

The emerging new order



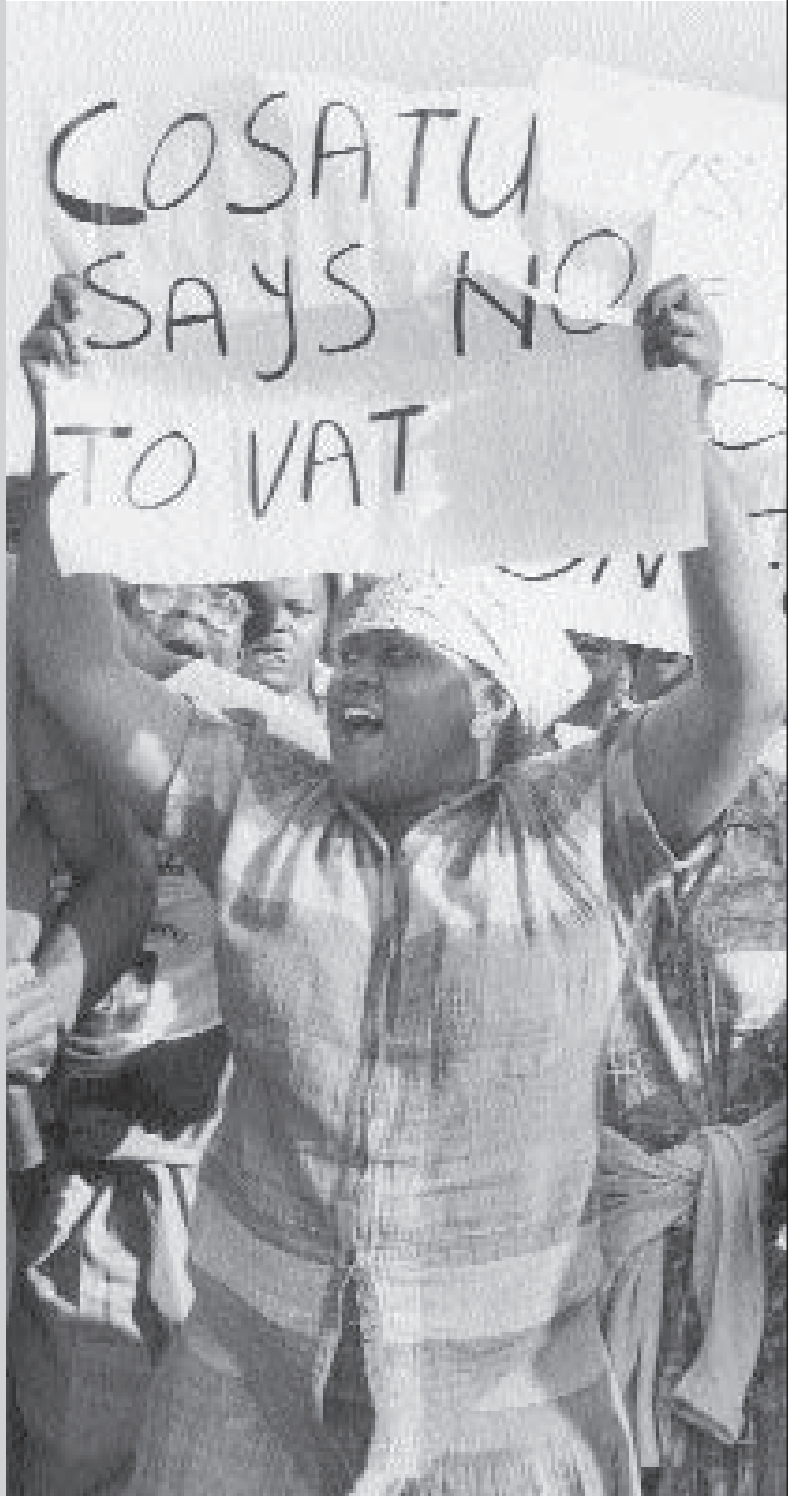
The unbanning of the political parties and the release of ANC president Nelson Mandela in 1990 changed the terrain dramatically. The ANC (and its alliance partners Cosatu and the Communist Party) faced rising pressure to develop key policies and prepare for political negotiations. It was within this environment that organised labour and business continued on the path set by the Saccola accord. This process was aided by the creation of the National Economic Forum (NEF), which emerged out of the 1991 anti-VAT strike. A key demand of the strike was the setting up of a macro-economic negotiating forum. Former Cosatu general secretary **Jay Naidoo** explained that the significance of the strike went beyond VAT and ensured the start of negotiations around the economy (see box).

