

Trade unionists from all three major federations, COSATU, NACTU and FEDSAL, look back on 1992 as "a very difficult year" in collective bargaining. However, although they experienced very similar problems, they propose a diversity of approaches as to how to deal with them. DOT KEET draws together some of their views on perspectives and priorities for 1993.

collective bargaining: *trade union perspectives on 1992 and 1993*

When COSATU unions held their national collective bargaining conferences in the early months of 1992, they set themselves bold targets for the coming rounds of negotiations with employers.

These included, above all, demands for real wage increases, a halt to escalating retrenchments, progress towards centralised bargaining, and a determination to persuade – or even push – employers into national industrial forums for serious collective discussions with the unions on the problems in the respective sectors of the economy.

Toward the end of 1992, a survey of union negotiators and organisers (from all three major federations) on collective bargaining problems and achievements over the year produced some sobering reports, starting with wages.

Wages

With few exceptions, all trade unions across the spectrum report wage agreements at, or

below, the rate of inflation – which represent real wages decreases. For 1993, union negotiators say

- ★ "We will have to draw the line. We have to prevent further erosion of wages... regardless of gold prices," *NUM national negotiator, Martin Nicol.*
- ★ "Higher wages will be our top priority, but we do not expect to get above inflation increases next year," *MEWUSA national organiser, Tommy Oliphant.*
- ★ "This must be our top priority," *CAWU national negotiator, Desmond Mahashe.*
- ★ "We don't think that higher wages will be on our negotiating agenda next year," *BCAWU national organiser, Vusi Thusi.*
- ★ "We need to get a fair balance between wage improvements and the need to maintain maximum employment," *FEDSAL general secretary, Dannhauser Van der Merwe.*
- ★ "Wage restraint is not the solution because it does not always mean more jobs. Often it

simply entails lower wages *and* fewer jobs," **SACTWU assistant general secretary Ebrahim Patel.**

Defending jobs

With heavy job losses continuing throughout 1992, most unionists point to defence of jobs as being "the top priority" for 1993. They say

★ "This is a major crisis," **SACTWU head of collective bargaining, Mark Bennett.**

★ "We would even take a cut in salaries to save jobs," **FEDSAL.**

★ "Our priority is to save

jobs; but we have to balance this against the need to protect basic standards," **NUM.**

During 1992 many unions fought for moratoriums on retrenchments while seeking alternative solutions. Such alternatives to job losses are projected as a major challenge for 1993.

★ "Discussions are going on within the union at present on how to approach the problem of retrenchments creatively. We are not against the introduction of new technology and work organisation, but it must not be at the expense of present levels of employment," **SACCAWU collective bargaining co-ordinator, Motsomi Mokhine.**

★ "It is easy to feel defeated on our demand for a moratorium on retrenchments. But the reality is that we haven't built a unified and coordinated struggle around the COSATU Congress demand for a moratorium," **PPWAWU.**

Some unionists adopt a more defensive approach by focussing negotiations on improved retrenchment procedures and packages, because

★ "Despite agreements with management,

workers have been retrenched. We are now striving to prepare better [retrenchment] packages for our members," **Food and Beverage Workers' Union (FBWU).**

★ "Better dismissal procedures have been achieved with Anglo-American, but we still have a long way to go. In mining we are going to be involved in a defensive struggle over jobs for the next twenty years," **NUM.**

Training

A more common – and more proactive – union approach to defending jobs is through retraining for different placement or alternative employment. This is regarded as

★ "... our major achievement in 1992. The innovative Work Security Fund in the Auto Sector includes training and retraining as well as preference in re-employment and maintenance of service-related benefits," **NUMSA**

national negotiator, Les Kettledas.

