

# TOWARDS DEVELOPING A LONG TERM STRATEGY FOR COSATU

## A Discussion Paper

[The aim of this discussion document is to begin a debate about the future role of COSATU. Its success will depend on concrete debate, discussion by membership and criticism of issues and/or direction. The analysis of the past three years will be addressed in a separate paper in preparation for the CEC and 5th National Congress]

Since our inception, our guiding principle has been to bring about the transfer of power to the people. The present political settlement, no matter how flawed, takes us a step closer to that goal. All polls indicate that barring a miracle, the ANC will have around 60% representation in the next parliament and Government of National Unity and Reconstruction. This will indeed represent a break with the past and a real victory for workers and the country as a whole.

### 1. An ANC Election Victory

The installation of an ANC government, while itself welcome and needing to be made reality, will present us with a lot of challenges that lay bare the contradictions on different points of emphasis with our alliance partners and from within COSATU.

#### ☞ A sympathetic government

Unlike the present racist regime which has perpetrated our exploitation and oppression, an ANC government will by its very nature, in composition and hopefully in practice, be sympathetic to workers. The presence of COSATU linked people, in national and regional government, together with representatives of other working class formations (democrats, communists and socialists) whose interest is the triumph of national liberation and the working class struggle opens up a new space for us to operate. The question facing us is whether we will utilise this space, (if so how?), or merely rely on the existence of the RDP to solve all our problems. We will have to find new ways of accessing public funds and institutions which in the past have been denied to us. They must be used to empower the dispossessed and impoverished. A new government will be able to develop new legislations that replaces the draconian laws of the past.

#### • End of crude apartheid

Apartheid in its crude form will soon be a thing of the past. What will remain are institutions and structures at a political and socio-economic level. The demise of apartheid may open up contradictions between organised labour and the unemployed. An ANC government will be under tremendous pressure from small and medium size enterprises whose approach to wages undermines labour standards and worker rights.

We however need to have an open debate about a social wage. The end of apartheid will itself be symbolic unless it is accompanied by real transformation of state institutions whose task it was to implement apartheid. Despite arguments for caution, we can not accept the fact that those dinosaurs who fed on apartheid are not effectively replaced. They may sound like born agains, they are not democrats. If they have things their way, we would be returning to the years of Verwoerd, Vorster and Malan.

#### • Loss of leadership

The nominations for the national and regional legislatures have taken away certain key leadership including officials. Many more will make themselves available for the new civil service and the local government elections scheduled for later this year. Loss of leadership is also positive (in that people with a working class background will be in decision-making places in our country). Our success will depend in part on our ability to rebuild leadership and to build cohesion after this loss. The new leadership at affiliate and federation level will be under scrutiny. Any change in direction, style and policy will be subject to many interpretations. We have a responsibility to the organisation. We must begin now to replace all those who are on the list (either elected leadership or full-time officials) who are well placed to make it to the government. While we must do everything to strengthen the election campaign it must be balanced with ensuring that the key role of leadership is to build structures and to assist the incoming leadership to adapt to the present situation.

With enhanced resources from a new democratic state for education and training we should be able to rebuild our leadership and build the capacity of worker leadership and much untapped leadership potential amongst our members.

#### • Contradictions within the alliance / different emphasis

As the major partner in the new GNU, key personnel from within the ANC will find themselves in senior executive, legislative and administrative positions in national, provincial and local government.

This reality will introduce new strategic and social class / strata tendencies, tensions and challenges:

- New strategic challenge

In the first place, as senior members of government they will, from a principled national democratic perspective, have the responsibility to unify our country, to seek to reconstruct and develop in ways which are sustainable.

- A new social stratum

The new reality will not just present a new strategic challenge. In effect, the promotion of several thousand key ANC personnel into senior governmental positions will constitute the formation of a new social stratum. Between the new ANC senior governmental stratum, especially those in management roles in the civil service, and the mass of workers in the public sector certain tensions and contradictions will occur. This new ANC governmental social stratum may well exhibit new class tendencies which have an anti-popular character. But we must be careful not to present or conceptualise these strains as a simple ANC vs COSATU (or NEHAWU) contradiction. The vast majority of public sector workers, and the vast majority of the popular masses themselves are ANC activists, members or supporters. It would be a serious error to simply, in an uncontested way, consign the traditions and legacies of the ANC to the new governing stratum. It is in COSATU's interest to help sustain a mass-based ANC and a broader MDM.

