

Workers rallies launch two new Cosatu regions

THE FORMATION of regional Cosatu structures is well under way following launches on the Rand and in Cape Town.

Thousands attended a rally at Katlehong's Huntersfield Stadium launch Cosatu on the Witwatersrand.

"The turnout at the rally proves we have the true support of our members, and their shows commitment to Cosatu," said Ban-retary.

The rally followed a conference of 640 delegates who met to discuss policy and elect office-bearers.

They represented over 200 000 workers organised in the massive PWV industrial complex where Cosatu has by far the majority of its members.

Most of the meeting was taken up by elections. It was the first time so many different unions had come together at a local level, and all

those nominated had to be introduced.

Delegates elected NUM's Paul Nkuna as chair; Cawusa's Mahmood Fadal as vice chair and CWIU's Ronald Mofikeng as treasurer.

The vote was split over the position of Regional Secretary between Moses Mayekiso of Mawu, and Bangilizwe Solo from NUTW. Solo was elected acting regional secretary.

"Almost all delegates participated in the discussions they expressed

their commitment to Cosatu, and to the spirit of unity. The level of debate was very high," said Solo.

"Soon, when we've sorted out all the teething problems of our young organisation, another rally will be organised to explain the resolutions passed by the Congress."

● Ten thousand people packed the University of the Western Cape's stadium for Cosatu's Western Cape launch.

Messages of support came from veteran union organiser Oscar Mpetha, now in Pollsmoor, the

United Women's Organisation, Cape Housing Action Committee, Cape Youth Congress, Western Cape Students' Congress, and the Western Cape Teachers' Union.

The rally followed elections of regional office bearers. SFAWU's Macwellington Mtiya is president; Saawu's Noel Williams is vice president and GWU's Nick Henwood is secretary.

Cosatu president Barayi addressed the crowd. His message to the government was clear: "Freedom is coming!"

He also called on the government to release all political prisoners, and called on people to burn their passes if they weren't abolished within six months.

Responding to Inkatha's attacks on Cosatu, he said, "Buthelezi says that we are a front of the ANC. But we say that Inkatha is a front for the National Party".

He appealed to all unions still outside Cosatu to affiliate — "their home is here in Cosatu".

Oscar Mpetha's message said he was "firmly convinced that Cosatu will help to free this country."

Newly elected regional vice-president, Noel Williams, said: "Today we are making history here in Bellville. We as workers in Cosatu are not only going to fight on the factory floor. Together we are going to fight for freedom."

"Cosatu did not fall out of the air. We are not a tri-cameral parliament of PW Botha. In Cosatu, we decide things democratically".

Vaal residents force OVBD rent concession

THE ORANGE Vaal Development Board (OVBD) has agreed to stop arresting residents and issuing them with summonses to pay their rent.

They agreed the day after a successful stay-away on March 24/25 which was called by the Vaal Stay-away Committee (VSAC) to force the issue.

Residents in the area have been boycotting rents for over 18 months demanding that they be lowered to R30.

The rent crisis took a dramatic turn on February 25, when 60 homes were raided late at night. Some residents were forced to sign declarations of intent to pay and some were forced to pay them there and then. Others were simply arrested.

This is the latest in a series of attempts by the OVBD to recover rent and service charges arrears.

Some months ago water and electricity were cut off in some Vaal townships. Residents have also been threatened with court action, eviction and confiscation of movable property.

Most recently, the OVBD issued 7500 summonses to residents to appear in court for not paying.

The Vaal Civic Association (VCA), through legal representatives, is challenging these. A test case is to go ahead sometime in April.

The VCA is however critical of legal action. "The courts of law can to a certain extent contribute to settling this dispute.

"We as residents must unite in action to make sure that our genuine and legitimate demands are met."

"We are not impressed by the lukewarm response of the OVBD," says the VSAC.

Other demands include cancelling the Delmas 22 trial and all other trials connected to the 1984 rent issue; freeing or acquitting the Sharpeville Six sentenced to death; the resignation of councillors and their so-called community guards; the scrapping of the Black Local Authorities Act; that Mayday be a paid holiday; and that democratic SRC's be recognised.

The VSAC was set up after the VCA was mandated to consult with unions, taxi associations, student and youth organisations and business people about the stayaway in March.

"We had a few problems in preparing for a stay away. We only had three weeks and this was too short a time for the civic — given the vastness of our area — to consult and report-back properly to all organisations."

