



*the*  
**COSATU/ANC**  
*alliance:*



**what does COSATU think?**

by KARL VON HOLDT\*

"I am not too optimistic that the ANC will protect the interests of workers and that it will be in

favour of socialism when it is the government."  
..... FAWU's Transvaal regional secretary in an

interview with *Labour Bulletin* some months ago (see 'Profile' in Vol 15 No 6).

\* This article focuses on the ANC and its relationship with COSATU. I do not attempt to discuss the other partner in the tripartite alliance, the SA Communist Party.

## THE COSATU/ANC ALLIANCE

The comment quoted on the previous page may sound strange, coming from an official in one of the most militantly Charterist of COSATU's affiliates. But over the past twelve months there has been increasing concern within COSATU over whether the working class has real influence

the difficulties of relocating from Lusaka to South Africa and building a legal mass organisation from scratch; being flung into complex and tricky negotiations with the regime; reorientating its politics to meet the needs of the new situation; responding to demands for consultations with every kind of organisation and inter-

action

- lack of an organising programme
- secretive negotiations, a poor negotiating strategy, and a willingness to compromise on major issues such as the demand for a constituent assembly
- lack of a strategic perspective
- lack of coherence and collectivity in the leadership
- leadership dominated by exiles with an inadequate understanding of mass organisation and action.

Two examples help illustrate some of COSATU's criticisms - the ANC's negotiations over violence, and the struggle for a constituent assembly.

### The violence and negotiations

Violence has swept like a terrible plague across South Africa. Awful massacres and daily murders shatter communities and disrupt organisation. It has become clear that there is collusion between elements in the security forces and Inkatha vigilantes. The De Klerk regime has shown no inclination to take firm action.

The ANC has been unable to respond effectively to the violence. "The leadership was told to implement defence committees, but they have been unable to do this," says a unionist. "Before the ANC was unbanned we would have taken creative initiatives, and organised a series of campaigns around the violence," said another. "We would have



*Peace, jobs and freedom march: COSATU influence on alliance campaigns*

*Photo: Abdul Shariff*

within the ANC. At the same time, there has been growing anger about the ANC leadership's lack of consultation with its own members and with COSATU, and about its poor negotiating strategy. In the words of a leading COSATU figure, "The ANC has paralysed COSATU and other MDM organisations politically."

Despite these criticisms, the majority of trade unionists in COSATU see their task as supporting, strengthening and democratising the ANC, rather than distancing themselves from it. They point to the enormous pressures on the ANC:

est group; trying to develop policy on a wide range of issues; facing a campaign of violence from Inkatha and the security forces on the ground. It is, as NUMSA general secretary Moses Mayekiso says, understandable that the ANC should have problems.

But the problems which worry trade unionists cannot simply be explained by these pressures. Trade unionists refer to:

- lack of consultation with ANC allies, especially COSATU
- lack of consultation and democracy within the ANC
- lack of any programme of



*Poor negotiating strategy, no programme of action... first government/ANC meeting*

*Photo: Benny Gool/Afrapix*

used the campaigns to build branches, build the alliance, build the patriotic front. But the ANC seems ineffectual."

Towards the end of last year, strong feeling developed in the unions that the ANC negotiators were not being tough enough, and that negotiations should be suspended until the government brought the violence under control. In April this year COSATU began threatening a stayaway to put pressure on the government. Then suddenly in mid-April they were informed that the ANC had issued an ultimatum to the government to take seven steps to end the violence. Unionists were pleased that at last the ANC had taken a stand - but upset that COSATU had not been

consulted.

Some days later there was a joint meeting of the executives of the ANC, the SACP and COSATU. The discussion focused on a programme of action to put pressure on the regime. All three organisations agreed to go back to their structures to discuss the proposals. But before the COSATU executive could meet, they read in the newspaper that Mandela was to meet again with De Klerk. Later the ANC moderated the seven demands it had originally put to the government - again without consultation.

Unionists were angry. "How can you mobilise your mass membership for action around demands, when at any moment someone will go off and nego-

tiate with your opponent again - you don't know on what mandate, what demands, and what was agreed? It simply confuses people. They don't know what they are acting for, so they do nothing." Unionists felt that the ANC lacked negotiating skills, and that it showed no understanding of how to link negotiations to a programme of action.

