

Restructuring

comments from the floor

Telkom

Devan Pillay: As a customer, I am impressed with what Telkom has done. So regarding the restructuring, is the experience of it among workers bad because they did not work before? What is the nature of their problem?

Rachmat Omar: There is a change in strategy at Telkom. Shopstewards agree that service has improved. Before 1996 call centres did not exist and Telkom did not get back to you if you had a problem. Now they do. The complaints on labour's side are about the intensification of work and surveillance. Shopstewards raised the issue that the call centre operators are the buffer between unhappy customers and management. Yet these operators are fault handlers and not fault fixers or technicians. Telkom has retrenched many fault fixers

Labour also has a problem with Telkom's emphasis on business clients Telkom will rather pay the penalty to government for not meeting its licensing requirements and social objectives than extend its service to rural customers. So Telkom is not promoting local economic development. Another problem for the union is the employment of part-time workers. These workers' contracts say they cannot join the union.

Different responses

Neva Makgetlar: A difference exists between restructuring in the public and

Compiled by Etienne Vlok

private sectors. The private sector can close down while restructuring in the public sector is not about closing down. I don't know how far you can get fighting restructuring at company level. So in COSATU we focus on sector summits. Enterprise restructuring should be seen in the context of sector restructuring.

Jane Barrett: Unions' responses to restructuring are often a combination in reality. Sometimes unions' responses are sharp while management is unable to respond. Management's response to union proposals is stuck in apartheid. The tradition in South Africa is of management not taking labour into account around workplace restructuring. It sees labour as empty without suggestions. Management do not realise the capacity of workers to understand the shopfloor. That could look like compliance.

Avril Joffe: Unions often have different responses over time to restructuring. When management changes, strategic engagement can die. This happened at Nampak. At SAB [South African Breweries] problems in the union leadership caused the death of its proposals. If there is a change in strategy what is the reason for that? The context

needs to be looked at carefully

How are the 'wins' or good responses made available to the rest of the movement? How can unions get hold of other unions' responses?

Karl von Holdt: In Highveld Steel workers resisted all management proposals. Their goal was to get management to the table to negotiate restructuring. Questions exist: Is restructuring feasible? What paradigm do you use? Do you accept the premises of globalisation and say we have to compete then?

Gary Phillips: For shopstewards, there are two types of responses to restructuring. Firstly, see how the law can be used to stop it. Secondly, respond to the alternatives that management suggests.

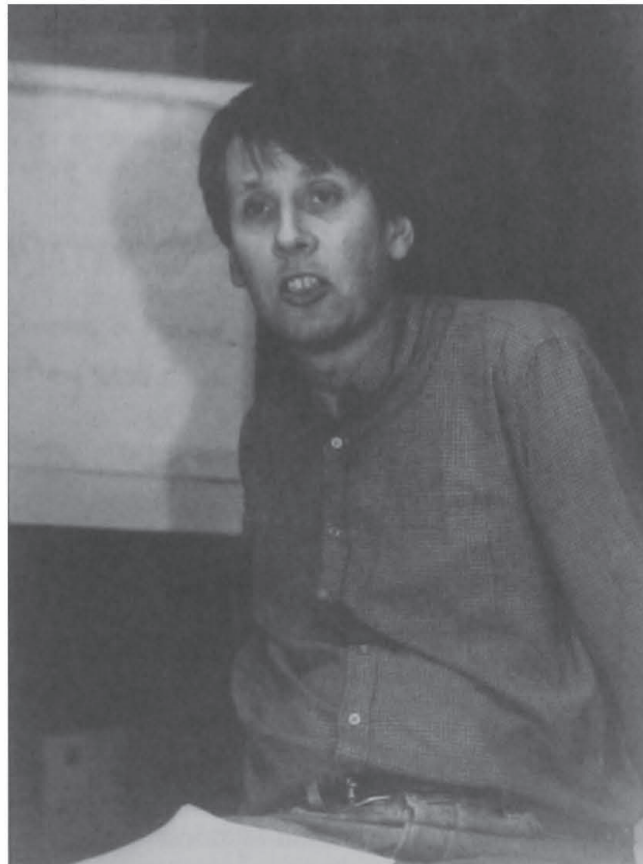
Jan Theron: What is core about restructuring? The sectors we researched have seen a massive increase in externalisation since 1995. It is a step away from employment where smaller contractors service bigger businesses.

What is our strategy here? Bosses say it is a rigid labour market. We may have to do a trade-off between minimum standards and collective bargaining legislation.

Unity across unions

Mojalefa Must: There is recognition that ultimately the response is from COSATU. But there are other federations and their unions also. Some of those unions compliment the power of management. So first you have to convince those unions to join the cause. Unions have to unite across federations and races.

Karl von Holdt: There are interesting relationships developing with the white



Karl von Holdt: 'Is restructuring feasible?'

unions in Spoornet and at Chris Hani Baragwanath.

Local government

John Pape: Regarding the issue of strategic engagement, other dimensions need to be mentioned. In the public sector the economic policy is the reason for restructuring, especially in local government.

Art Sitas: SAMWU's position has to be seen differently. It is resisting privatisation. Because SAMWU decided to resist, it has to keep on resisting. Only if it collapses or succeeds then the union can engage.

Karl von Holdt: SAMWU keeps on opposing privatisation and says why it will not work. However, you cannot resist and depending on whether it is successful or not, decide to engage. You can engage throughout in the media and with actions. ★