1991 to present

NAIDOO ON ECONOMIC NEGOTIATIONS

In an interview with the Labour Bulletin at the time Naidoo said: 'We intend to drive the government and business into two focuses of negotiation, one socio-economic and the other political.' He said: 'The VAT campaign is serving as a vehicle to channel people's energies to challenge the government... We are redefining the agenda of change in this transition period. The campaign is establishing, firstly, that the masses do have a role to play in transition and secondly, that negotiations have to deal with economic as well as political issues. We (Cosatu) believe that political negotiations will actually mean very little to our people unless we deliver very concrete goods to them... We need broader macro-economic negotiations to identify the national framework within which we are going to try to resolve economic problems in this country.

He pointed out that the campaign had demonstrated the ability of the democratic movement to lead a broad coalition of people, 'including those who do not agree with our policy. We in the unions are very clear about the need for the alliance to develop a concrete strategy at the economic and political level.' He pointed out that economic negotiations were of more central concern to Cosatu – because the ANC is a political organisation, its focus has been primarily around political issues and political transition. 'For us VAT provided the opportunity to take economic issues centrally on the agenda. Macro-economic negotiations are now on the agenda and no one can get away from that... Cosatu has always been a political player and intends remaining a political player even if we have an ANC government in power'.



The NEF created some expectations of the start of some form of social accord. This view was reinforced by claims that the new industrial relations environment was becoming one of co-determination and resembling a corporatist model. Former Labour Bulletin editor Karl von Holdt argued at the beginning of 1993 that the process of change in the industrial relations system had resulted in a situation where unions had become more involved in a new series of institutions (at the time the NEF, but later Nedlac, Setas, bargaining councils – and the list goes on...) which strengthens the tendency of institutionalised conflict and on the other hand, strategic unionism, which could create the conditions for corporatism.

Von Holdt began to explore this further to ascertain the changing role of unions in a process he called resistance to reconstruction. He argued that the transition to democracy raised new challenges and questions for the democratic union movement. 'Under apartheid the unions faced two extremely hostile enemies: the state and the employers. The unions fought hard battles to establish themselves, and learned a range of tactics and strategies to resist both repression and cooption. Although some areas of cooperation between business and labour did develop – they always do when there is a negotiating relationship – in general the union stance was one of 'militant abstentionism'. This was the politics of resistance. Trade unions refused to accept responsibility for productivity, profitability or economic growth, and rejected participating in joint projects with management. They argued that their members never saw the benefits from these processes, and that neither management nor the states were offering unions, workers or black people any real power to participate in economic decision-making.'

This situation had begun to change, he argued. He pointed to a range of developments, which reflected a move towards new relations between the unions and the state. 'Undoubtedly these trends will accelerate once a democratic government is

in place. Organised labour is destined to become a central and very powerful social institution. In recognition of this, the trade unions are beginning to debate a new politics of reconstruction. But what strategies will the unions adopt in order to consolidate their position and influence? Their decisions now will have an enormous impact on the shape of our society, perhaps for decades to come.'

Von Holdt looked at the idea of a 'reconstruction accord' (see p56) as proposed by Numsa in a workshop. This idea would give content to the alliance between Cosatu and the ANC but the union stressed that this would not compromise union independence. SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union (Sactwu) general secretary **John Copelyn** (at the time) argued instead for complete independence from the state and political parties (see p60). He argued that the unions should put all their efforts into establishing and strengthening centralised collective bargaining structures. These would provide an independent base for unions to influence society and the state.

Von Holdt argued that the ideas expressed by Numsa and Copelyn both broke with the tradition of 'militant abstentions'. They envisaged union initiatives in training, productivity, economic policy, investment and 'worker participation'. These ideas formed part of an emerging politics of reconstruction in the union movement. But the politics of reconstruction were not simply replacing resistance. In both perspectives, the organisational strength, independence and militancy of the unions would be crucial if their policies on restructuring were to be implemented. The success of the new politics of reconstruction depended on unions maintaining and deepening the qualities that had been forged in the politics of resistance. Nonetheless, it was true that if workers and trade unions started to take responsibility for economic growth and development, they would have to strive for greater productivity and less industrial action. This had the potential to weaken organisational and dampen militancy.

Did this change then reflect support and

TWO HATS

In an interview with the new NUM general secretary Kgalema Motlanthe in 1992 he stated: 'I do not think it is in itself a problem. The primary role for me is to unite the workers, make sure that they remain a united force and that whoever belongs to the ANC or the SACP should not transform NUM into either the party or the ANC. NUM is first and foremost a union. I think we should try our level best to inculcate the spirit of independence in the union. The union should see itself as an independent formation not an appendage of this or that political organisation. An ANC government will not change the attitude of the union that much. The union's role is to articulate the interests of the mineworkers and it has to do that without fear at all. I think that the ANC government will be able to create a favourable political superstructure within which we as a union can conduct our business.'