Furthermore,

★ "Training will contribute towards job security because employers cannot easily retrench people in whom they

have invested," **SACCAWU general secretary Papi Kganare.**

But training is also seen as vitally important in itself:

★ "Training will be our first item on the agenda for next year," **MEWUSA.**

★ "Advancing on Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) is very important in order to overcome the craft unions' monopolisation of skills," **CWIU, acting general secretary Muzi Buthelezi.**

★ "We have to open up craft skills and training to our members through ITBs in building and civil engineering," **CAWU.**



Martin Nicol, NUM

Photo: William Matlala



Tommy Oliphant, MEWUSA

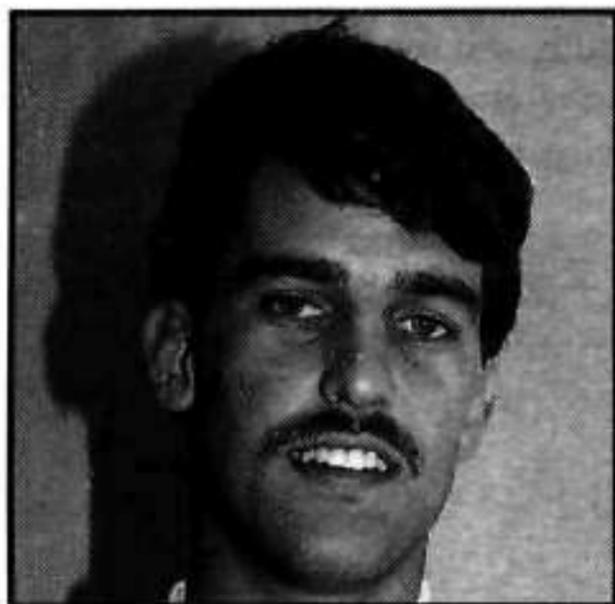
Photo: Sue Kramer

Creating jobs

The most common unionist approach, however, seems to be that the best way to defend jobs is to create jobs through industrial restructuring and economic development.

Thus, for example:

- ★ "We need to actively participate and, where feasible, initiate employment creation projects as part of the Work Security Fund in the auto sector," **NUMSA**.
- ★ "We need massive labour intensive, government funded job creation programmes, for example in housing, road building and so on," **CAWU**.
- ★ "The answer to retrenchments is to create jobs, not through works programmes, but



**Dannhauser v d Merwe,
FEDSAL**

Photo: William Matlala

through economic reconstruction," **CWIU**.

- ★ "In order to create jobs we are going to have to restructure the entire mining industry. We must provide alternative uses for mining assets, redevelop

mining towns, encourage rural development. Basically, we are going to have to have these things legislated," **NUM**.

Centralised bargaining

The negotiating effectiveness of the unions will, in turn, depend crucially on progress towards centralised bargaining because:

- ★ "Centralised bargaining is the key to all other aims and priorities," **CWIU**.
- ★ "During 1993 we will be campaigning intensively for the formation of a national industrial council for the textile sector," **SACTWU national organiser, Jabu Gwala**.
- ★ "Centralised bargaining is absolutely essential for us. We'll take the issue to a national strike if necessary. We have had

overwhelming support from our members for this," **SACCAWU**.

- ★ "We have to achieve centralised bargaining together with recruitment. We cannot have a rapidly expanding membership unless we also have CB. We need an integrated approach," **TGWU assistant general secretary, Randall Howard**.



Ebrahim Patel, SACTWU

Photo: Sha

Many COSATU unions proposed central or national bargaining forums in their respective industries; but with differing responses from employers:

- ★ "We concentrated on central bargaining forums this year. Some small companies responded, but big companies evaded with various excuses. We will go ahead anyway and they will come in eventually," **SACCAWU**.
- ★ "There has been a hardening of attitudes amongst employers on centralised bargaining," **FEDSAL**.
- ★ "We have a national bargaining forum in the civil engineering sector which will probably lead to the setting up of an industrial council," **CAWU**.
- ★ "Nampak have responded to our demands for a national bargaining forum, but they want to develop a pattern of bargaining forums in order to pre-empt the setting up of a proper industrial council for the sector," **PPWAWU**.
- ★ "Many companies were willing to enter into discussions with us on industry forums. For example, we made a major breakthrough with Barlow Rand's Romatex...," **SACTWU**.
- ★ "We have achieved some national company negotiations, but no progress on national industry forums. It is going to be a hard

battle," *CWIU*.