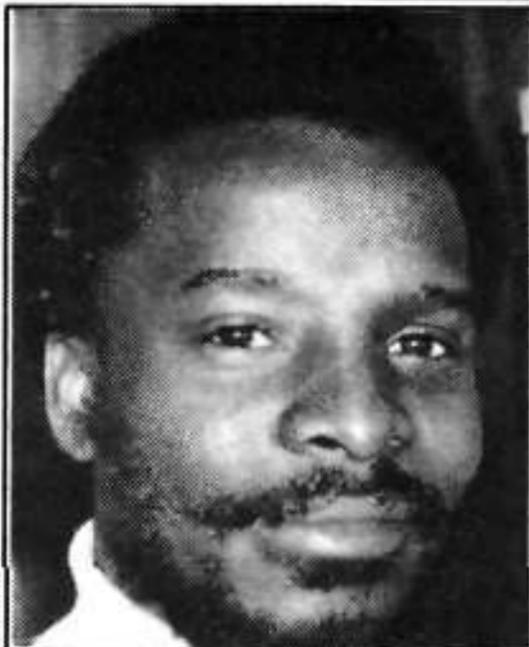
However, as the negotiating crisis deepened, COSATU was able to exert some influence. After two weeks, when its demands had not been met, the ANC suspended negotiations and announced that there would be a series of mass actions. Key actions were to be a stayaway, and a day of protest marches countrywide on 15 June.

The tripartite alliance had held consultations before announcing the mass action. Clearly COSATU's own experience and programme of mass action influenced the ANC, and gave it a series of events to mobilise around. The 15th of June had already been chosen at COSATU's national campaigns conference in March, as a day of mass marches by workers in support of COSATU's demand to end retrenchments. COSATU's economic policy conference towards the end of May formulated the slogan 'Peace, jobs, freedom!' for the marches. This slogan was then adopted by the ANC. The slogan combines immediate economic and political demands for an end to retrenchment and violence, with the broader political goal of freedom.

These events show how COSATU, with its working class perspective and experience of national campaigns, is able to help shape ANC programmes. But this potential has not been fully exploited.

### **The ANC and the demand for a constituent assembly**

Towards the end of last year it became clear that sections of the ANC leadership were not committed to the demand for a constituent assembly (CA). Some of them believed that it was an unattainable demand, and should therefore not be put forward. They argued (and still do) that the CA is simply one mechanism among many for achieving a democratic constitution.



**PPWAWU's Siphon Kubheka**

*Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin*

On the other hand, COSATU strongly supports a CA as the most democratic forum for drawing up a constitution. Because it is open and democratic, a CA would prevent secret deals and assure the working class of a powerful influence. At its Workers' Charter conference in November last year, COSATU reiterated its demand for a constituent assembly, and resolved to campaign for this. This position was bound to have some influence within the ANC leadership.

When the ANC floated the idea of an all-party congress in its important January 8 address to the nation, there was immediate suspicion that this meant the constituent assembly was being abandoned. When COSATU took this suspicion to the executive meeting of the tripartite alliance in February, the ANC "clarified" its position that the all-party congress was not supposed to be a substitute for a constituent assembly. Since then ANC spokespeople have been somewhat firmer in their backing for the constituent assembly demand.

### **Consultation and negotiations**

While COSATU has managed to exert some influence, many unionists feel

COSATU has been treated as a junior partner in the alliance. COSATU was not consulted before the ANC raised the idea of an all-party congress or before it issued its ultimatum on violence. It was not consulted before the ANC agreed to suspend armed struggle, nor has it been adequately consulted on the progress of negotiations.

Unionists, with their years of negotiating skill, feel the ANC has been weak in its negotiating strategy.

PPWAWU's Siphon Kubheka expands on this: "The masses have been left in darkness. There are obviously heated arguments behind closed doors, but you only notice this when you read in the press that the Minutes have been breached, or the talks are suspended. Then we are called on to act without knowing the reasons or what is happening."

Several unionists criticise the secrecy of the 'talks about talks' and the joint working groups. "The government and the ANC reached agreement on the return of exiles and the release of prisoners," says COSATU vice-president Chris Dlamini, "but no-one knew what was entailed in these agreements. When the government raised new issues and said the ANC was reneging on the agreements, we were not sure who was giving the correct version. We were unsure what action could be taken."

Negotiations behind closed doors make it impossible for mass action to influence negotiations. "When we go into factory negotiations," says Kubheka, "we have constant report-backs. The people on the ground then assess the situation and say whether to advance or retreat, or prepare for a dispute. They are the ones that guide the process. But with the ANC it is the other way round."

"The people must feel they are setting the pace," says NUM president James Motlatsi. "Now it seems the ANC NEC is setting the pace."

Chris Dlamini echoes this. "Some comrades believe the regime is ready for change. They feel they are failing if they make no progress, so they are too willing to revise their positions. This has created confusion about what our bottom line is. The masses need to know the bottom line. If the regime refuses to compromise, then we should go back to the masses and debate action to force the regime to shift. We will make serious mistakes if we carry on like this."

