

# *the* **Accord** *with* **SACCOLA** *and the dangers* *facing our movement*

---

ROSELINE NYMAN\* takes a critical look at COSATU's dealings with SACCOLA in the run-up to the August general strike.\*\*

---

**O**n 10 July, after much discussion, the COSATU CEC agreed on a programme of mass action in support of a range of demands related to majority rule and a constituent assembly. Before the CEC COSATU initiated talks with SACCOLA, the bosses organisation, around their support for COSATU's demands.

The outcome of these talks was a Draft Charter\*\*\*. In exchange for SACCOLA support for the charter came the proposal to modify and water-down our agreed programme of action and have a joint SACCOLA/COSATU one-day shutdown. This was debated at a CEC meeting on 20 July but no agreement was reached. A further CEC was scheduled for 22 July.



*Photo: William Matlala*

Given the implications for our movement in general, and COSATU in particular, I felt it necessary to contribute to a much needed debate around the 'Draft Charter – Programme for peace, democracy and economic reconstruction' and its significance.

**1 The proposed accord is a grave political error and needs to be corrected as a matter of urgency**

The sponsors of the Draft Charter within COSATU have promoted it on a number of grounds.

It has been argued that by making an agreement with the bosses we would be isolating the de Klerk regime from one of its main constituencies, and thus score a major victory in

---

\* SACCAWU's national legal unit co-ordinator and member of the union's campaigns committee

\*\* article written shortly before COSATU/SACCOLA draft charter failed to get employer support

\*\*\* reprinted elsewhere in this issue



our struggle for an interim government and a constituent assembly – and, by extension, in our struggle for majority rule and economic transformation in our country.

The specific form this “victory” will assume will be a jointly agreed “shutdown” (by workers and bosses) of economic activity on 3 August 1992. In exchange, COSATU and the alliance will not go ahead with the seven-day programme of action agreed to by the CEC of 10 July.

Although less central to the argument, it has also been argued that we need to be sensitive to an unfavourable balance of forces internationally.

Finally, the possible effects of a hardline response from the bosses – such as dismissal and other disciplinary action – has been cited.

It is my view that the sponsors of the position err seriously on a number of grounds. The Draft Charter, in both its contents and political orientation, goes against the entire traditions of our movement. It specifically undermines all the political and organisational gains achieved by our movement over the last 20 – 25 years.

The sponsors of the Draft Charter have a seriously mistaken view of the relationship between the bosses and the De Klerk regime.

Throughout the many years of our struggle the bosses have firmly stood behind all the governments that have ruled and oppressed our people. Up to two years ago it was commonly accepted within our movement, that the bosses were the main beneficiaries of the system of apartheid and capitalism.

The bosses made huge profits on the basis of the repression of the 1960s; they were in the forefront of attempting to resist the rising labour movement in the 1970s; they supported the PW Botha regime throughout its states of emergency in the 1980s. Throughout the history of our movement, we have established one clear fact: the sweet-talking bosses are not our friends. They are our enemies.

Up to February 2nd, this fact was not contested within our movement.

Three issues have dominated the lives of our people since February 2nd.

- The first and most immediate has been the bloody carnage that has been unleashed on our people.
- The second has been a deep and thoroughgoing attack on the living standards and conditions of our people.
- The third issue has been the political intransigence of the de Klerk regime and its point-blank refusal to accept majority rule.

The attitude of the bosses to these issues is the fundamental test of its relationship to the state. It is also the only real - and not wishful - basis on which the “strategy” of winning the bosses must be evaluated and tested.

Fortunately the Draft Charter deals with exactly these questions. It is an indication of what SACCOLA - or at least its executive - is prepared to accept.

Let us look at how far the bosses have travelled since February 2nd.

#### **a) On violence**

The section dealing with violence in the Draft Charter is remarkable for two things.

Firstly, it is crafted in a manner that is so bland and vague that it represents what the government and Inkatha have publicly accepted at this stage. Every single proposal contained in this section of the document - the formation of peace committees, the monitoring of security forces, recommendations of the Goldstone Commission, the need to implement the provisions of the Peace Accord - belongs to the period preceding the current political deadlock around violence (and democracy) by a whole year!

The effect of this section of the document is to trivialise – in fact to completely undermine – the very basis of the current political crisis through which our country is passing. It is shocking that COSATU can even contemplate a document that is crafted as if there have been no revelations about Goniwe’s murder, about corruption in very high places, about the complicity of the De Klerk government in murder, about Boipatong.

