

A message to all members of COSATU

from the executive committee

From the Executive Committee

1987 - The Year of Consolidation and Decisive Action

We greet you in the name of the Congress of South African Trade Unions. We greet you in 1987 - the year for the consolidation and decisive action of our movement.

COSATU is just over a year old. Today we are closer to the day when we - the workers and youth of our land - must free ourselves from poverty, hunger, exploitation and racism. But a long and bitter struggle still awaits us.

Our struggle has come so far because of the struggle and unity of millions of people, led by the workers and the youth. The path we have travelled has not been easy, and although we have built COSATU into a mass workers' organisation, we can see that the path ahead is even more difficult. The possibilities before us are greater than ever before - but so are the dangers.

We are being attacked on all sides - the bosses, their government and their allies are panicking. They are confused - and in their crisis they can see we are getting stronger.

They want to stop us from advancing. That's why they have imposed a State of Emergency. They have detained thousands of our comrades - among them Moses Mayekiso, Lizzie Phike, Enoch Godongwana, Noel Williams, Matthews Olifant and Amos Masondo.

They have sent their army and police into our townships and into our children's schools and into our worker meetings;

Their allies have sent vigilante death squads to attack and kill workers all over the country - like our MAWU comrades who were murdered at Mpophomeni);

They have tried to crush workers who dare to struggle for what they deserve - at GM and OK Bazaars and BTR and Goldfields and Impala.

We all know the situation is serious. We all know we need the maximum unity if we are to defend ourselves and move forward in our struggle. We all know we need to learn from our mistakes and setbacks if we are to consolidate our gains, strengthen our organisation and move forward in 1987.

Comrades: this year we have to overcome our problems. This year we have to overcome our divisions. This year we have to build the greatest possible mass united action under the leadership of the working class. How can we do this?

ONE INDUSTRY - ONE UNION - NOW!

We have to make sure all our structures - at the local, regional and national level - are consolidated and working properly. To do this effectively we need one union, one industry.

We promised at our launch that we would merge and form big industrial unions within 6 months. It is now 14 months and still we do not have one union in each industry. This cannot be allowed to continue. We have a big job to do comrades. We have to organise millions and millions of unorganised workers into our ranks. We have to bring the millions of unemployed, farm, railway, construction and public sector workers into our ranks. We can only do this by building strong and powerful industrial unions. Nothing must stand in our way. Workers - make sure your union is coming together to form one big union in your industry!

BUILD AND STRENGTHEN SHOP STEWARD COUNCILS

All our structures must be strengthened, especially our local shop steward councils. They are one of the pillars on which COSATU stands. Make sure your views are represented by your shop stewards on the local COSATU shop steward council in your area. If there is no shop stewards' council in your area then you must make sure that one is formed.

Build the COSATU shop stewards' councils as the organised voice of worker unity in every area.

BUILD WORKER SOLIDARITY ACTION

At our launching Congress we said "AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL" will be our guiding light and we adopted powerful resolutions to

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guide us in the struggle ahead. We have made some progress - but not nearly enough.

Too often we have stood back and watched while our comrades struggled alone against the bosses or the government - like at GM or Crossroads or Impala or OK Bazaars. Too often have we stood back and watched while our comrades were detained - even though we have resolved to fight every attack on our organisation with united action. And when we did take decisions for strong action - like the July action against the Emergency or the December 1 action against the killings of our MAWU comrades - some problems and divisions in our movement weakened our protest.

This is bad comrades. We must build our structures, our unity and our ability to mobilise more strongly and seriously - so that we can take action on what we decide, instead of just having resolutions on paper.

The bosses and the government have seen this weakness too. They saw how we built June 16 and May Day into the biggest national general strikes ever, with millions of people taking action. They were scared. They saw how NUM and some affiliates mobilised the biggest ever national industrial action, against the death of our comrades at Kinross. They were alarmed. But they also saw how we failed to build July 14 and December 1 - and they grew more confident.

We must not forget that the base of our power is in the workplaces. We must ensure that every workplace has strong, democratic structures and active members. And we must not allow our differences to undermine our unity in action. Differences we will always have. They are necessary in every democratic organisation, to find the best ideas for the strongest way forward. That is what worker democracy means. But it also means that once we have made a decision, we are all loyal to that decision - and we do our very best to carry it out in a disciplined and comradely way.

To let differences lead to a split in a union, as happened in NUTW; or hold up the organisation of a region, as happened in the Eastern Cape and Witwatersrand regions; or weaken a local, as happened in the Johannesburg local, is terrible comrades. Please, let's make sure these things do not happen and that we discipline people who try to divide us.

CAMPAIGNS

This year we will be working to turn our powerful resolutions into action. The campaign for a living wage for all workers, for the organisation of the unemployed under the banner of COSATU and for national united action under the leadership of the working class are crucial.

Already, all over the country, workers are building these campaigns in action. The heroic OK workers have been on strike for a living wage for weeks now. COSATU workers have blacked supplies to OK in solidarity with the workers. The youth and all progressive organisations have increasingly been drawn into solidarity action with the workers.

BUILD THE LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN

Together, we in COSATU must take these campaigns forward. The struggle for a living wage will be COSATU's main campaign this year. We must especially organise and unite our mass strength behind a clear, co-ordinated, united, national living wage campaign, and for the organisation of the unemployed.