★ "Do we aim for industrial councils or for central bargaining forums?" *SACCAWU*.

★ Centralised bargaining is directly related to industrial restructuring. The ICs should be

made to take up the questions of industrial restructuring," *TGWU*.

Industrial restructuring

★ "... is high on our agenda for next year and the future. It is essential in

the construction sector," *CAWU*.

★ "The specific demand that we make for our sector as a whole is for the involvement of our union in the whole process of restructuring within our industry," *FAWU general secretary, Mandla Gxanyana*.

★ "This is an absolutely key issue for us in the mining sector. Restructuring of the entire mining industry will have to be discussed in the working groups that emerged from the Mining Summit in 1991. These are as important

for us as the National Economic Forum," *NUM*.

★ "This is our number one priority for next year. We already

have research on industrial restructuring under way in the auto and engineering sectors," *NUMSA*.



Les Kettleidas, NUMSA

Photo: William Matlala



Papi Kganare, SACCAWU

Photo: William Matlala

★ "During 1992 SACTWU was engaged in a defensive struggle against retrenchments, but in 1993 we will launch an offensive fight to tackle the structural problems responsible for the decline of industries in our sector," *SACTWU*.

★ "We have to get to grips with the economic issues in our sectors. But we have a size problem. We cannot afford specialised personnel," *PPWAWU*.

★ "This is absolutely essential for our future. We must develop the skills to persuade the future democratic government to adopt policies necessary for the future of the mining industry," *NUM*.

Role of the democratic state?

There are differing approaches amongst unionists to the role of the state in the process of economic restructuring in South Africa.

★ "The state has an important role in infra-structural development and job creation," *CAWU*.

★ "The state will have to intervene actively. We need a government that will subsidise gold mining during the

restructuring process and, if necessary, threaten the mining houses," *NUM*.

★ "The democratic government must participate in a broad transport policy forum to deal with the disasters of the current apartheid-based transport system. We must develop progressive mass transport policies including nationalisations, especially in passenger transport," *TGWU*.

★ "Industrial councils should be legislated to oblige employers to accept centralised bargaining," *CWIU*.

★ "Industrial councils or industrial forums



Muzi Buthelezi, CWIU

Photo: Shariff

must not be legislated. They must be won by us through our struggles. The democratic state must not intervene in industrial relations. It can play a role in broader



Jabu Gwala, SACTWU

Photo: Morice

socio-economic or labour market questions. It can facilitate or monitor, but it must not decide," **SACCAWU, general secretary Papi Kganare.**

★ "We cannot just wait for a democratic government. We

must move forward with the other unions to ensure the future government is responsive to workers' needs," **PPWAWU.**

Labour unity

Although labour unity is regarded as a necessity, unions in the different federations - and even within COSATU itself - seem to give the question of trade union mergers and organisational unity different weight for the coming year:

★ "This is our major organisational project for next year. Our merger must go ahead with SARHWU; as well as with SATDU (taxi drivers) and SASTAWU (scooters). We have invited other unions to join the forthcoming goods transport IC and the Transport Unions' Forum. There is no better way to achieve maximum unity amongst transport workers," **TGWU.**

★ "A merger between SACTWU and the leather workers unions would allow for the development of appropriate strategies for the restructuring of the crisis-ridden leather industry, and for more effective bargaining with employers," **SACTWU.**

★ "This is essential in our sector, but we are not even hopeful of progress because SACWU is evading the issue of unity with us unless there is a merger between NACTU

and COSATU first. Whereas we feel that, without commitment to unity by the affiliates, merging at the national level will be fruitless," **CWIU.**

