and what needs to be done in terms of peace.

For the first time we were able to tie them to issues of poverty, job creation, the supply of food.

Why did the charter fail?

I don't think the charter itself failed. Both business and ourselves are still committed to picking up the charter and moving ahead.

What failed was reaching agreement on the shutdown, and delivering the public sector. While Bobby Godsell said to COSATU there was an 80% chance of their delivering the public sector, they were not able to do so. In addition, their negotiators agreed to a shutdown but could not deliver their constituency. They are not telling the truth if they say they never envisaged a shutdown. We put it upfront that we are talking of either a one day shutdown or no agreement at all.

Another important reason why we could not reach an agreement is, we believe, that government intervened at the last minute. The government believed we were going to business because we were so disorganised we could not deliver. Delpont apparently said if they sign the agreement COSATU will have pulled off the con of the century.

Was COSATU able to deliver its constituency?

I think COSATU would have been able to deliver, albeit with rumblings. I am not saying there were no differences of opinion. But if we got a one day shutdown then we would have cut the stayaway to one day and scaled down activities on other days that would be

destructive of the economy.

There was dissatisfaction among the grassroots, not with the accord but with the manner in which the negotiations progressed. The lessons we are going to learn as COSATU are: Firstly, that whenever you have negotiations there must be clear terms of reference for the negotiators. Secondly, there was very little report back by unions to their own structures. While there was discussion at the CEC and EXCO, there was very little discussion at REC's. We were just saying that talks were happening but not saying what shape they were taking.

The third lesson is our approach. There was a time when the mass action, the week of action, became a principle rather than a strategic weapon to be used at that particular time. To some of our comrades the issue was not that we have engaged in mass action and that among the weapons we are going to use is a two day stayaway and a third day of occupations and two days of sectoral activities. The week of action became an end in itself.

The question is how do we combine negotiations and struggles? During the mass action activity, the mass action became the big issue, rather than peace, democracy and economic reconstruction.

Does the charter have a future?

Yes. Business has committed itself to what should be the prerequisites for us to cross the democratic threshold. We must now try to pin them down. If they balk at that, it will show that they are only prepared to support democracy if there is a trade-off in terms of action - that they do not support it in principle. Secondly, with regard to the question of violence, we believe it is also in their interests for the violence to end. So we are hoping to pick up the issue with them very soon, without the pressure of having to settle because certain things are going to happen.

Is COSATU now driving the alliance?

No, no. We are not driving the alliance. But there is now more co-ordination. The alliance summit has been able to meet often enough. The principle has been accepted that this then

becomes the highest decision making body within the alliance. So I don't think it is COSATU driving the alliance, but I think our input does play a certain role. I would say that we are now treated as equal partners in the alliance. ♦



Pailo Jordan
*NEC member,
African National
Congress*

How do you evaluate the mass action campaign?

Mass action was a great success. The response was overwhelming. People estimate that more than four million people participated. The level of participation from coloureds and Indians on the second day was very high. Some Indians closed their shops in support of the mass action.

Marches held in cities throughout the country were well disciplined. The biggest in the history of our country was the one held in Pretoria. More than 100 to 200 000 people brought the city to a standstill.

Mass action compelled business to take a stand and define its own position on the current impasse. In addition it has made the government seriously consider its intransigent position. Government has been forced to accept the UN peace-keeping force, and disband Koevoet and Battalion 32.

Why take action when de Klerk's door is open?

What de Klerk said after mass action, that his door is open, is not the issue. The issue is what is behind the open door. He has not yet responded to our 14 demands. Special service units are still in operation.

We are not saying that there won't be resumption to negotiations. But de Klerk must move faster. The ball is in his court. He has seen the strength of mass action and the power that lies behind that.

Is COSATU now controlling the alliance ?

It is silly nonsense for people to suggest that COSATU is driving the alliance in a militant direction. People used to say the ANC was driven by the SACP. When we were legalised they said the ANC is the one driving the whole process, and now it is said COSATU is leading the alliance in a militant direction.

It is the alliance that is leading the whole process and not an individual organisation or trade union. ♦



Lesaoana Makhanda
*NEC member,
Pan Africanist
Congress*

What were your objections to mass action?

In principle, PAC does not object to mass action. We have been engaged in mass action intermittently since 1960. However, we do not agree with mass action being used to resuscitate CODESA. We were against CODESA, and with its demise we will be contradicting ourselves if we campaign for its revival.

Do you think the mass action was successful?

Every success has to be measured factually. It is stated that 4 million people were on strike and our working population is 14 million. Therefore, one cannot gauge the success of the strike with the given figures.

The ANC will, of course, take credit for the mass action.

What does this mean for PAC, when millions take part in action officially boycotted by your organisation?

The truth is that this action had an element of frustration or intimidation. It is a known fact that some townships had barricades which made it impossible for workers to leave their

areas. However, this does not compromise our strategies. We have been an organisation that has relied on the masses and we are not in any way dampened nor uneasy about what has happened.