On the other hand, senior ANC personnel\* in government will also find themselves frustrated, undermined and blocked by the large bureaucracy they will inherit from the apartheid era. To some extent rank and file public sector workers (and workers more broadly in all sectors) will be natural allies of the new ANC upper level governmental strata. There is no iron law which says that the new governing stratum will have to sell out, will have to become bureaucratised and embourgoised.

Quite apart from their subjective strengths and weaknesses, the new ANC stratum will face contradictory strategic and class pulls and inclinations. Which of the different tendencies sketched out above will emerge as the dominant tendencies will be a function of strategic clarity on our part, struggle and the relative balance of organised forces within the broader ANC-led alliance.

There are many contradictions that will face us. Firstly, the ANC will be subjected to a lot of demands by all sorts of interest groups. Our membership will expect us to ensure a change in the conditions of work and living standards. Employers will expect the ANC to confront us on issues such as productivity,

minimum wage and to accept a wage restraint. The ANC as the government of the day will have to concern itself with catering for the needs of society as a whole, including our class enemies. Secondly, the prospect of a new public sector union engaged in negotiations with an ANC government is both challenging and full of uncertainties. It is challenging because unlike the present government who safeguarded the interest the public servant associations at the expense of our own members, the new government will be able to negotiate with all for as long as they enjoy a proportionate representation and support of the workforce. It will be uncertain because none of us have ever been involved in such a situation before. During the debate on all of the above, contradictions and differences will emerge which we will have to deal with.

Contradictions and differences may not only be confined to COSATU and the ANC, but may also come from within. Already different strategies exist between unions. We need to find ways and means of containing these while emphasising areas of agreement. Our key role is not only to prevent contradictions and differences, but to find a way to manage them in the interest of the working class. We should aim to deliver basic goods to our membership, engage an ANC government in negotiations bilaterally and in institutions, strengthen our ties with mass formations and develop concrete policies to give effect to our demands.

#### • Employers strategies

In the past, we have usually been better prepared than employers in policy formulations and winning certain key demands. The opening up of the world to employers, the formation of a single employers organisation / federation will ensure greater coordination amongst them. They will attempt to copy the strategies of their counterparts in other parts of the world where attempts are being made to weaken and to split the labour movement. In Germany employers are demanding longer working hours; British Labour Law has just been amended requiring workers to sign proof of membership on a regular basis. In Spain unions are fighting for survival and low wages and repression characterise the so-called Asian Tigers. We must prepare ourselves for a trial of strength. The manner in which the lock-out issue was resolved has merely postponed the real debate. We can expect resistance from employers. We must avoid being forced to articulate their position around the opening up of the economy. We need to increase our productive capacity to that of world standards. Such increase should be aimed at benefiting society as a whole.

## 2. Redefining our Role

The changing situation demands of us to redefine our role. New methods of dealing with problems, demands and expectations will have to be found. While

workers in the past may have joined us because of our links with the Congress movement, in the future they will join us primarily because they expect us to safeguard their interests. Some will even put pressure on us to concentrate only on bread and butter issues and leave the rest to political parties and organisations. We have to project a clear message of why we need to continue existing. We want to be part of real transformation. As part of civil society, we have an important role to play in deepening democracy.

Our members are part of the community. Therefore we can never confine ourselves to bread and butter issues. They want houses, water, electricity, an end to violence, etc. Increasing the social wage of workers is our responsibility. We need to be engaged in struggle through the RDP and other avenues to win these issues. This must be done side by side with other trade union work.

#### **• Trade Union Independence**

The strength of COSATU will depend in part on our ability to maintain trade union independence. We need to differentiate between independence and non-alignment. We are in alliance with the ANC and SACP based on a particular programme. This alliance must be maintained and strengthened so as to ensure ever deeper and broader democracy - empowering people at every level - and even more fundamental transformation leading to the total transfer of power. Independence must be understood to mean the right of COSATU to articulate its position as agreed by Constitutional structures and our rank and file. It also means that we are not a conveyor belt of our alliance partners. It will be a sad day for trade unionism if COSATU was to become a sweetheart federation. Our members will do to us what we have done with the old TUCSA unions.