Secondly, the document does not state that de Klerk is responsible for the violence. It might be said that the charges about violence should be directed at de Klerk and not at the bosses.



We do not hold one position for de Klerk and another position for the bosses. The sincerity of the bosses on violence can only be judged on whether they are prepared to embrace the truth - to accept what is now accepted by the overwhelming majority of our people - that de Klerk is responsible for the violence.

But this is not all. Very recently, the NUM walked out of negotiations with the Chamber of Mines because one of the mining houses harboured Koevoet on their property. We know that up to now the mining bosses have refused to come clean on their attitude to death squads like Koevoet.

FAWU is on the verge of a national strike in the food sector on the question of violence. To FAWU it is clear that the bosses have been colluding in attempting to break FAWU by allowing UWUSA into FAWU factories.

The saga of UWUSA, and the bosses' attempts to promote it, is known to all our members and to the movement as a whole. How many thousands have died on the mines? Don't we all know the role of the mine police in this violence? The examples of the reactionary role of the bosses in the violence are countless. Our members and our people know them.

South Africa is one of the least safe countries in the world for unionists. The assassination of unionists is a very common occurrence. What have the bosses said to this? *The bosses' record on violence is dismal and treacherous.* The bosses surpass de Klerk only in their ability to sweet-talk and cry crocodile tears.

#### **b) On combating poverty**

A great tragedy is unfolding in this country. In both town and countryside, millions of our people face famine.

Every union in COSATU has raised the protection of jobs - *that is, existing jobs.* Millions of our people face famine. What does the Draft Charter offer our people?

It offers *promises of meetings and more meetings.* And on this basis we are expected to ask our members to abandon a struggle in their own defence. What we need to look at, and

thus base our actions on, is the real record of the bosses in the socio-economic sphere.

The bosses are engaging in an unofficial 'capital strike', investing in offshore concerns, paying shareholders high dividends and speculating on the JSE instead of investing in job creation. This flight of capital and lack of investment is the principle cause of poverty and unemployment in this country.

What does the document say about housing and hostels? It says it will "upgrade" them! COSATU and our entire movement has called for the *conversion* of hostels into family units, not upgrading. We all know who is opposed to converting these hostels. It is Inkatha.

The document - crafted in a so-called non-party political manner - is meant to appease even state surrogates like Inkatha. Millions of our people have no houses to "upgrade", and under the pretext of violence the bosses have engaged in a 'building strike' in the townships.

For our movement to enter into such a vague and empty agreement on one of the burning questions facing our people - the fate of the hostels and housing - defies any sense of shock: it leaves us numb.

As for the struggle against high food prices, the recent fights around marketing boards has shown who benefits from high prices. It is big business and the monopolies that control these boards. COSATU has a programme of *struggle* against high food prices; COSATU does not need a vague and empty promise as a basis for halting that struggle.

Our programme of mass struggle, which has been triggered by the deadlock at CODESA and the Boipatong massacre, is clearly very closely related to our socio-economic struggles. We thus clearly cannot suspend our mass struggle because of a promise of a forum, - to which the bosses had already been forced to agree as a result of the anti-VAT strike last year.

What we have looked at are just some of the empty promises being offered by the Charter. It can easily be shown that every clause offers the same.

But this is not all. *The document is silent on*



the plight of farm workers. The fact that after the LRA strikes in 1988 the farmworkers and domestics still have no basic rights is because of the very bosses who form SACCOLA's constituency.

*The document is silent on the plight of public sector workers.* Bobby Godsell is prepared to grant us light, but he is not prepared to ensure that public sector workers can earn enough to afford the benefits of electricity.

Most unbelievable, *the document is silent on the question of a moratorium on retrenchments.* The last demand stands at the heart of our current struggles to combat poverty. To talk of job creation in a context of continuing retrenchments is to trivialise our members' plight.

Again we see that the bosses have no credentials that can allow us to ally ourselves to them on the question of "combating poverty". They are the prime culprits in the slide of our people into poverty.

The Charter is meant to be the basis for isolating the government. But all the key promises in this section on "combating poverty" require government intervention to ensure the massive deprivations of the past are corrected. The question, therefore, is not to 'isolate' the government in a manner that pretends that these issues can be addressed without government intervention; the key question is to remove the NP government from power. Are the bosses prepared to accept this fundamental task facing our movement? This is the key question when deciding who are friends of the people.

Negotiate with the bosses as part of our struggle to combat poverty? Yes! But an alliance with them which demands that we water our most basic demands and halt our struggle? A thousand times no!

