



POLITICS



Conference of the Left

SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST CONFERENCE OF the Left, intended to bring together a range of disparate socialist forces, is being planned for June 1994.

The conference will be convened jointly by Cosatu and the SACP, and will focus on developing a broad left-wing movement in South Africa. It will also look specifically at the implementation of the alliance's Reconstruction and Development Programme, and the role this can play in building socialism.

The Conference of the Left is one of a series of conferences planned for the next nine months which will clarify exactly how the reconstruction programme is going to be implemented. Implicit in this series of gatherings is the development of a more cohesive Left project in South Africa.

The first meeting, scheduled for December, is an alliance reconstruction conference. This will see the formalisation of the reconstruction programme by the three main alliance partners.

It will be followed by a civil society reconstruction conference in February 1994, which will bring on board the mass democratic movement, civics, women's groups, the youth and other formations.

The Conference of the Left itself is planned for June 1994. It will be hosted jointly by the SACP and Cosatu, in

terms of a resolution adopted at Cosatu's September special conference.

The resolution — proposed by Numsa — instructs Cosatu and the party to "host a conference of the Left consisting of working class organisations with a mass-based constituency".

Calls for such a conference were first made at Numsa's 1991 conference, and confirmed by the Cosatu congress that year, but were never implemented. They have been given impetus in recent months by calls by several Cosatu affiliates for new forms of organisation of working-class organisations.

Who's in? Who's out?

A key issue at the conference is participation. Numsa information officer Langa Zita, in an article due to be published in the next issue of *African Communist*, argues that the conference should be as inclusive as possible.

He suggests the participation of at least the following:

- The Left within the Congress movement. This includes Cosatu and the SACP, the Left within the mass democratic movement (in particular the civic movement), youth and students, the progressive church movement, "the feminist and sexual consciousness movement" and environmental groups.
- The Left outside the Congress movement, for example Wosa, Issa, the PAC and Azapo. "Black consciousness and pan-Africanism have something to contribute to this process, in as far as they conceive their ideas within the concrete concerns of the working-class and the rural poor," Zita says.

Platform or party?

Another key issue is the overall objective of such a conference. The debate

over whether to form a workers' platform (a coalition of socialist forces) or a workers' party will be a crucial one, and one which will influence relationships with the new government.

There is strong support for the idea — articulated by Mzwanele Mayekiso in *WIP92* — of bolstering the SACP rather than setting up a new party. As Mayekiso put it: "From where will a working-class party draw its coherence, given our fragmented background and the disagreements that exist within the socialist movement? Why don't we instead put that effort into reinvigorating the SACP, with its tens of thousands of members?"

But there are also calls — such as the one made at this year's Numsa congress — for the formation of a new workers' party.

In his *AC* article, Zita argues for two main objectives:

- The short-term objective — contesting the character of the ANC, developing a programme of Left forces within the ANC.
- A more long-term objective — "pursuing a Left consensus beyond the Congress movement". This, he suggests, can best be realised through a Left platform rather than a new party: "A platform is more loose and flexible than a party manifesto and programme." In addition, he says, "a platform would be preferable if the mistrust and animosity of the past are to be overcome."

A regional Left

Further down the line, a regional conference of the Left is also in the pipeline. Influenced by the successes of the Sao Paulo Forum — which unites Left forces throughout Latin America — socialists in our sub-continent have been talking about a Southern African version of the forum, which would unite leftwing parties and forces in South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe and elsewhere. ■

— Chris Vick