Our campaign will strike at the heart of the profit system. What we want is what we need to live decently. If the bosses' capitalist system can't provide us with what we need, then we don't need the bosses' system. We want the wealth we created to come back to us, so we can all have decent lives.

BUILD MASS UNITED ACTION

Mass united action is our strongest weapon. As we move forward we must draw behind us support and solidarity from the millions of workers, youth and progressive democratic organisations outside our ranks. In this way we will build a campaign of united action under the leadership of workers, and around our demands.

In all our campaigns, we will get the best results and strengthen our leadership of the struggle if we take the initiative and build the widest possible unity in action behind our demands.

This year we must make sure that our May Day and June 16 campaigns are much bigger than last year so that they truly are OUR national holidays.

We can expect the strongest resistance to our struggle for national united action from the bosses and the government. In their desperation they will try even harder than before to attack our movement.

They will try to create vigilante gangs, especially from the unemployed, to divide and intimidate us. They will try and encourage tribalism, racism, factions and division wherever they can to undermine our unity. We must not let them.

ORGANISE THE UNEMPLOYED

We have to organise millions of unemployed under our federation to strengthen our common struggle for jobs for all at a living wage. We, the organised employed workers, can help the struggle of our unemployed comrades by implementing our resolution for a ban on overtime and a 40 hour week. Let us mobilise support for this campaign and join unemployed workers in fighting for the sharing of all work on full pay and a massive public works programme, paid for by the bosses and the government, that will create jobs and provide us with things that we need.

BUILD WORKER SELF-DEFENCE

We have to organise our own defence to protect ourselves and our struggle against attacks. Already, in many areas, COSATU workers are starting to defend themselves. We have to strengthen this a hundred times over, in every workplace and every township. The attacks are getting so serious, so many people have died, that we must organise self defence in every workplace and every township to consolidate and protect the gains we have made.

No-one else will defend us or our struggle. We must do it.

BUILD DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY AND YOUTH ORGANISATION

The problems facing us at work and in our communities are the same. Nowhere do we have control over the decisions that affect our lives: the rent we are forced to pay; high transport costs; terrible conditions in the townships. These issues are directly related to the starvation wages workers are paid.

That is why COSATU workers are leading the struggle to build street committees in the townships. Like our unions in the workplaces, street committees will give us the democratic organisation and unity

and strength to fight for all the things we need - including control over every aspect of our lives through our own democratic organisation under the leadership of organised workers.

There is a lot of discussion about alliances and allies in our struggle. The strongest, best and most reliable allies of the working class are the youth. Like us, the youth exploit no-one. They have nothing to lose and everything to gain by marching together with us to a workers' future.

We must do everything we can to build close links with the students and youth and their organisations; to share our experiences with them of building democratic organisation - and to share our vision of our struggle and the future. At the same time we must give maximum support to the struggle for Peoples Education and the building of democratic SRC's.

ORGANISE FARM WORKERS

Farmworkers are starting to get organised under FAWU. As farmworker organisation develops, a solid bridge will be built between workers in the cities and workers in the countryside. Millions of rural workers - together with the rural poor - will join hands with organised workers in the cities to struggle, like in the factories, mines and shops for control over the land where they live and work. We must do all in our power to build this bridge as soon as possible - and to make it as strong as possible.

WOMEN WORKERS COME FIRST

In our movement women workers have a special place because they carry the heaviest load of all. It is the duty of every COSATU worker to make sure that the demands, participation and struggle of women workers are strengthened a thousand times over. If our liberation does not succeed in creating free people, equal to each other in every way, then we would not be liberated.

Our struggles for maternity rights; equal pay for work of equal value; childcare facilities that meet workers needs; against sexual harassment and harmful work must have the highest priority in all our struggles today.

Our leading role in the struggle depends on the courage, determination and leadership of women workers.

ONE FEDERATION - ONE COUNTRY - NOW

Comrades - we are at a crossroads. We see a year of more struggle, more hardship and more suffering - and more hope. Now is the time. If we are to live, then we must go forward together against the bosses system of profit and greed. We can see how far we have come. COSATU is the home for every worker in South Africa - employed and unemployed. That is why the old bosses' federation TUCSA has broken up. That is why the bosses are desperately trying to promote UWUSA against COSATU. All their divisive efforts are doomed to failure if we are united. There should now be no obstacle for all democratic unions to come together with us and form one federation in one country.

OUR TASKS

We are committed to the leadership of the working class in the struggle. This year we must show what this means by consolidating and uniting our organisation, COSATU, in decisive united action with other progressive organisations under the leadership of organised workers.

To do this we will need the widest possible democratic debate, through all our structures, on our weaknesses and our strengths, so that we can come to our National Congress in July with the program for the workers' way forward.

We must, through our organised strength and unity and clarity of purpose, really unite and really lead the vast mass of our people to a new, transformed society - a society where the needs of workers will be paramount. How we build this society and what it will be like must be deeply discussed in our affiliates and in COSATU structures before the Congress and after it.

Comrade workers - the future is in your hands. The struggle depends on you and you alone. Make sure your organisation, COSATU, is united. Make sure your union is participating fully and actively in all the structures of COSATU. Make sure COSATU is democratic. Make sure COSATU is doing what you want under your control. The workers united can never be defeated.

CONSOLIDATE AND ADVANCE

BUILD MAXIMUM UNITY OF THE WORKING CLASS

ONE UNION ONE INDUSTRY, ONE FEDERATION ONE COUNTRY