



THUMPING THE TABLE

COSATU Negotiations Co-ordinator JAYENDRA NAIDOO speaks to Sakhela Buhlungu*

Sakhela Buhlungu: *How is COSATU participating in CODESA?*

Jayendra Naidoo: COSATU CEC (Central Executive Committee) decided that, while we are waiting for our formal application to join CODESA to be considered, we would negotiate with our allies to have participation through the tripartite alliance. So we now have four people participating through the SACP in three of the working groups. We also have joint meetings from time to time with the ANC

where we get reports and we discuss strategies.

The CODESA process is very complex and very fast moving and it's difficult if an organisation is not in it to make meaningful contributions at a level of strategy.

Within the political negotiations at this stage, having recently crept in through the SACP, we are really bit players - partially observers, not really main shakers-and-movers.

The political task force of COSATU processes all the information coming out of CODESA and then reports to COSATU

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EXCO. It's an imperfect process because, when things are moving from day to day at such a pace, you need a fairly extensive machinery to keep up. So, we've confined ourselves at EXCO level to a set of eight basic bottom-line positions (see box on p 19) which are the ultimate mandate and directive to our people participating in joint forums with the ANC, and those participating in the Working Groups.

Buhlungu: *How are the COSATU participants in the Working Groups mandated and how do they report back?*

Naidoo: Within COSATU, the broad mandate is produced by EXCO but it is not capable of coping with the demand for day to day consultation. The COSATU political task force meets on a weekly basis, and evaluates what's going on, and attempts to give some meaningful inputs.

We have communicated the bottom line position of EXCO through rallies, such as the May Day rallies. Through the usual report-back processes that affiliates have from EXCO it should permeate down to their branches and locals etc.

One of the difficulties is that you can't report back on all the detail, because it's so complex. There are 19 parties each producing documents and proposals. We need to focus our report-backs on the principle positions, where there are any shifts and so on.

Buhlungu: *Members of COSATU are saying they don't know exactly what's going on at CODESA.*

Naidoo: It's a problem and it results from the very complexity of the process, as well as the poor level of the alliance's communication flowing from the CODESA negotiations.

Buhlungu: *Some complain that CODESA negotiations are mainly between the ANC and the government and that the ANC is making secret deals and compromises with the regime on very important issues. What is COSATU'S*

comment on this?

Naidoo: We have a regular weekly consultation and our sense is that there are no secret deals. On the ground there is considerable confusion about what is being done at CODESA, what is being achieved and so on. Lack of information always fosters suspicions and rumours.

At the same time, I think that one should say that a negotiation process will inevitably involve compromises. Certainly there will be compromises made in CODESA. We are aware of that, and the ANC is aware of that, and every party involved is aware of that.



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Buhlungu: *Some organisations have noted that the political negotiations have demobilised their membership. What is the situation in COSATU?*

Naidoo: Mobilisation of members and maintaining them in an alert state depends on the way one approaches negotiations, and our approach has always been that you have power at the table if you have power on the ground, and if you have no power on the ground, then you are just a fly on the wall.

We see that as the most important feature of the whole negotiation process, and this is where the weakness lies. I think the question about the demobilisation of membership is partly correct, and is something that has to be addressed at an alliance level.

As negotiations progress and as COSATU organisation becomes more mature, there is a sign that the grassroots are getting left behind. Our locals are becoming dominated by activist shop stewards, rather than mandated shop stewards. But that is something that has been developing for a number of years, even before negotiations, and it's a problem that COSATU

has to address very strongly.

Buhlungu: *What does COSATU see as the major obstacles to a solution being reached in the negotiations, and how can they be overcome. Violence is obviously one of them.*

Naidoo: The major obstacle is a desire by the government to create the impression of



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conceding power, while at the same time retaining power. The government is playing a very complex and intricate game and you see that on all fronts.

Violence too is a difficulty. But violence should not be used as an excuse to prevent the process from going forward. This is what the government is attempting to do. They suddenly say that 'until the violence is solved, we can't go forward, there's no climate for elections'. But

the violence has been created by forces under their control.

We want to see a situation where a clear time-frame is set for CODESA to pass into history. It's just a step on the road. The next phase is the election phase, and we should get into that phase without any delay.

So, at the alliance summit, we will be pursuing the question of time limits, deadlines etc so that we can enter into the real phase of elections, and move into interim government as soon as possible. In that context, we are going to be raising points about grassroots campaigning and mass action and grassroots involvement.

