

NUMSA bargaining conference

More than 190 delegates met at the NUMSA national bargaining conference held in Johannesburg in March to discuss the union's collective bargaining strategy for 1998. The conference also discussed the proposed jobs summit.

The conference spent more than a day discussing unemployment. The sectors in which NUMSA organises have lost thousands of workers. In the engineering sector alone, 114 345 jobs have been lost since 1990. While labour productivity increased by 12,3% between 1990 and 1996, capital productivity decreased by 16,6%. Unit labour costs have decreased by 6%. These figures demonstrate very clearly that employers are more interested in making profits than expanding employment.

In the tyre sector, the opening of trade barriers has encouraged imports, leading to a decline in employment. In the auto components and assembly industries trade liberalisation is pressurising companies into cutting costs to compete with imports. Employment levels decreased during 1997.

Resolutions

The conference argued for an effective employment strategy which will create significant numbers of jobs, raise the standard of living of the poorest workers and eliminate poverty. Delegates rejected the idea that labour market flexibility is the solution to South Africa's unemployment problem. It was agreed that NUMSA will set

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up industrial restructuring teams to look at the implications of industrial restructuring as a whole and how NUMSA's sectors can defend jobs and promote job creation.

Jobs summit

Delegates debated the jobs summit conscious of the fact that their resolutions would feed into COSATU's submissions to the summit. Deliberations centred around the neo-liberal character of GEAR. Some delegates argued that, because of GEAR, an alliance agreement on the jobs summit was highly unlikely and that, if this proved to be the case, COSATU should withdraw and call a stayaway on the day of the summit. It was finally agreed that nothing could be gained by boycotting the summit. It was agreed that:

- ☐ Labour should develop an emergency plan towards full employment. Members must be mobilised around concrete demands, which will form the basis of an election pact with the ANC.
- ☐ The summit must be preceded by an alliance summit, where a common approach can be formulated.
- ☐ The right to disagree with alliance partners and to mobilise members around differences must be reserved.
- ☐ In the period time leading up to the

jobs summit, there must be a moratorium on retrenchments

- ❑ Labour's position that no party could present its position as 'fixed' was reiterated
- ❑ The summit should be used to deliver large numbers of quality jobs
- ❑ NUMSA must convene its own jobs summit to look at the state of our sectors, potential job loss and remedial mechanisms
- ❑ All parties to the summit should be willing to review their policies in the interest of job creation

It was also resolved that,

- ❑ There should be a campaign to buy South African goods, control on the influx of goods from outside South Africa and controls over reduction of tariffs
- ❑ Infrastructure should be expanded, with a focus on delivery and economic recovery, land reform, training, etc
- ❑ Government should retain the secondary tax on capital/companies
- ❑ Government must lead the public transport and public works programmes Youth and women should be targeted for employment
- ❑ Government must not make the repayment of apartheid debt a priority
- ❑ There must be a campaign against the privatisation of public infrastructure/basic necessities
- ❑ A mechanism must be created to influence the budgetary process

Bargaining

The conference deliberated extensively on the plight of motor workers, who have not received any increases for the past three years. The employers are dismissing workers arbitrarily. At the same time, they speak of worker rights. Workers are subject to continual victimisation and harassment. It was agreed to fight vigorously for motor workers, even if it

means drawing all on the reserves of the union to win the battle

Campaigns

NUMSA will focus on plant-based campaigns to demand the implementation of workers' rights as granted by the new LRA. Core demands for all our sectors for this year are

- ❑ **Wages:** A guaranteed inflation rate increase, plus an improvement factor. Larger increases for lower grades to close the wage gap. All increases to be granted on actual wage rates
- ❑ **Scope:** The scope of the main agreements in the motor and engineering sectors should be extended to cover the ex-homelands and TBVC states. The auto and tyre agreement should cover salaried staff as well
- ❑ **Benefits:** Benefits such as pension and provident funds must be controlled by the union
- ❑ **Outsourcing:** Workers must not be retrenched as a result of outsourcing. Outsourcing must be the subject of negotiations. Labour brokers and independent contractors must be prohibited, unless by agreement with the union. Workers employed by independent contractors must enjoy the same benefits and conditions of employment as normal workers
- ❑ **Technology:** Employers should not be allowed to use new technology to retrench workers. Rather, new technology should be introduced in the context of job creation. There must be six months notice before the introduction of technology
- ❑ **Training:** Education and training must take place during working hours. All workers must be given paid leave for training and education

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