Zwelinzima Vavi, interviewed on his appointment in October 1992 as Cosatu's national organising secretary had this to say: 'A trade union movement should always maintain its independence. The dangers that we have to guard against are the mixing up of political and economic issues... The crisis that we are facing as union leaders is that we wear many hats. ... My opinion is that no individual can be effective if he is involved in more than one structure... If you have decided to be a trade unionist you must do your utmost in the workers' struggle. You must be innovative and be up to date with issues that are worker related. A trade union movement should not allow itself to be led by a political or a vanguard party. We should always fight for our independence and not allow ourselves to be controlled by a political party. The strategic alliance we have formed will end when we achieve democracy in SA. I am not for the idea of an alliance after we have achieved our goal.'

Resolve Trainingworks would like to take this opportunity to congratulate S.A Labour Bulletin on their achievements. Their coverage has provided us with invaluable insight and knowledge in the area of labour relations over the years.



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a move towards a social contract by labour? The views of Numsa and Copelyn indicate how the unions might approach the issue of social contract. The question is, did the unions have the power and resources to shape the terms of a social contract? Former trade unionist Bobby Marie questioned their ability to do this in view of capacity constraints. Sociologist **Eddie Webster** and economist **Stephen Gelb** argued that the solution to SA's economic problems lay in the forging of a social pact between business and labour (see p64). However, Glenn Adler questioned whether social partnership is the route for labour. He argued instead for labour to reject the ideology of social partnership. 'The labour movement faces a paradox. On the one hand, a breakdown of social partnership is not in itself a bad thing: this is someone else's ideology, which creates serious traps for labour. But if partnership is replaced by unilateralism, opportunities to advance working class interests will be lost. If social partnership is not the route for labour, how can it ensure it protects and advances its interests in a democratic and capitalist South Africa? What strategies does it need to adopt to ensure success? He went on to argue that 'while Cosatu has never embraced social partnership, its actions are now judged according to those standards. Government policy-makers and business leaders tend to use the language of partnership only when they accuse labour of acting out of line. One hears less about partnership when it comes to macro-economic policy, or when companies make their investment decisions. A close reading of Cosatu's most recent policy statements yields no references to 'social partnership'. When Cosatu refers to partners it is talking about the tripartite alliance and other formations of the mass democratic movement... It may even be questioned whether Nedlac itself is premised on the

notion of partnership. Its founding Act only says that it shall 'seek to reach consensus and conclude agreements' on social and economic policy. Cosatu has reaffirmed its commitment to socialism. In doing so, it has not lapsed into the old absentionist position. Instead, at its recent congress, the federation resolved to 'engage both the state and capital... underpinned by our ideological vision of a socialist society... 'There are significant differences between partnership and engagement. Engagement accepts the need to bargain and reach agreements or compromises with one's opponents. It does not require a common vision of the future. Nor does it imply a common set of values to govern behaviour. Agreements depend on circumstances and may change when these change.'

Within this debate on the changing role of unions, the issue of politics was prominent. The debate about the relationship between unions and political parties has been a long-standing one and was not limited to the emerging labour movement from the 70s. In the late 1970s and early 80s the debate focused firstly on whether the unions should affiliate to the UDF or not and what role they should play in relation to the ANC in exile, and then on whether to adopt the Freedom Charter as Cosatu's guiding principle, the role and future of the tripartite alliance (which remains an ongoing and at times tedious debate) and the 'two-hats debate'.

A man who has handled many hats in his time, **Snuki Zikalala** argues (see p68) that trade unionists should not wear two hats. The party's deputy general secretary **Jeremy Cronin** responds to both Zikalala's input and that of Copelyn and argued that their arguments were so weak that they were likely to undermine the very cause they sought to defend (see p72).

In the afterglow of the first democratic elections, the labour movement was

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confronted with a barrage of challenges – some of them not new as many had simmered beneath the surface and had not been dealt with while the political terrain was being sorted out. These included the intensification of workplace restructuring, the rise in informalisation of work which impacted on the ability of unions to organise, job losses, globalisation, trade issues, impact of new labour laws, organisational problems, how to ensure public sector affiliates contributed towards the transformation of the public service so as to ensure service delivery to the poor and communities and HIV/AIDS.

Problems inherent in transforming the public sector have dominated numerous editions of the Labour Bulletin over the years. Von Holdt said in an editorial that: 'Over the years the Bulletin did focus on the state of the public sector and the need to transform and reform it'.

Ten years into democracy these issues have still not been addressed. This is starkly revealed in a project currently being undertaken at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital. **Von Holdt** recently gave a presentation on the process of restructuring the hospital and the problems inherent in the system which appear to be ignored by national government (see p76).

