

**T**he democratic movement has had to develop new creative strategies in the bantustans to manage the complex relationships demanded by the ANC decision to bring bantustan leaders to the negotiating table as allies.

For their part, the new generation of bantustan leaders - aware of the necessity of retaining the economic base of their territories - has had to exercise great diplomacy, with an eye to foreign companies, which were originally wooed to the bantustans by the vision of a profit paradise.

In the community, bantustan residents are beginning to take control of their lives through civic associations, while in the workplace unionists and workers are compelled to continue the fight against unsympathetic employers.

Workers in the bantustans believe industrialists are playing for time, 'squeezing the sponge of its last possible drop' before unions grow strong enough to assert workers' rights. In the Transkei unionists believe industry is 'hiding behind the government saying that there are still no laws to allow unions'.

In Ciskei there are rumours that foreign companies, many of them Taiwanese, are pulling out before they are kicked out by the new government of Brigadier Oupa Gqozo for refusing to stop extreme exploitation.

In the Transkei, military leader General Bantu Holomisa commissioned Professor Nic Wiehahn, the architect of South African labour legislation, to make recommendations on a labour dispensation for the territory.

Workers there requested interim legislation to force employers to recognise workers' right to organise. Holomisa would go no further than encouraging management and workers to co-operate and talk to each other. Workers say Holomisa's call had little effect on management attitudes.

Members of the Food and Allied Workers' Union (Fawu) say employers victimise workers involved in union activity. Mongani Dyanti of the Butterworth Workers Co-ordinating Committee says the dismissal of shop stewards is rife. 'Workers are fired for intimidation and for assaulting management but they are so militant because of the frustrating lack of channels to air grievances'.

Fawu members see Holomisa as caught in a Catch 22 situation: on one side he faces extreme worker dissatisfaction, and on the other he has to appease investors who were drawn to the bantustan by the guarantee of stable and cheap

# Striking a balance

*Dramatic changes in the bantustans have brought Cosatu into direct negotiations with industry and government on the shape of a new labour dispensation.*

*Thumida Maistry reports*

labour. Workers charge that Holomisa's numerous trips to recruit foreign investment show that his allegiance lies clearly with employers.

Despite this, the Cosatu local in East London, which has been assisting Transkei members to organise, and worker leaders in the bantustan, are positive they have made maximum use of the relaxed atmosphere to strengthen organisation.

The lack of previous organisation and the pent-up frustrations of years of exploitation in sweat-shop conditions have led to militant worker action, sometimes spilling over into aggression and even violence.

After Holomisa announced last year that unionism would be allowed, a wave of strikes swept through factories in the main industrial areas of Umtata and Butterworth. There were many allegations of assaults by groups of workers, and Holomisa was forced to concede to demands for protection from both workers and management.

It was clear to all parties that strong unions would be able to discipline their members. But unionists say companies now regret their initial enthusiasm for the introduction of unions, which have rapidly consolidated their organisation and begun educating their rank and file members.

The initial wave of wildcat strikes has made way for more disciplined actions, but there are still regular reports of strikes. The recent visit to Transkei

by ANC leader Nelson Mandela took place against the backdrop of a strike by over 1 000 municipal workers, which brought public services to a halt.

Wiehahn has now completed his proposals on Transkei labour legislation, but so far only government officials and industry have seen the report. Unions have not seen the document. The Department of Manpower said copies were still being printed, and that those available for study had been provided by Wiehahn himself.

The Workers Co-ordinating Committee in the Transkei oversees union developments in the area. It is an interim forum, acting until Cosatu can discuss the establishment of a separate region for the Transkei at its next congress.

Workers discussed the possibility of the Transkei falling under the Cosatu's Border office in East London, but it was felt there were issues and conditions unique to the bantustan which warranted a separate structure. In the Transkei, there is need for training and education on basic issues, such as the role and function of shop stewards.

**C**osatu has held workshops on a new policy towards the sympathetic bantustans - although it does not recognise the political legitimacy of these structures. Bones Skulu of the SA Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (Saccawu) referring to events in the Ciskei, explained: 'The bosses wanted a breathing space until reincorporation, and they wanted labour legislation as their companies had been rocked by wildcat strikes. Workers also wanted a breathing space to air their grievances. This together with the openness of the new government brought about Cosatu's willingness to enter the space in the homeland'.