★ "This is a big problem for us. There are many small unions in our different sectors (SATU in typographical, NUFAWU in furniture, MWASA in paper/printing). We have to aim to win their members at the base on specific issues and through offering better benefits," **PPWAWU.**

★ We are facing growing union rivalry on the shopfloor (with BCAWU and SAAWU) and even violence. The national level has to facilitate ground-level co-operation. We also have to extend the collective bargaining unit to include more skilled and even white workers," **CAWU.**

★ "This is our major challenge for next year," **BCAWU.**

★ "There is a steering committee of NUMSA and NACTU's Metal and Electrical Workers Union (MEWUSA) representatives discussing a merger between the two unions. As part of the process of broadening worker unity we are also aiming to include skilled, white collar workers in the bargaining units in our sectors," **NUMSA.**

★ "NUMSA's alliance with the ANC/SACP is a major hurdle at the moment. We are prepared to merge as soon as the process towards democratic elections is over," **MEWUSA.**

★ "The party political alignment of trade unions must be ended. Then prospects for labour unity would be much better. In the meantime, we must concentrate on commonalities, on the areas where we agree," **FEDSAL.**



Randall Howard, TGWU

Photo: William Math

Trade union growth

Recruiting amongst more skilled workers, and other less organised sectors of the working population seems, for many unions, to be part of their broader trade union growth strategies in the coming year:

★ "We are losing members but we are not going to expand simply by organising more. We have to achieve amalgamations with existing smaller unions in all our sectors; and we must win over more skilled (especially



Mandla Gxanyana, FAWU

Photo: William Matlala

coloured and Indian) workers," **PPWAWU**.

★ "Membership loss through retrenchments is being off-set by new recruitment in new mines and new geographical areas. We are also aiming to

move forward in recruitment in new grades," **NUM**.

★ "We have suffered fairly dramatic losses, but we are also taking in members in new sectors (such as leather), new geographical areas (such as the homelands) and generally in the rural areas (where we are mopping up small companies), and we are moving into higher (staff) grades," **SACTWU**.

★ We will have to try to move into and recruit in higher grades, extending the bargaining unit, but white workers are still resistant," **CWIU**.

★ "We have to have a clear union growth strategy, targeting specific sectors. We can't sit and wait for workers to come to us," **TGWU**.

The mood in the unions

Despite the difficult year they have just been through, and the unfavourable economic prospects for 1993, reports by unionists on the mood within the trade unions across the

spectrum are worth noting for the coming year:

★ "The (mainly skilled) membership of the trade unions in our federation has grown because of fear of retrenchments," **FEDSAL**.

★ "The majority of our members are very angry.... But we are not going to be able to pull out another strike in the coming year," **MEWUSA**.

★ "If we don't deliver next year on concrete wage advances, a defiant 'to hell with them' anger amongst many miners might be expressed in spontaneous actions," **NUM**.

★ "Our members will be willing to act if we ballot them on a national bargaining forum. But we know some companies are gearing up for confrontation with us – as they did with NUMSA. We are going to act with tactical care," **SACCAWU, Motsomi Mokhine**.

★ "There is a mood of rage amongst our members at the appalling conditions. But militancy has to be channelled in a tactically responsible way. The experience of NUMSA must be a warning to us," **CAWU**.

★ "Trade unions have lost a number of big struggles this past year, such as the NUMSA strike, and we must look at the role that our leadership and poor organisation has played in those defeats," **PPWAWU**.

★ "We have a good direct sense of the mood of the members on the ground. They feel that further action is necessary to convince



Thulani Dhlamini, TGWU

Photo: William Matlala

employers that we *are* serious. We can expect independent 'non-regulated' actions and demonstrations, whether we ballot for strike action or not," **TGWU National Negotiator, Thulani Dhlamini**. ☆