COSATU general secretary Jay Naidoo compares the ANC's 'talks about talks' with COSATU's approach to the LRA negotiations. "The ANC often makes vague agreements which can be reinterpreted or changed later by the regime. This leads to confusion and conflict over what was agreed. It is unwise to simply rely on your opponents' 'integrity' and on broad agreement. For example, when we finally had the manpower minister at the

table we reached broad agreement on changes to the LRA within two hours. He got up to go. We said, no, that's not good enough. We kept him there until two in the morning working through our agreement clause by clause. That way there can be no confusion and no renegeing. The details must be spelt out in black and white."

### **No programme of action**

The lack of a clear negotiating strategy is part of a bigger problem: the lack of a programme of action. According to Dlamini, "this is the key weakness of the alliance. We have no programme of action around the immediate issues in the talks about talks, and we have no programme around our demands such as an interim government and a constituent assembly."

"We require a programmatic approach to issues such as the violence," says Naidoo. "What are we trying to achieve? You cannot just turn mass action on and off like a tap."

While most unionists apportion blame to all three alliance partners, the ANC as the leading actor on the political terrain must clearly shoulder a large part of the responsibility. "COSATU and other MDM organisations have been politically paralysed," says a senior union leader. "They have had to stand back as the ANC moved centre stage."

However, Motlatsi argues that COSATU itself has made serious mistakes: "At the very

time when ANC was unbanned, we as NUM proposed that COSATU should join the ANC's negotiating team - but we were outvoted. Now we cannot blame the ANC. We could have brought our experience and corrected the problems right from the beginning." Many unionists now believe NUM was right.

### **Democracy**

Worker leaders do not only criticise the ANC for failing to consult adequately with its allies; they also believe that it has failed to consult with its own members, and that the leadership are not accountable to their base. As an example, a union general secretary refers to the ANC's consultative conference in December last year. At the conference, delegates - many of whom were COSATU members active in ANC branches - criticised the ANC leadership for negotiating without consultation and report-backs. In his closing address Nelson Mandela criticised some of the positions adopted by the delegates.

"Criticisms were put forward constructively with the aim of building the ANC," says the unionist. "Then the NEC - through Mandela - stood up and told the whole world that we were inexperienced and did not understand negotiations. He was not debating this with us in closed session, but telling the whole world through the media in open session, when no-one would have dared to stand up and differ. In COSATU you would never hear Jay Naidoo

or Elijah Barayi do this. After the conference, even after all that criticism, the leadership continued as if nothing had happened."

Unionists, steeped in a culture of mandates and accountability, believe one of the chief weaknesses of the ANC is its lack of a democratic structure. "The ANC has enormous human resources in the branches and regions," says Kgalima Motlanthe, who is NUM's education officer and

which takes place every three years. "The constitution has to be changed," says Motlanthe. "There has to be much stronger representation from the regions, so that delegates are accountable to the base."

Many unionists (and other activists) agree with this view, and indeed the NEC's draft has been rejected by the ANC regions. After some resistance from the NEC, it was replaced with a much more democratic draft.

to understand that the democratic movement really developed its mass character, its working class orientation and its revolutionary experience in the mass struggles of the 1980s. But the current NEC is a different generation with different experiences."

"We comrades who were active inside the country thought the exiled leadership were without faults," says Kubheka. "We did not take into account the effects of exile, of being far from home, of working underground. When the ANC was unbanned we noticed problems."

The current leadership of the ANC is almost entirely made up of exiles and former Robben Island prisoners. "But the main core of the leadership should come from the MDM, as we are the ones with mass experience," says Alan Roberts, COSATU's Western Cape Regional Secretary and former FAWU organiser, and an SACP activist. "We used to romanticise the role of the exiles and the Islanders. But if we analyse it clearly, their particular skills and experiences placed limits on their contribution. ANC activists come from three traditions - the Island, exile, and the internal movement or MDM. The ANC has not analysed these different traditions and how to integrate them."

Kubheka adds: "We have to admit making some mistakes. When the ANC was unbanned we said it should immediately assume the leadership - and so we lost the culture that had been established between the



*The MDM's defiance campaign in 1989: the ANC has not drawn on this rich experience of mass struggle*

*Photo: Rafs Mayet/Afrapix*

also chairperson of the powerful PWV region of the ANC. "But it has not been able to tap those people."

The draft constitution put out by the ANC NEC did not inspire confidence in the ability of the leadership to address this problem. It increased the size of the NEC, and provided for most delegates to be elected from the conference floor or to be co-opted by the NEC. These delegates would not be accountable to any constituency except conference -

### **ANC leadership**

If all of these criticisms are valid, if the ANC leadership does not consult, if it does not understand mass action and has no strategy, if it is undemocratic and produces such an undemocratic draft constitution, then what sort of organisation is it? Can one say that it is an organisation with a bias towards the working class? Can one call it a revolutionary organisation?

A leading COSATU figure answers this way: "You have

UDF and COSATU. From 1986 the two organisations had established a culture of consultation and struggle and mutual respect. Now we handed over leadership to comrades from the ANC without them having established roots. Although it is debatable whether it could have been done differently."