"The VCA has also been hit hard by repression and some of our leadership is standing trial in Delmas.



Vaal Civic, hard hit by repression, but standing firm.

"The VSAC was formed to take over the organisation of something like a stayaway" says the VCA.

"We are going to work at improving communication and consultation with organisations and residents. Our still very young block

and area committees have played quite a good role in sustaining the civic and keeping the residents informed about actions. But, these still have to be improved and we plan to cover the whole of the Vaal with such grassroots structures."

Viljoenskroen residents ask for answers

UNREST HAS reached the dusty Free State township of Viljoenskroon where residents have shown the authorities that they no longer accept their inferior conditions.

When residents marched on the administration buildings on January 30, police bullets left Letshabo Nthethe dead.

Angry at this unprovoked brutality, the previously quiet township went on a rampage. The mayor's house and government owned property were razed to the ground and informers were dealt with.

When the authorities slapped restrictions on Letshabo's funeral, the township responded with a five-day stayaway. Everyone, including hostel dwellers stayed away.

Tension that had been simmering for years exploded into action.

Viljoenskroon residents demanded the mayor account for:

- Why Letshabo was shot.
- Why they pay for inferior housing and for flush toilets they do not have.
- Why teachers are unqualified and why such a high unemployment rate exists.
- Why the mayor monopolises the high positions in the community.
- The mayor could not face the residents and sent his deputy instead.
- Residents also called for the immediate resignation of the community council so that people could choose their own representatives.
- Their demands were met with further repression.

Viljoenskroon was now practically an occupied zone. The police were everywhere, even in the mortuary and cemetery. People with T-shirts advertising even commercial products were stripped and beaten.

Despite the restrictions placed on the funeral, Letshabo was buried in dignity two weeks after his death.

The police order said no singing, no political speeches and no slogans, but everyone disobeyed.

Nearly seventy people were arrested and charged with trespassing.

Release Mpetha

THE RELEASE Mandela Campaign (RMC) has added another activist to their campaign — Oscar Mpetha.

"On account of his age, poor health and the respect he commands, the RMC demands that he be released," said the Cape Town RMC.

He is a past president of the UDF, a founder member of the African Food and Canning Workers Union and president of the ANC in the Western Province in the fifties. Last year he was sentenced to five years imprisonment for terrorism.

Statements supporting the campaign were received from the UDF, Cosatu and the SA Council of Churches.

Street committees behind successful stayaway

MAMELODI RESIDENTS and activists credit the success of their two day stayaway — called at short notice — to the street committees they have built.

The stayaway was called to protest what residents say was 'uncalled-for police provocation'. A rally to launch the Mamelodi Civic Association (Maca) on March 16 was disrupted halfway by police and SADF.

The stayaway — its duration and how it would be conducted — was immediately discussed at street level. The same night executives of both Maca and the Mamelodi Youth Organisation (Mayo) met, ready with reports from all streets.

"The decision was unanimous and hence the success of the popular action," said a MACA organiser.

"This is the clearest example of how well people's organisation can work" he said.

The stayaway was 98% successful. On both days SADF and SAP vehicles patrolled the township. Houses were raided and even a church meeting was disrupted.

MAYO has been operating street committees since last year. MACA



Mamelodi residents bury victim of repression

did the same and coupled this with groundwork for the formal launch of the civic.

Each street committee has a chairperson, vice chair, secretary, vice secretary and a treasurer. Two representatives from each street committees in a section of the township form the section committees. The executive of the central organisation is elected from an assembly of all these structures.

The structures are based on the policy of accountability — discussion and mandates from the people to the executive and report-backs from the executive of an organisation to the people.

"This is what we understand by people's democracy. People participate in decision-making and in carrying out those decisions", a Mamelodi activist said.

"This form of organisation

became necessary because it was difficult to deal with issues adequately at mass meetings. Also the state clampdown is heightening and mass meetings may soon not be allowed at all. This has already happened in some areas."

"The structures also help draw people's attention to the connection between pressing local issues and those of national and international importance.

Since the rent boycott from November last year, the Development Board stopped collecting refuse. Now the street and section committees organise this, using borrowed vans and lorries. Residents contribute money for petrol.

The committees are busy working out structures and methods for disciplinary action.

"We have to be careful in understanding the role and importance of these structures", say Mamelodi activists. They must be organic and be able to work on their own. This will help them to be vigilant, take initiative, and ensure they survive intimidation to advance their goals under the most difficult conditions."