Independence must be based on a programme of action whose vision is based on the will of our membership.

#### **• Prioritising our involvement**

In the past year we have been involved in too many fora. In some of these we were represented in name only with either no person attending regularly or no report back and mandating structures in place. We must identify issues, formulate policy or responses and either engage in action or negotiations. Policy formulation must be dynamic and ongoing. It must also involve our structures and the rank and file. We must build capacity in those areas we prioritise and balance our engagement with capacity. We need to prioritise issues around which we wish to negotiate in fora and participate to the best of our ability. Failure to prioritise will mean involvement in everything, but no capacity to deliver or time to develop policies. The weakness and vagueness of sections on Trade and Industry as well as labour market policies in the RDP is an indictment on COSATU. On areas where we are supposed to be experts and

custodians, we have no clear policies. Where we have policies, they can only be articulated by a few. Just as we started to fight for forums as a way of blocking the unilateral change by employers and state, we must now identify issues closer to home as priority areas. We have the personnel, the expertise and the will. Let's release our energies.

#### ☞ Assisting affiliates

Without abandoning the fact that COSATU is affiliate driven, the federation needs to play an effective coordination role. Areas such as industrial restructuring, workplace democratization, servicing membership, developing towards self-sufficiency, improving wages, skills and grading and so on need to be approached in unison.

The present unevenness between big and small unions must be eliminated. All unions must receive more or less the same status in the federation. The lack of involvement by the rank and file in policy formulation can not go on forever. In the late eighties almost all of our shop stewards felt confident enough to explain our policies, campaigns and strategies. We were able within days to mobilise our members around a number of campaigns. This tradition is fast dying. Some EXCO participants do not feel comfortable enough to explain our positions. This is an image we can live without. We need to avoid competition and rather harness or redirect the meagre resources at our disposal. There is no single reason why SADWU shop stewards cannot be brought on board the NUM education activities particularly those dealing with COSATU policies. Similarly SACTWU could offer something to CAWU, etc. For many years we have paid lip service to solidarity action. We must implement the principle underlying slogan : An Injury to One is an Injury to All.

#### ☞ Defining a 3-5 year strategic vision

In defining our role in this ever changing situation, we must base it on long term sustainable strategic vision. Such a strategy, while allowing for dynamic changes, must guide us between now and the Fifth National Congress in September. From September onwards, we must be planning to confront challenges that lie ahead. Not only do we need a 3 year programme, but our strategies must take into account that the Government of National Unity and Reconstruction will last for about 5 years. Our strategy will have be underpinned by among others the following broad objectives:

- winning an election
- RDP that provides for real transformation
- ending violence and crime
- attaining financial self-sufficiency
- mass driven programmes and campaigns

- sustaining membership and growth
- provide real service to affiliates

We must also analyse and plan to deal with the strategies of employers at a regional level. No COSATU vision will succeed unless it is also based on the Southern African region. Issues such as regional economies, trade union solidarity and labour migration needs proper discussion.

#### ☛ **Self Sufficiency**

The fourth National Congress committed us to reach self sufficiency by 1996. The new political situation will see the end of financial assistance from those who in the past helped us due to apartheid. We need to ensure that all our unions have better financial admin. We need to develop a better system of paying subs to COSATU. We should also as a matter of urgency develop an investment strategy that allows us to meet our self imposed deadline as well as being able to intervene and shape investments.

### **3. Key Challenges**

As outlined at the beginning, many challenges will face us in the coming period. Key amongst these are:

#### **3.1 *Building organisation***

The paper presented at the Special Congress contained a nine point plan to strengthen organisation (see Special Congress paper).

#### ☛ **Capacity building**

COSATU needs to build capacity (personnel and structures) that makes it possible for us to respond to defined priority areas timeously. We need to replace as soon as possible those who are on the election list (as argued earlier) so as to close any vacuum that may exist. A number of shop stewards and officials are involved in voter education and in the election campaign generally. We must build on the election database so that we can effectively utilise and deploy comrades after the elections. They will have acquired skills in training, organising, mobilising and mass campaigning which constitutes the foundation for building an effective organisation.

