

COSATU office-bearers say: Forward with the struggle

COMRADES,

about 1500 delegates will meet at COSATU's Special National Congress on May 14 and 15 to discuss the situation facing us and to decide the way forward.

About ten months ago, at COSATU's last Congress, workers adopted the Freedom Charter and resolved to build permanent alliances with progressive organisations. On February 24, Botha banned 17 progressive organisations — including the UDF and SAYCO — and restricted COSATU from taking up any political issues.

This has raised questions for every comrade in the struggle: What is the way forward for the workers struggle? How will we continue our march towards a democratic society free of apartheid and exploitation?

For COSATU this means: How do we continue to progress as the mass democratic movement and how can we continue to make gains on behalf of organised workers? How can we defend and extend our organised strength on the shopfloor in the face of massive repression from the bosses and the

government? What must we do to defend ourselves against the Labour Bill, restrictions, wage freezes, privatisation?

Now, more than ever, clear decisions and direction are needed from the mass democratic movement. On the one hand, the government is using its many weapons of repression to try and break democratic organisation. On the other hand, it has no support among the people who are angry, and determined to win their freedom.

At the COSATU Congress we must look carefully at our strategies — remembering all the time that our strength lies in the masses, and not in a few people in offices. The successful defence of our struggle depends on whether we can mobilise the mass support into strong democratic organisation in every sector of our struggle.

Our main discussion at Congress must focus on these burning issues: How can we build and strengthen mass democratic organisation? How do we continue to struggle for short-term demands around our im-

mediate needs together with our longer term demands which will solve our problems for good? Our people are mobilised and determined — but without clear leadership and direction our initiatives can easily be defeated.

The key issues facing COSATU now are the restrictions, the Labour Bill and our demand for a living wage. The Bill and the restrictions are a direct answer to COSATU's growing strength and the massive mobilisation around our living wage campaign last year.

The issue of a living wage remains a burning issue for workers. But the Labour Bill wants to take away workers weapons — strike action and solidarity action. If the Bill becomes law, we will have no legal weapons left.

The adoption of the Freedom Charter last year by COSATU and the UDF demonstrated the growing unity in the ranks of the oppressed and exploited. Our living wage campaign, and the power and strength of the strikes which sustained it, showed that workers can and must lead the



COSATU President Comrade Elijah Barayi.

mass democratic struggle.

But there are still many weaknesses. The bosses and the government know these problems — that is why they feel confident to force through the Bill and restrictions now. They are weaknesses that are within our power to solve because they are weaknesses within our organisations.

Our Congress must find ways of correcting these weaknesses. They have been raised many times before in our structures.

They include:

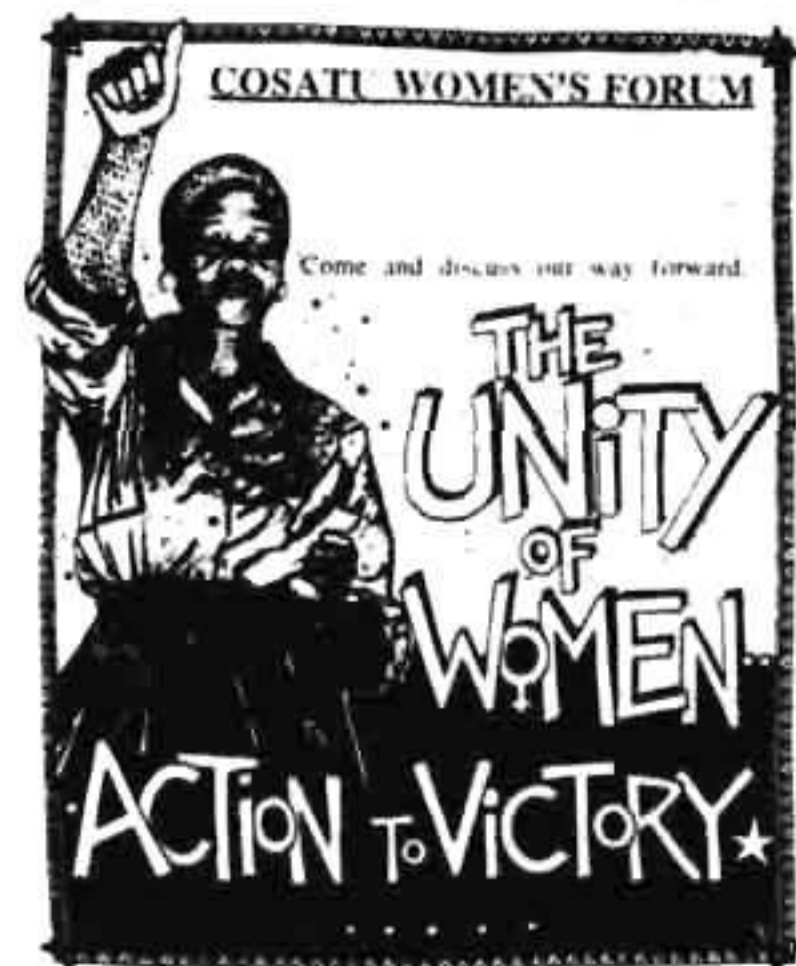
- Weak local and regional structures and leadership.
- Weakness of structures in some affiliates.
- Divisions, suspicions and a lack of co-ordination within and between affiliates.
- Poor participation by affiliates in many COSATU structures.