Buhlungu: *What are the latest developments regarding an interim government and a constituent assembly?*

Naidoo: Essentially there is an agreement on the principle that there is a two-phase interim government: one appointed at CODESA,

which ensures that we can get to elections, and one which comes out of the elections and which manages society while the constitution-making body meets and completes its process.

The issue which has to be resolved in the next week, is the nature of the powers of the interim government and its sub-councils in the first phase: whether it's an advisory body to the government, whether it's simply a preparatory body making recommendations for post elections, or whether it's an executive body, and if so, what precise executive powers it has.

On the constituent assembly, my understanding is that there's agreement that there should be an elected body drawing up the constitution, but the details of that, and how it will be elected still have to be sorted out. The information, at this stage, is that group two which is dealing with this, has just begun to get to grips with the question. There are a number of proposals about the way in which regions should be accommodated in the elections, but in principal, there's agreement about the way in which we need to go.

Buhlungu: *What about the forthcoming elections?*

Naidoo: COSATU will not contest the elections. However, the CEC has discussed releasing people from the leadership of COSATU, to be available to stand for election to the Constituent Assembly on an ANC platform if we are approached by them.

Such people would of course, have to be bound by all the ANC structures of accountability, but if we as COSATU are consciously releasing people, as a strategic decision, they should also have a relationship with COSATU. That is the way we are going to propose it. They'll be elected as the ANC but they'll have a sort of ambiguous dual accountability.

Buhlungu: *Once the constitution has been drafted and agreed to and a new government is to be set up, would COSATU recall them then, or would they continue as ANC people?*

Naidoo: That's a difficult question. We would release them for the period of the constituent assembly, which would imply that we would like them back after that. But I think by that stage, individuals may also make their own decisions. We expect to lose some along the way.

Buhlungu: *COSATU has said there must be an interim government by June this year and a constituent assembly by the end of December. What will happen if the regime uses delaying tactics?*

Naidoo: We're saying we're not going to tolerate delaying. That's out of the question. If there is a long drawn out process with no light at the end of the tunnel, then we would really be looking at mass action as a way of shaking it loose.

We would have to discuss with the ANC as to whether the process is blocked, or whether the process is just being extended a couple of weeks longer than our time frame. But if there's going to be a delay, then we're going to thump the table pretty hard.

Buhlungu: *What does COSATU specifically want to see in the new constitution?*

Naidoo: We haven't yet formulated a document saying what should go into the constitution. But our general approach would derive from the Workers Charter and from COSATU economic policy. We would like certain key workers rights, such as the right to strike, to be enforced in a constitution.

With regard to property rights, we wouldn't like anything to be enforced in the constitution, which would undermine the ability of the state to use nationalisation in sectors of the economy if necessary. And we would not like anything in the constitution which compels the state to be a particular sort of state, such as a capitalist state, to use old-fashioned formulations.

Buhlungu: *Why is COSATU demanding a separate economic negotiating forum from CODESA?*

Naidoo: CODESA is a forum which has a short brief to get us to the point of an election and a constituent assembly. The economic forum is going to exist longer to deal with economic and social questions. It will involve the main players in the economy and they are not all the same people as at CODESA.

Buhlungu: *What are the central issues for COSATU in the National Economic Negotiating Forum?*

Naidoo: In broad terms, COSATU is concerned about the issues that affect workers and their day to day lives: unemployment and job security, retrenchments, public works programmes and job creation schemes generally, the investment of workers' pension and provident fund money, taxation policy, trade and tariff policy and centralised bargaining.



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Buhlungu: *What response have you had from government?*

Naidoo: The National Negotiating Forum drafting committee met with Derek Keyes in April, and put the agreed proposal to him that business and labour have formulated.

Government has now appointed a sub-committee of so-called senior economic ministers to liaise with the process business and labour have started. It is a pretty positive indication compared to where they were a few months ago.

Because business and labour have endorsed this forum so enthusiastically and comprehensively, government cannot really stay out.

Buhlungu: *Is this then the beginning of a social contract?*

Naidoo: The answer which COSATU has given is this: if we look at our own experience, we have been negotiating with employers for the last 20 years - starting at the shop floor level, and at industry level - about a whole range of issues which we think are important. Management tried to keep certain issues as managements prerogative and we have chipped away at that idea bit by bit.



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We now have a situation, at the point of transition, where we are in a position to talk not just about industry-based, or local-based things, but things which affect what we've been doing at a national level. For example, it is not possible to talk seriously about job creation without talking centrally to government and employers, and that is why this forum is essential.