The PAC has just met the government? Is this a new policy?

No! These are only preparatory talks. We went there at the invitation of the government. We felt we should meet them after CODESA II collapsed, and now that we have the international presence in our country.

We are the ones who initially rejected CODESA and said that it was a failure. Everybody is now aware of what we were saying. We will negotiate with the regime on condition that there is a guarantee that we will move towards majority rule. ❖



Bokkie Botha
Chairperson,
SACCOLA

What did business want to achieve from the draft SACCOLA/COSATU charter?

We were concerned to illustrate to COSATU the impact of mass action on the economy. We wanted to stop any form of action which would hurt the economy. We also wanted to do something constructive to lessen the violence.

Why did the charter fail?

Business was not prepared to close down totally for the day, and also we could not deliver the public service as part of the agreement. On COSATU's side they were prepared to take one day's action but would not promise no action thereafter. They would not promise no damage to the economy for the duration of the agreement.

We were not against their right to peaceful protest and democratic dissent, such as marches. We were looking to get some form of

symbolic joint action on that day. We never understood there would be a total shutdown. The charter called for all South Africans to "observe 3 August". Some companies said they would shutdown. Others wanted local arrangements, in fact similar to the arrangements which finally were made.

We had some concerns about the wording of other sections of the charter. But we never put our proposals forward because we stuck on the question of how we would jointly behave on the day.

What role did government play?

I am not aware of any government pressure placed on any of the negotiators. But all our constituents were mandating separately and I cannot speak for all of them.

We did consult with government, but openly and with COSATU's knowledge. Government indicated that they would not shut down on the day. We also had to speak to them as one of the major objectives of the charter was to bring the political parties together. Our general impression was that the government thought the process was a good one.

Does the charter have a future?

The principles are very worthwhile. Both parties want it as a basis for future talks. There was initially some resistance from business. As talks progressed the business community developed considerable consensus and we were bringing most on board in support of the principles. ❖



Gerrie Bezuidenhout
Labour Affairs
manager, SACOB

How do you view the mass action?

From an economic point of view the stayaway action did cause some damage. Certain sectors of the economy took quite a knock. Our SACOB business confidence index also showed a dip.

While we are not against peaceful protests, we believe that a week long action which includes a stayaway, is not really an appropriate way to make a point.

Is business moving closer to politics and the democratic movement?

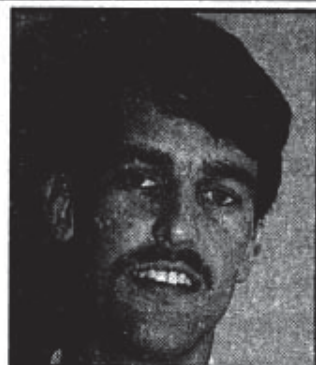
I wouldn't put it like that. The charter shows that there is a lot of common ground between organised business and organised labour as to what are the problems facing our society.

The political arena as such is a bit foreign to business. Also, business organisations have members across the political spectrum, which makes it a sensitive area. Our connection with politics should be the broad principles of what a democratic society should look like.

One would not have a problem with the principle of universal suffrage. Obviously, from a business point of view, the free market for us would be important – although I am not saying that it is something that must be included in the constitution. Our support for a 'yes' vote in the referendum was because it meant negotiations to lead to the ultimate solution of the political constitutional issues. It certainly was not a vote for de Klerk or the DP. It was support for a certain process.

Why did SACCOLA not get a mandate for the charter?

This type of process involves a certain amount of exploration up to a point, and then the obtaining of a full mandate. In the end, none of the member organisations supported it. I would not say it was a slap in the face of the negotiating team. The wider membership, for various reasons, could not go along with it. The package was not acceptable. It was not good enough. ♦



**Dannhauser
van der Merwe
Secretary,
FEDSAL**

Why did you oppose the mass action?

Mass action is everyone's right. But if it is not to the benefit of the country as a whole you have to rethink it. We decided that, especially in the economic circumstances, it was not the right thing to do.

We are apolitical and middle of the road. The mass action had a political colour. Innocent people always lose their lives in mass action. It's a negotiating tool, but at what price?

The guys who would lose out in the end would be the workers. The workers lose money, the employers lose money and the whole country suffers from it. There were some ordinary members who took part for political reasons. But it was a small percentage.

Where do you stand on democracy?

We are definitely in favour of democracy. But we feel more for a negotiated way of getting to a solution.

Because of the way the country's population is put together we have to work out something else than just one man, one vote.

But this is a dangerous question. It is more political and might put us into one political shed. If there's killings all over the show, and if it gets socialistic or communistic, then I'm sure we won't support it. We have a wide variety of people in FEDSAL, from very left to very right. But most of our people are moderate. ☆

