

10. Neil (Lura)

Debate on globalisation

at the

1997 Cosatu National Congress

- Minutes -

At the Cosatu National Congress, a debate around the issue of globalisation erupted. At the core of the debate was whether the federation was opposed to globalisation or not. Some unions felt that as a federation we should be opposed to globalisation and all what it represents. Others felt that we should be opposed not to globalisation but its negative effects or the current form of globalisation.

This is how the debate unfolded on the congress floor:

TGWU:

As TGWU we want to have the clause that talks about being opposed to globalisation replaced by a sentence that reads:

"in South Africa and internationally we against the current form of globalisation"

We don't agree with both motions that are on the floor. One says that we are opposed to globalisation. The Numsa/Sactwu one says that we are opposed to the disastrous effects of globalisation. We think that our amendment will bring the two positions together.

SARHWU seconds TGWU:

NUMSA:

We appreciate what TGWU is trying to do. But as soon as you say the "current form of globalisation", it's vague. What does that mean? Some are saying not opposed to globalisation. Is that not a contradiction?

We think that the best position is captured in the composite by ourselves and SACTWU which says that as Cosatu we are "against the disastrous effects of globalisation". Not all just some of effects. The negative ones.

NUM:

We are confused. Are we saying "we accept globalisation"? According to us, COSATU does not accept globalisation. Globalisation is a reality that we face, not of our own choice. The way you can define globalisation is that it is an advancement, an imperialistic offensive on working people of the world. It is an advancement by capital. We are

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uncomfortable with globalisation as a whole. The effects are not accidental they are part of the strategy. They are part of globalisation. Globalisation is the thrust of neo-liberal economic policy.

FAWU:

We understand now. People want to accept situation and deal with it instead of working out a response and counter. NUM puts it clearly. We agree with them totally.

SADTU:

Want to support NUM and FAWU.

TGWU:

NUM and FAWU and now SADTU propose that we change decision of federation. We don't understand how it can be argued that we are opposed to globalisation. Our understanding is that we are in an international world – global village. All resolutions we have taken on macro-economic, on GEAR, relates to this – foreign investment. Why do we go to WTO. Because we want to attack globalisation. South Africa and Southern Africa should have a more equitable share of the market. MNC's and TNC's will be there to the extent that they bring investment.

The world is global. This is the reality that we are confronting now. It will be politically unsound to be opposing globalisation. We will stick to our position on this issue.

SACTWU:

Support what TGWU has put forward. Surprised at NUM's conclusion. We agree with NUM that globalisation is a site of struggle. In engagement we will put forward alternatives. We don't want a situation where each country just produces for its own country! Countries must trade.

In this situation, what does labour do? Does it say that this becomes basis for international worker solidarity? We can't say we don't want anything to do with globalisation. We don't want globalisation that serves the interest of neo-liberalism. It doesn't help just to say reject globalisation. We agree with the position that says that we are not opposed to globalisation but its "negative consequences".

SAMWU:

As unions we always deal with effects and not causes. We support NUM and FAWU that we are opposed to gobalisation. Can't fight for socialism in capitalist framework.

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SACCAWU:

This debate is reduced to semantics. We should focus our energies on programme. Support TGWU and others.

CWIU:

We need to understand globalisation within a context. That context is informed by a neo-liberal agenda. TGWU wants us to believe that international trade and globalisation is same. Globalisation seeks to attack working class. We should object and oppose it. We do not understand what are the good effects of globalisation.

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