



PROCESSED

Centralised Bargaining: Where to CWIU?

Since the late 1980's, there has been a serious realisation on the part of Cosatu and CWIU leadership, of the need for Centralised Bargaining. Two broad areas of concern which pressurised us in this direction were:

- 1) The low level of class consciousness on the part of the majority of members during this period - especially with regard to the complete lack of solidarity around wage struggles.
- 2) The organisational incapacity of the unions to cope with the excessive demands of plant based bargaining. This wasted resources and undermined the quality of work and achievement of annual wage bargaining.

Faced by this reality, achieving consensus on the need for a campaign to achieve centralised bargaining at leadership level was relatively easy. Unions in other sectors eg. metal, mining, clothing, textile and the public sector, regularly set examples of what could be achieved by well run centralised bargaining. Numsa's experience illustrated the strengths and pitfalls of centralised bargaining - ie. Numsa's mandating and report back processes, the Mercedes Benz strike by opponents to the "one bite at the cherry".

During 1991 the union adopted a comprehensive resolution on Centralised Bargaining (see attached). Much of what was adopted has not been fully carried out, or implemented in a half-hearted manner. Looking at the section "We therefore resolve:" we will see the following:

2.1 Not fully carried out. CB was not central to these structures discussions with constant assessment accompanied by specific follow-up and programmes of action.

2.2 Not sufficiently done. Here our leadership and organisers failed dismally to draw the links to annual wage bargaining, constantly raising awareness of industrial developments, capitals strategies and political consciousness.

2.3 Sectoral bargaining together with building a structural sectoral support base was attempted, but was weak and failed overally. This was due to our lack of a "campaign orientation" which mobilised members at a grassroots level on the basis of substantive demands.

2.4 Sectors worked out programmes of action which lacked action. This was in part due to the reluctance of our leadership at the 1992 Bargaining Conference to lead and/or support the culmination of the campaign in a dispute and eventual industrial action against the

employees. The necessary "showdown" was avoided.

2.5 Solidarity action, even at the level of learning from the experiences of Numsa and Ppwawu was entirely absent.

2.7 Judging from NEC minutes (1992-1994), the NEC did not fully prioritise Centralised Bargaining as the major activity - nor managed to stamp its authority on the organisation, especially getting shop stewards and organisers to take campaigns seriously.

Similarly the 1993 Congress resolution on Centralised Bargaining was inadequately and incompetently followed up. The only task which was successfully carried out was the delivery of Cosatu letters to every factory. The other activities:- workshops, factory general meetings, local general meetings with direct staff involvement, demonstrations and picketing did not take place.

The crucial national ballot\referendum in all industries to determine the views of our members on Centralised Bargaining did not materialise. This novel idea would effectively have raised awareness\consciousness around CB and could have been a useful show of organised strength. No thorough assessment has yet been made as to why this did not take place.

It is in the context of our organisational failure and the emerging co-determinist political path of Cosatu unions, together with the increasingly pro-capitalist position of the ANC (now dominant in the GNU) - that a new approach to achieving CB emerged. The roots of the new "pillars" strategy could be found in the 1993 Congress resolution on Bargaining issues and levels. It is apparently a sophisticated interpretation of this resolution which attempts to make sense of this chaos around bargaining in the union. The 1993 Congress mistakenly lumped the campaign of CB with plant-level negotiations by virtue of so-called core demands at plant-level. How can we advance CB when we promote core-demands at plant-level? It is obvious that under the circumstances of weak leadership and co-ordination and a membership which is not fully convinced of CB and extremely economistic in its perspective to wage bargaining, the *status quo* within the union is likely to remain. This, coupled with organisers themselves not having internalised CB and not even consistent in promoting core demands we are faced with a disaster and not likely to obtain CB which is controlled and supported by our rank-and-file members.

The present strategy of pillars is meant to be the bargaining strategy which is to "run alongside our fight for CB" (from 1993 Congress Resolution). This strategy attempts, by a method of gradualism, to achieve CB around issues which are not contentious to employers, such as wages.