CONCLUSION

In February 1979 the Bulletin wrote: 'it is time for a clear recognition by the state and management that the organization of African workers in unions must be accepted as a permanent fact of our society. For labour it is also increasingly clear that the shape and efficacy of their organizations in the future depend on the policies and practices that they develop now.'

Black unions have become a permanent feature in our society and over the years content in the Bulletin has mirrored developments in the emerging unions and

FACTORS HAMPERING DELIVERY

Julian De Bruin, Imran Patel and Nobom Tshiki explore the factors hampering efficiency and delivery in the public service. They include lack of training, poor management practices, unrepresentivity, unaccountability, rigid pay and personnel system, and lack of innovation and planning processes all contribute to low productivity in the public service and elsewhere.

LACK OF TRAINING

In the public service training has been characterised by:

- lack of adequate resources. The current government training budget is about 10% below the average formal-sector rate;
- benefits going to management; and
- minimal, inadequate and un-accredited training at lower levels. Even basic adult education including literacy programs, are not provided on a significant scale.

POOR MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

On 9 November 1994 the Parliamentary Public Select Committee described the management style prevailing in the public service as being authoritarian, highly rigid and inflexible. Undue deference to political authority has been an inhibiting factor, which has had to be contended with in the public service. Government, which was itself, unaccountable created a public service in its own image.

UNACCOUNTABILITY

Public accountability and transparency is seriously lacking in the public service. Public servants have been mainly accountable to political leaders rather than to society as a whole, and this accountability has been mainly limited to financial control and regulatory compliance. Society was not included in the planning process. A public service culture of secrecy and paranoia fostered corruption. Demands for transparency are a response to this.

PAY AND PERSONNEL SYSTEM

The grading system, which establishes

wage levels, is very complex, rigid and narrowly defines jobs into occupational classes. Officials are paid according to rank rather than performances; and the personnel and wage system rewards compliance with procedure rather than achievement of outcomes. Nor does it encourage staffing changes in order to meet national priorities (e.g. encouraging doctors to practice in rural areas).

MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Devolution of management responsibility and demands for management accountability go hand-in-hand. The notion of accountability goes much further. State assets and resources belong to the community. Structures and decision-making processes which are open to public scrutiny and which are accountable to society (which consumes public service) and to public sector workers need to be set up, including at the Parliamentary level. Other nations have Freedom of Information legislation under which citizens can demand information from the government. Accountability regimes also reduce the opportunity for corruption. There needs to be a clear distinction between a professional public service whose primary goal is to meet the needs of the people and the political goals of any particular government. Devolving decision making powers and authority to lower management levels within departments and institutions puts public sector managers in a position where they can take decisions for which they should be held responsible. In addition to fostering a needs-based approach, it can create a more adaptable, flexible and need-directed service.

Such a system allows for increased efficiency, because management at lower levels has the freedom to make operational (not policy) decisions, which affect them without seeking approval from higher levels of management.

This is an edited version of an article which appeared in 1995 in the Bulletin.

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NURSES ON PUBLIC SERVICE

During Von Holdt's presentation at a Sociology for Work Unit (SWOP) breakfast a number of nurses members of Denesa, expressed their views on the state of the public sector. One nurse said: 'Bathe Pele as a principle is being abused. If you do not care for your staff then they are not going to care. Government has created the impression that nurses are leaving SA because they want to improve themselves and they do not see the working environment as the issue. But that is the issue.' Another nurse said: 'Nurses at Bara are capable but they are made to be incapable. When there are problems they are alone. Nurses are saying that Bara is a high risk area to work in...'

how they have evolved post 1994.

However, the struggles being waged today, as Webster highlights go beyond those of organised workers. This was highlighted in the Bulletin in 1998 following the poverty hearings:

'The outcome of the hearings would have far-reaching repercussions. A poverty platform under the slogan 'War on poverty' was expected to feed into the coming election. Theoretically, the idea had features of a social movement. But Naidoo (Jay) was cautious not to advocate the idea in its entirety. He believed that an organized social formation was not on the immediate agenda. For Naidoo, the continuation of the tripartite alliance pre-empted the poverty platform going further than a loose coalition of social forces around concrete issues like child care and housing: 'Unless Cosatu leaves the alliance and drives the formation of a social movement, I cannot see it being a viable option', he said. He did not dismiss the possibility of a social movement arising out of a 'creeping ungovernability on the ground. How social discontent adds up in the future will depend on the approach government adopts.'

As the country moves beyond its first decade of democracy, the next phase in the evolution of the Bulletin is likely to cover the new struggles which are emerging and how they relate to and affect the labour movement – the editor.

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