These, and all other issues which weaken us, must be discussed by all workers in

COSATU. The Congress is our most powerful forum and it is there that the voice of workers must be the loudest. COSATU workers — make sure your delegate comes with your strong mandate on how to strengthen our organisation; how to build the maximum unity and solidarity and how to take forward our struggle for freedom.

Yours in struggle,
Cosatu National Office-bearers.

Cosatu takes a critical look at itself at CEC meeting



OVER 250 workers from all over the country gathered at COSATU's Womens Congress last week to discuss the struggle of women workers. The vast majority of the delegates were women, including a number of women from progressive women's organisations under the umbrella of the still to be launched FEDSAW. The Women's Conference was organised by COSATU's National Education Committee. Topics workshopped at the conference included: Women in the Unions; Women in the Community; Women at Work and Women and Health and Safety.

The next issue of Cosatu News will cover the Womens Conference in depth.

THE COSATU CEC met in mid-April. Serious discussions took place on the state of the union movement, the current situation facing COSATU and the mass democratic movement and the over dependence of COSATU and its affiliates on outside funding.

After detailed reports from unions, the following problems were identified:

- The structures of merged unions have not always been properly integrated.
- Almost all union structures are weak.
- There is poor union participation in COSATU structures.
- There has been a failure to implement and build COSATU campaigns and this has meant that workers have often been left to fight in isolation from the strength of the federation.
- There is a lack of financial self-sufficiency and of resources in terms of skills and organisational experience.
- Division and factionalism within and between unions

affects COSATU's ability to act effectively.

- There are problems of financial maladministration in some unions.
- There is a problem with responding and adapting to repression.
- Bosses' strategies like mass dismissals, lockouts and interdicts are not being dealt with adequately.
- Certain sectors in COSATU — like farm, domestic, unemployed, construction and public sectors — are still weak.
- Weak education programmes in most unions mean that COSATU education cannot operate efficiently.
- Distribution of information to our membership is still poor.

After lengthy discussion on the current situation facing COSATU and the democratic movement, it was agreed that the following areas needed to be debated more thoroughly before our Special Congress:

- The problems of divisions within and between COSATU unions.

- The relationship between the UDF and COSATU.
- COSATU's response to the attacks and restrictions.

In the discussion of the financial situation facing COSATU and its affiliates, it was clear that the federation was far too dependant on overseas financial assistance. If the government's new law on funding were applied to COSATU, it would seriously affect our ability to function.

It was agreed that COSATU and its affiliates must move as rapidly as possible to become self-reliant.

It was also agreed that COSATU would still not accept any support from the ICFTU. But it was felt that more information on the ICFTU and who it financed should be provided to affiliates for further discussion.

At COSATU's second Congress last year a resolution to increase affiliates' subs to COSATU from 5 cents to 10 cents per member was defeated.

Cops surround Cosatu offices

ON Friday April 22, as COSATU NEWS went to press, police surrounded COSATU offices in Cape Town and Germiston where railway workers were gathering to commemorate the death of six of their comrades a year ago.

April 22 has been burnt in the minds of thousands of railway workers nationally as "Bloody Wednesday" after police shot dead six strikers in Johannesburg and Germiston.

In Cape Town the offices of Community House were searched by the police, they occupied the building and the names of railway workers attending the meeting were taken down by police.

Meanwhile in Johannesburg, about 150 railway workers marched through the streets of central Joburg. Railway workers have vowed to commemorate "Bloody Wednesday" every year from now on.