Over the past two years a Staff Development programme has been designed and offered to union officials and senior shop stewards. If utilised effectively it will help improve administration, coordination communication, and efficiency in the organisation.

### Servicing membership

In almost all our regions, workers are complaining about lack of service and involvement in decision-making. The majority of our affiliates still use the same structures and methods of the early eighties to drive the organisation forward. Most cases either go unchallenged or are badly handled resulting in disgruntlement and resignation. Accepting that there is no proper balance between the number of staff members and membership, we need to devise ways and means to empower shop stewards in handling cases and negotiations. In most factories that hard fought for victory for holding general meetings during working hours is no longer utilised.

We must use computers, fax machines and other modern technology to enable and enhance the capacity of worker leadership and not simply make work easier for organisers.

### Building structures and layers of leadership

The cornerstone of our organisation is supposed to be locals. In most areas they either do not exist or are not being attended by shop stewards and officials. While it is true that violence plays a role in the declining attendance, our neglect of those structures is a contributing factor.

The other factor is the status of locals in COSATU. We need to revisit our debate on the role of locals and regions in the run up to the 5th National Congress. Most of our structures can not cope with the changing situation. We have a duty to overhaul these structures so as to build effective coordination and communication. If we are going to be a real force against employers, we will have to once more rely on our members to defend us against them. It was those COSATU members who waged the living wage campaign in the late eighties, who defeated employers' LRAA of 1988, who stopped the VAT highway robbery, etc. Presently they have become spectators in the organisation. Given direction and proper discussion, workers can help run organisation. The majority are now involved in the election campaign. Without undermining the role of leadership, we need to ensure that locals and regional structures are meaningfully involved in policy and decision-making.

### Organising the unorganised

For many years COSATU have spoken about organising of the unorganised white workers, agriculture, financial are but areas where we can increase our capacity. We must investigate how best to organise white collar workers.

#### • Effective coordination within organisation

Our success is going to lie in the main on our ability to effectively coordinate, communicate and to have a speedy flow of information. These will require a change in a number of structures and/or departments. We will have to accept that the EXCO's role will be to deal with administrative issues, ensure implementation of CEC decisions and to mandate negotiators around issues where policies exist. Constitutional meetings would need proper planning based on cooperation from affiliates. Affiliates need to consult with their structures before meetings so as to ensure that they are not surprised by the outcome of meetings. While print and visual media help us reach millions of people, there can be no substitute for using our own structures and materials to report back to our membership. Regional Shopsteward Councils and Congresses must allow for proper discussion on union work. In the EXCO, very little time is made available to discuss trade union work.

The analysis above is not new. We must therefore come with new proposals for dealing with the problems. Our main aim is to find a meaningful way of building structures, involvement of membership and sustaining membership growth.

#### • Realignment of structures

The two previous papers on demarcation has proven that there is a bigger debate looming in industrial demarcation. We have two routes: One is to implement piecemeal as we go along, the other is to wait until we have concluded the whole debate. The danger is that we are faced with an immediate task of putting together a service sector union and that waiting too long would just kill the initiative. We may also end up where we were in the last Congress where the proposal for super unions were just shot down. The reality is that we need to redefine industry to take account of world trends and the need to build strong unions.

The present negotiations has resulted in an agreement for 9 provinces. Will COSATU follow the same route or maintain the present demarcations? We need to debate pros and cons of both options. The key consideration must be accessibility to membership and availability of resources to do the job.

#### • Trade Union Unity

We must reaffirm our commitment to the unity of workers. New approaches to NACTU and FEDSAL need to be made. We should not allow political differences alone to block the unity of workers. Apart from the workers summit, we must convene other meeting to deal with worker issues at a socio economic level.

The Fourth National Congress avoided discussion on Structures including the need for a full time president. We must revisit that debate. We must also move towards changing the frequency of constitutional structures at all levels.

### **3.2 *Implementing the RDP***

The adoption of the RDP by the ANC Conference on Reconstruction a few weeks ago, places a challenge on the alliance to deliver on its undertakings to society as a whole. The implementation of the RDP will not be realised through legislation alone. We need to have continuous input on how it should be implemented.