### c) On 'Political transition'

This part of the document begins by openly violating existing positions of the federation. The document says "it is the role of political organisations to craft new political dispensations".

Throughout our history we have never



*Bobby Godsell - 'prepared to give us light, but he is not prepared to ensure that public sector workers can earn enough to afford the benefits of electricity'*

*Photo: The Star*

subscribed to the myth that the labour movement has no role in politics. Politics has been the life-blood of COSATU and all its predecessors. COSATU has even applied to join CODESA.

The trend towards denying COSATU's political role, and its role in leading our militant struggles, can also be seen in the Charter seeing COSATU's role as to 'mediate' in the current living wage struggles. Throughout COSATU's history, its role has not been to be neutral on struggles waged by our members, but to take a leading role in them.

This part of the document represents a clear ideological and strategic victory for the bosses and their state. The enormity of this political error cannot be overstated. *Our movement must reject this position with all the resources at its disposal.*

The rest of this section is remarkable for its vagueness and omissions. The deadlock in CODESA is not about numbers or anything: it is about the regime's preparedness to accept *majority rule.*

The document pretends that there is no deadlock at CODESA and talks of four elements to make progress. If these four elements are what we need for progress then there should have been no deadlock, no pulling



out of CODESA, no set of demands linked to returning to negotiations. If so, why all these programmes of mass action? This document and its 'four elements' is a colossal mistake and must be corrected urgently and effectively.

It has been said that bosses do not like certain words. Therefore we need to be "diplomatic" and use "words acceptable to all". To this diplomatic sensitivity we need to state clearly that *in a society where the majority has no say, all those who do not like the words "majority rule" are enemies of democracy and of the people. We gain nothing by playing word games with the destiny of our people: we lose everything.*

## **2 Who supports SACCOLA?**

Another major error of political judgment is to confuse Bobby Godsell's 'enlightened' views with those of his support base.

We know that the signing of the Laboria Minute did not mean much for the farm workers. Even today, SAAU (farmers) is opposed even to a deal that immensely favours the bosses. SACOB vacillates. The signs for our members on the ground are ominous.

But if it is the mass base of SACCOLA that occupies the extreme right-wing, the state/government has come out clearly in favour of the "shutdown" and the Accord. Where does this leave the sponsors of the 'isolating the government' view? It would be wrong to say the government is playing propaganda games. The fact is that *every* line in the Draft Charter has been *publicly* adopted by the government in the past. Even Inkatha agrees to every line in this document.

Our movement is approaching the abyss. It is our sacred duty to halt and reverse this most dangerous slide towards a disintegration of our movement.

## **3 The Draft Charter and "shutdown" constitute a grave tactical and strategic error**

After months of inactivity, demoralisation and passivity of our people, in no small measure due to our past errors) our people have begun to rise again. Quite correctly when we realised our errors of the past we turned to the true

source of our struggles: the masses.

Our people are being lifted out of their slumber by their deeply held conviction in the political and moral correctness of the positions the movement holds at the moment: majority rule, cleaning of the armed forces, culpability of the de Klerk regime on the current violence – and so on. *Our people's political and moral conviction is our greatest strength and asset.*

This moral factor also constitutes the greatest key to the success of our campaign of mass action. To undermine it in any manner, to cast any doubt on its absolute validity, is to commit the greatest tactical and strategic error. Such will be the effect of the "diplomatic sensitivity" that is being displayed in the document.

The momentum of mass action that we have begun to build up over the past few weeks will be completely undermined if we accept this document and the one-day "shutdown". We can say goodbye to "rolling mass action".

We have gone to our members and mobilised them. We cannot send them a thousand different messages. On the eve of these important battles, to adopt the Charter and "shutdown" is to be indecisive and to fail in our solemn duty.

We must stand by the decisions of the CEC of 10 July 1992 – for rolling mass action.

COSATU has undertaken many initiatives – some involving negotiations with the bosses and some with the state. These initiatives must continue to be pursued and struggled around. Our task at the moment is to resist the temptation of "new" initiatives and a dispersal of our perspectives and energies. Let us desist from actions which will draw our members into debates over the relationship of this or that initiative to any 'new' initiative.

All the lessons of our struggles and all principles of strategy point in one direction: *it is time to muster and concentrate our forces; it is time to weld together, on the basis of a clear call and slogans, the political and moral will of our people.* The most important task of the day is not to spend time dithering with the bosses but to *organise* the practicalities of mass action. ☆