So, we have to negotiate with government as well as with business, and what we are doing is pulling them into one negotiating forum.

It's another stage of advance in the negotiating process that we have been participating in for the last 20 years, moving it logically onto a higher level because we are unable to solve certain things unless we bring the government in.

Buhlungu: *Will such agreements not tie the hands of a future government?*

Naidoo: Our conception of the economic forum is that we don't want it to be cast in concrete. What kind of government we get out of the elections, what sort of power-sharing arrangement, and how dominant within that arrangement the ANC is, would open the way to another range of possibilities for the way in which the state could become involved in the process. Any arrangement needs to be flexible to accommodate the changes in the transition process and in the new phase after a democratic

government is in place.

At the same time, for quite a considerable period, the government will require consensus and support from major actors in the economy. There is no way this economy is going to be turned around without involvement of labour, and without being able to carry with it business support. So, there will be a need for this sort of multi-interest approach to remain.

Buhlungu: *What will happen to the tripartite alliance if the ANC wins the elections and forms a democratic government?*

Naidoo: The alliance obviously changes shape and form under the new circumstances. Our alliance with the ANC has, in the pre-negotiation phase rested on our common goal to get rid of the apartheid regime.

In a post-election period, with the ANC as government, the basis of the alliance will have to change and it's already moving in this direction. It will have to be based on common goals with regard to economic, social, and political transformation of society.

We are already having discussions with the ANC about an agreement on an election platform and I think this is the way in which the relationship between COSATU and the ANC and the future government will be developed.

Will the alliance survive, will it collapse, will it change? Those questions are being asked all over the world as well, because the experiences of other liberation struggles don't hold out great hopes for a permanent alliance.

We are aware of all those experiences, and we're aware that once ANC is in government will have a broader responsibility and constituency beyond the working class - including people who are our so-called class enemies. There will be demands from different sectors of society which will put pressures on the ANC to take positions that we may disagree with.

Our approach to that is that we have to contest with different sections of society about the sort of positions that will be dominant within the ANC and which, as government, it

will respond to in the future. Secondly, whether there are points which we disagree with or not, we should work to build on the points which we agree about; and that will be the core of alliance.

Buhlungu: *What are COSATU's own strategic perspectives on the transition period?*

Naidoo: COSATU's goals in the transition period are:

- At the political level to achieve a government which is democratic, based on universal franchise, is not locked into arrangements which undermine its ability effectively to become involved in transforming society, in removing the inequalities of the past, addressing apartheid policies.
- At the economic level, we want to be able to achieve the basis for the social and economic transformation for redistribution to take place, for growth to take place so we can begin to accommodate rising unemployment and provide for people what they want on the basic level: better medical care, housing, a better transport system, electrification and all those sorts of things that affect the standard of living of the people.

Buhlungu: *What about COSATU's goal of building socialism?*

Naidoo: The struggle for a social order which we call socialism is in broad terms a society based on people rather than profits. It is not going to be an over-night struggle, particularly now in the context of changes internationally.

The test is this: are the steps that we are taking, are the things that we are involved in, the campaigns that we are involved in, taking us forward to the goal of a society which is structured around people and not around the need for profit? Is it increasing the power of the working class or not? Is it undermining the power of the working class or not? Is it increasing the knowledge of the working class or not? Is it raising the standards of living of people?

I think those are the sorts of tests to apply to see if the way that we engage in negotiation process now, or next year or the year after, are moving us towards a socialist society. ☆



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COSATU's eight bottom line positions for CODESA

- 1 We want to achieve an elected constituent assembly which makes decisions by a two thirds majority thus ensuring the broadest consensus in the constitution making process.
- 2 In preparation for the election CODESA appointed interim government must be established, by June 1992, with the brief of ensuring fair and free elections, and to limit the possibilities of abuse of state power by the NATS and any homeland organisation.
- 3 All political prisoners must be released and exiles must be able to return home.
- 4 A large international presence is required to monitor the elections: to ensure that it is both fair and free and to ensure a climate of free political activity.
- 5 After elections, a new transitional authority must be constituted which will have the responsibility and authority to effectively manage the country during the transition.
- 6 As the key goal is elections, CODESA 2 must not drag on to another CODESA 3, but must finalise all the key issues to enable elections to be held this year.
- 7 The security forces must be integrated under a single command structure accountable to the transitional authority.
- 8 All citizens of the TBVC states must be granted full South African citizenship rights to enable them to participate in the elections. ♦