This view is to convince employers by reasonableness and logic that CB is not the demon it is purported to be - a demon which

could potentially cripple their sector with strikes. It is a position which admits defeat in disguise and will only be achieved over a very long period of time, during which we are unable to defend workers adequately from the ramifications of restructuring and a plethora of productivity schemes. With our labour history in SA, and specifically CWIU, the only basis on which employers are likely to agree is if we, capitulate to support their schemes against the long term interest of workers. This perspective is an adaptation to the firm position of employers against CB. Ironically, the real obstacle to CB in the chemical industry is SACWU, not so much the employers. This is the only valid criticism of our approaches to the bosses on CB, ie. excluding a major union in our industry, particularly in heavy chemicals. However, for the petroleum, glass, plastics and even consumer sectors this is not a major stumbling block.

Moreover, we need the combined might of CWIU\SACWU to crack employers on CB. Presently these are well grounded reasons to expect the ANC led GNU to be supportive of CB for the following reasons:

- 1) Whilst the ANC is on the one hand the party of capital, it is not yet fully rooted in the institutions and workings of the bourgeois state and therefore lacks sufficient confidence to thoroughly act out a clearly pro-capitalist position which even defies bourgeois reasonableness ie. our reasons given to employers is wholly compatible with modern capitalist governments.

- 2) Based on the latter our arguments for CB is a logical outcome of present day monopoly-capitalism, reflecting the centralisation of industry in terms of control and ownership. Therefore, why not bargaining with labour? In line with this the state and advanced more liberal-minded sections of capital are keen on drawing us into the process of industrial restructuring. This can only be pursued comprehensively and consistently on a centralised basis.

- 3) The ANC led GNU is mindful of the need to be considerate to the whims of labour due its traditional militant power base and political support to the still tenuous new government. It has consistently through its labour ministry and specifically Tito Mboveni called for tri-partism at a macro level. CB fits snugly within this framework.

The time is therefore ripe for us to formulate a clear position which argues strongly for CB in the sectors which we have demarcated and to campaign for this to be legislated. However, our approach must not be dependent on apparent sympathies of the GNU. Also, ideally the demand for CB to be legislated ought to be led by Cosatu, but due to the federations weaknesses we cannot depend on this. Like other unions which have specific concerns which are nevertheless general, we should take the lead on the issue. This has been illustrated by Numsa and Sactwu, with the latter almost "specialising" in the area of Trade and Tariffs policy in the face of GATT.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD FOR CWIU?

1) End the dispersed "campaign" which diversifies CB into pillars which develop at different paces and consequently divides and confuses our members.

2) Instead capture the most crucial demands of each pillar and centralise them into a single list of core demands which are not to be negotiated at plant level.

3) Engage our members with leadership deciding not to negotiate at plant level for these demands in 1995. This approach will conflict with the predominant membership perspective and force them to review and internalise the union resolution on CB. Improvements on conditions of employment will therefore depend upon our success in achieving CB.

4) This engagement of membership should commence with an entire month of propaganda and mobilisation (pamphlets, daily factory general meetings and branch general meetings):- February 1995. No other activities should occupy our leadership and staff.

5) This process should culminate in the formulation of clear demands to employers and the government on CB, albeit separately. The Bargaining Conference to be held during March 1995 should adopt these together with a programme of action.

6) This programme of action should include a referendum on members views on CB and whether they are prepared to embark on industrial action in favour of negotiating our demands at a central bargaining forum.

7) Sectoral meetings with employers should be called to place our demands as well as meeting with the Labour Ministry to legislate CB. Shop steward delegates to be present.

8) Failing agreement with the employers we should apply for Conciliation Boards on a sectoral basis simultaneously with the view of having national industrial action by all our members during May -June 1995. Obviously, the plastics sector will be different and they will have to be fully involved in the NICISEMI negotiations.

9) For this period should restructure our work and set up structures which will act as smooth functioning campaign machinery.