In the Ciskei, the looting and burning of factories after the March coup was followed by a move among industrialists to withdraw from the bantustan. But this soon changed, particularly among South African companies, many of whom



**Workers hoisted ANC and SACP flags at the re-burial of Chief Sabata Dalindyebo**

were convinced that the destruction would not be repeated. It also seems it will be some time before workers can demand the same levels of pay and benefits as their counterparts outside the bantustan.

In one of his first statements on labour issues after the coup, Ciskei's Gqozo said his government was committed to democracy which 'assumed the right of labour to organise itself in unions of its own choice'.

Speaking to unco-operative industrialists, he added: 'Those still firmly locked into the labour philosophy of the early 19th century must realise that they can no longer phone a despotic head of state and arrange for uniformed louts to beat up their labour when it dares to disagree with management'.

In line with this approach, Gqozo initiated talks between industrialists and Cosatu. Workers demanded the immediate recognition of unions pending reincorporation of Ciskei into South Africa. Learning from the Transkei experience, workers knew a clear framework within which to operate should be set up as soon as possible.

Gqozo said that whatever the two parties agreed as the basis of their relationship would be tabled and adopted by his government.

Following discussions, Cosatu lawyers submitted a proposal outlining the minimum rights of workers. The document, 'The Basic Rights of Recognition Act', aims 'to foster collective bargaining in the Ciskei, to provide for basic

trade union rights and to provide for the implementation of such rights'.

By mutual agreement, there have been no public statements about the progress of the discussions, but it is believed that initially industrialists had few amendments to make to the draft. Later, they demanded a guarantee that there would be no strikes if they allowed unions to operate. Unions viewed this as a delaying tactic.

**G**qozo has accepted the importance of unions, but has said that both parties should agree on a working document. Recently the direct talks between employers and Cosatu ended, and teams of lawyers representing employers, the unions and the Ciskei government have begun meetings to thrash out a draft labour law. This is expected to provide for union recognition, dispute procedures and other related matters.

Gqozo's attitude to the organising of public sector workers has contrasted markedly with his approach to the private sector.

He has launched repeated attacks on the National Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu), accusing it of causing numerous strikes.

Although Gqozo has founded his opposition on the argument that essential services should not be disrupted by strikes, a fear of losing power also appears to play a part.

The Ciskei leader came out strongly

against the nurses' strike at Mdantsane's Cecilia Makiwane Hospital, in which at least four patients are reported to have died. Nurses were arrested, and Gqozo told them that they were being manipulated by Nehawu to topple the government. A major conflict between Gqozo and the union was averted when the mass democratic movement intervened.

Nehawu has denied involvement in the strike, saying that only a third of the strikers are union members. Nehawu's Benson Mjebeza said the strike had been spontaneous and arose from extreme dissatisfaction and frustration.

Nehawu members are, however, sensitive to Gqozo's accusations that they intend to overthrow the government. A member said it was possible that individuals or groups still bent on restoring the luxurious nest Sebe had provided were looking for bases to launch their plans to destabilise the new ruling council.

However, he added that the matter was being investigated and that structures would tighten as Nehawu consolidated. He also said that it was more likely that the new governing council wanted to retain power over the public servants so that it could hold onto its own power.

The claim that Nehawu is colluding with Sebe's old party, the Ciskei National Independence Party, seems highly improbable. But it does reflect Gqozo's concern with the loyalty of the public sector which he has inherited from Sebe.

The health service clash has threatened the delicate alliance between the MDM and the new government. It appears that the UDF has accepted Nehawu's explanation, after initially accusing the union of irresponsibility in the light of the deaths caused by the hospital strike. Cosatu affiliates have also come out in support of Nehawu and has advised it to strategise more carefully.

Union pressure to push the ruling council further is getting the support of the MDM, which was previously careful not to do anything to isolate sympathetic leaders. Its caution was apparently reinforced by fears that South Africa might pull the plug on its errant child. But now that grassroots structures of the MDM have taken control, there appears greater confidence to exert pressure on Gqozo.

At the same time, both Holomisa and Gqozo are walking the road the ANC will soon be exploring: bargaining with industry to stay - but also to recognise the rights of workers. ●