#### **☛ *Interaction with institutions***

As an organisation we need to put structures for the implementation of the RDP in place. Their role before the elections will be to identify areas of concern to COSATU, institutions and organisations with whom we need to interact, build capacity for implementation. Beyond the elections these structures will have to relate to a number of fora, affiliates, employers and government departments. The ANC conference resolution calls on us to place the coordination of the RDP at the President's office and Premiers. As COSATU we must realign our structures to the same scenario. While we should not rule out negotiations and interaction with government department, there may be advantages in concentrating our efforts at a central level such as the RDP Commission.

#### **☛ *Setting up and prioritising proper fora***

As outlined earlier, we are involved in every forum under the sun. If we are not involved it is either because we do not know of the forum or have not yet been allowed to participate. Our argument for forums was to block unilateral restructuring by employers and the state and to redirect resources. After the elections, we must identify a few forums for participation, develop policies around others and feed this publicly or through our interaction with mass based formations.

We propose that we concentrate on the following areas:

- Trade and Industry and Industrial Strategy in particular, Workplace Democracy
- Public Sector and Parastatals
- Department of Labour
- Labour Market issues
- Education and Training
- Macro-economic policies

The NEF is presently a tripartite body of government, business and labour dealing with macro-economic issues. Other organs of civil society will soon demand a voice for itself in this forum under a new government. There is also a convergence and overlap in labour market issues being discussed at the NMC.

We must consider pushing for a merger of the NEF and NMC structures to deal with labour market and macro-economic issues. We should also debate the possibility of setting up a committee that interacts with government on socio-economic issues. All interest groups of significance would be represented. They would negotiate with those responsible for the implementation of the RDP. A structured relationship is a necessity at the present moment. Areas such as housing, local government, mineral energy, electricity, etc. are areas around which we need to develop policy without COSATU necessarily having to sit in these fora. Affiliates such as NUM, SAMWU, NUMSA and CAWU can play an important role in this regard. The only concern is to avoid sending all our people to all fora without a proper implementing strategy.

#### **☛ Policy formulation**

Apart from principled positions, we have got no detailed policies on a number of crucial issues. Very often we reach consensus only to return to the same issue at the next meeting. We believe that we should put together a team/s to look at the following areas and to finalize policies:

- \* minimum wages
- \* grading / skills / wages
- \* investment strategy
- \* new comprehensive LRA
- \* labour based (construction) standards and wage rates on labour intensive construction and public works programme
- \* Affirmative action
- \* Productivity

There is an urgent to look at appropriate structures in COSATU to ensure policy formulation, review role of task forces and how to get policy debated and owned by our members.

#### **3.3 The Struggle for Socialism**

The Special Congress held in September reaffirmed our commitment to Socialism. We therefore need to ensure that conditions for such advancement are possible. The RDP, while itself not a socialist programme, lays the basis for such advancement. The loss of jobs and the inability of capital to create more jobs forces us to develop a democratic alternative. The MERG document

speaks of job creation at a minimum scale over a period of 5 years. While itself commendable, it is not a solution for curbing unemployment.

COSATU together with the SACP and other organs of civil society need to plan beyond the end of the GNUR around which the RDP is based. The conference on Socialism must emerge with certain answers and a programme that can easily be implemented. We also need to find ways and means of strengthening the Left both inside and outside of parliament.

### 3.4 Key campaigns

No labour organisation survives without campaigns that reflects the struggle of the rank and file. We need to identify a few campaigns that we can run as an organisation. We need to move away from the notion that we own all campaigns.

The following campaigns are crucial for COSATU:

- a) Site Tax - until July 1994
- b) Centralised Bargaining - ongoing
- c) Worker Rights - ongoing
- d) Living Wage - ongoing
- e) Implementing the RDP - ongoing
- f) Free Political Activity - until elections
- g) Election Campaign - until end of April

## 4. Process

We are suggesting that the following process be agreed upon:

WHAT	WHEN
Identify issues pertinent to COSATU and reach consensus on them	March CEC
Prioritise issues and agree which are crucial for us	March CEC
Define goals, objectives and benchmarks	Ongoing. To be finalised by 5th National Congress
Implementation mechanism	Ongoing
Monitoring and evaluation	Every CEC

This is by no means a full strategy, but an opening shot towards developing one. We need to debate all issues relating to structures, constitutional changes, etc. and finalize by September wherein our long-term strategy will be finalized and adopted. END