

# Cosatu's Living Wage Campaign must be built

1987 saw the biggest strike wave ever in the history of the workers' struggle in South Africa. There were over 500 times more work days lost through strike action in 1987 than in 1986. And 1986 was itself a record year for strikes.

Hundreds of thousands of workers — from the mines, factories, hospitals, railways, post offices, construction sites, municipalities, hotels, shops and farms — came out on strike for a living wage. From Cape Town to Pieterburg, in every corner of our country, workers answered COSATU's call for a living wage with militant strike action.

Strike action was highest in the food, chemical, printing and state sectors. The vast majority of strikes were over demands for a living wage. After wage strikes, solidarity strikes and strikes against unfair dismissals and for union recognition were the most frequent causes of labour disputes.

The strike wave produced real gains for COSATU workers who were the only workers in the country — on average — to get wage increases higher than the rate of inflation (price increases). In addition, Mayday and June 16 were finally secured as our days through massive national staydowns.

Another feature of the strike wave was the number of national strikes that took place. This was a direct result of COSATU's policy of "One Union, One Industry" which was finalised for all unions — except those in the transport sector — soon after COSATU's second Congress in July.

Increasingly, unions are also building national shop steward councils within different companies. This has laid a strong basis for national action in companies like Southern Sun, Dorbyl, Dunlop, SAB, OK Bazaars, Mondi, Sappi, Checkers, Pick 'n Pay and Icor.

The strike wave happened despite any real organisation and co-ordination by COSATU National, regional and local living wage structures never really got off the



Management chases journalists away in trying to disperse a picket line at the CNA warehouse in Rosburgh, near Durban. The picket was staged on October 28, 1986 and it was over a wage dispute between CNA and Cosasus.

ground. Plans to try and co-ordinate the wage struggles of unions — especially NUM and NUMSA — fell through. Often militant strikes, like the GM, NUM and Mercedes Benz strikes for example, were not supported by effective solidarity action.

In many strikes, workers were left to fight in isolation even though other workers were on strike in different unions and different parts of the country around similar demands.

The COSATU National Congress, which took place just before the NUM and NUMSA strikes which less than thousands of workers were on strike, did not even discuss the living wage campaign. Already in May when COSATU HOUSE was bombed and the physical attacks on COSATU began to grow sharply, the focus of COSATU's campaign was forced to shift to a defensive "Islands Off COSATU" campaign.

Since then COSATU has been caught up almost entirely with responding to

attacks from the bosses and the government. Bosses started to use tactics like lock-outs, attempts to sue unions for strikes and mass dismissals to try and smother unions. This went hand in hand with an increasingly hard-line approach to workers' demands.

At the same time the government, in addition to its general repression against the labour and democratic movement under the state of emergency, came with harshness of our nation, restrictions on our right to meet, speak and publish, deregulation and the Labour Bill.

## WAGE FREEZE OPPOSED

This has been followed up this year with the wage freeze, privatisation and the restrictions on COSATU and the banning of 17 democratic organisations.

In this situation the living wage campaign hardly appeared on COSATU agendas from the middle of last year. But on the ground, workers continued to come out on militant strikes.

The greater the attacks on COSATU, the greater the confidence and profits of the bosses grew. Despite the massive strike wave last year, major companies greatly increased their profits in 1987, with many more than doubling profits as compared to 1986.

While bosses and the government let workers to ignore their belts and accept small increases or no increases at all, the bosses are making massive profits and the government is increasing its spending on the army and police and bastards by millions and millions of rands.

All their attacks — lock-outs, mass dismissals, Labour Bill, privatisation, deregulation, wage freezes and restrictions — are aimed at destroying COSATU's living wage struggle and our organisation. Our response must be to build our living wage campaign, our living wage structures and our living wage struggle to stop the attacks and move forward to win the things we need.

## Cosatu's living wage demand

- Wages must be automatically linked to price increases.
- Open the books of the company to the union.
- Scrap the Labour Bill and restrictions.
- Down with the wage freeze and privatisation.
- A living wage for all.
- 40 hour week without loss of pay.
- Mayday, June 16 and Sharpeville Day as public holidays.
- Job security.
- No job dismissals.
- 6 months' paid maternity leave and a guarantee of a job back.
- An end to the hostel system and decent housing near places of work.
- The right to decent education and training.

- Equal and increased technical and vocational training for females and youth.
- Retrenchment pay of one month's wages for every year of service.

## No Rights for domestic and farm workers

WHILE the vast majority of COSATU workers are mobilising to fight the Labour Bill — which threatens to set back the gains that workers have won in struggle since 1979 — millions of workers in South Africa do not have any rights at all.

Farm and domestic workers, who are being organised by FAWU's Farm Workers Project and SADVU respectively, have no legal protection in terms of wages and conditions of work. Nothing.

A Commission of Enquiry by the Manpower Department into the position of farm and domestic workers has not been released three years after it was completed. Farming bosses and madams are totally opposed to any change in the legal position of these workers.

These bosses can hire and fire as they like, pay any wage that workers are prepared to accept, force workers to work as long as they want them to, deny workers any holiday at all.

The struggle against the Labour Bill is also a struggle to make sure that farm and domestic workers enjoy at least the same rights as workers in the private sector.

**RESIST**  
THE WAGE FREEZE  
**FIGHT**  
FOR A LIVING WAGE