There is a strong sense among unionists that the leadership needs to be "revitalised". In Kubheka's words, "leadership should come from a constituency: we need strong organisational structures on the ground to give direction. We need to allow open constructive criticism, and there should be a practice of report-back and mandate." He acknowledges that this implies changing the leadership and the NEC's draft constitution.

Many unionists feel frustrated by a lack of coherence among the ANC leadership. "They keep giving different positions and changing their decisions," says one. The most recent example occurred on the weekend of 15-16 June, when a member of the ANC's constitutional committee said the ANC was flexible on the demand for an interim government, while Mandela reiterated an inflexible position.

Part of the problem is the personal power wielded by deputy president Nelson Mandela. He is a man of great personal strength and discipline, who can be both remote and charming. While he has

firm principles and integrity, his "imperial leadership style" does not encourage collective and democratic decision-making. Many of the NEC members clustered around him are ineffectual men with no independent base, who constantly seek Mandela's favour because he is seen as the source of power. Among those who *are* competent there are differing political views, so ANC policy at any given moment seems to depend on who



COSATU's Chris Dlamini  
Photo: Afrapix

is articulating it. Mandela needs to be surrounded by a strong representative leadership to ensure that his strengths do not become weaknesses.

Not all unionists are confident that Mandela's understanding of democracy is the same as their own. But for many, "Mandela is still the greatest leader our people have produced," as TGWU president Sam Shilowa says.

### Strategic perspective

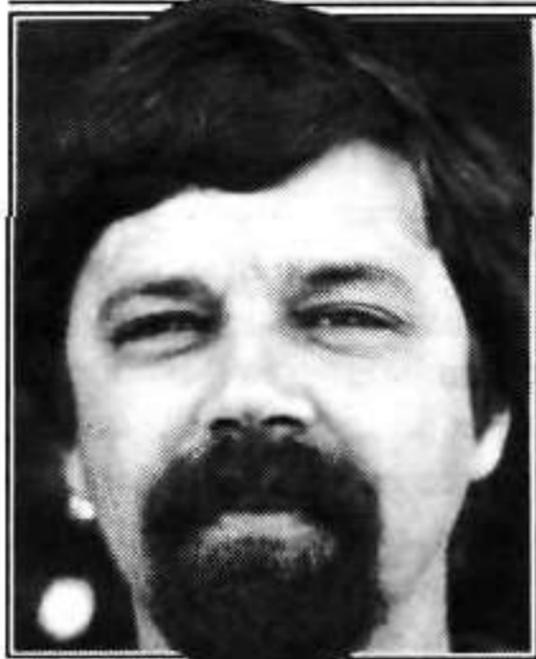
"The violence and attacks have stopped ANC from growing in most areas, and there is no strategy for recruiting new members," says Kubheka. "Since 2 February we cannot

claim that we have made any gains," says Dlamini, "whereas De Klerk has made gains internationally, and even in our communities. Some see him as a 'man of integrity', or a comrade." "We no longer seem able to influence the middle-ground," says Motlanthe.

The ambiguities in the ANC's approach to the constituent assembly and interim government demands, the conflicting statements from different leaders, the disjunction between negotiations and mass campaigns, all indicate that the ANC lacks an overall strategic perspective. Some complain that neither the Freedom Charter nor the Harare Declaration seem to be guiding the organisation.

There is growing concern that the democratic movement is losing ground to De Klerk. Roberts fears that "the ANC will lose support to the NP, which is more and more seen as the only force capable of ushering in a new South Africa." The violence is shattering ANC structures. Activists and their constituencies have become demoralised and demobilised. They feel they have no influence over events, and are disempowered by the ANC's manner of negotiating.

De Klerk is making ground internationally. He is increasingly able to present the NP as the only force capable of leading SA into a democratic future, and is winning support in the coloured and Indian communities, and among liberal whites, who were



COSATU's Alan Roberts  
Photo: Benny Gool/Afrapix

previously sympathetic to the ANC.

Unless the ANC can develop a strategic perspective to guide the organisation and its members in the period ahead, it will be unable to regain the strategic initiative from De Klerk.

### The alliance

"The alliance has made no vivid progress," judges Chris Dlamini. "We react to issues at the last minute, not in an organised fashion. COSATU has not had a visible input or influence in the alliance."

"Some of the actions of the ANC make a mockery of the alliance," says Siphokheba. "You meet in the alliance and decide on strategy and tactics. While you are reporting to your members the next day you read a different thing in the newspapers."

"Our active shop stewards are becoming disillusioned and thousands of workers who should join the ANC are not," says Alan Roberts. "Workers have a real experience of negotiations, of real battles. They are used to assessing strategies

and tactics and actions. They shape the policy of negotiations. They can see the weaknesses of the ANC."

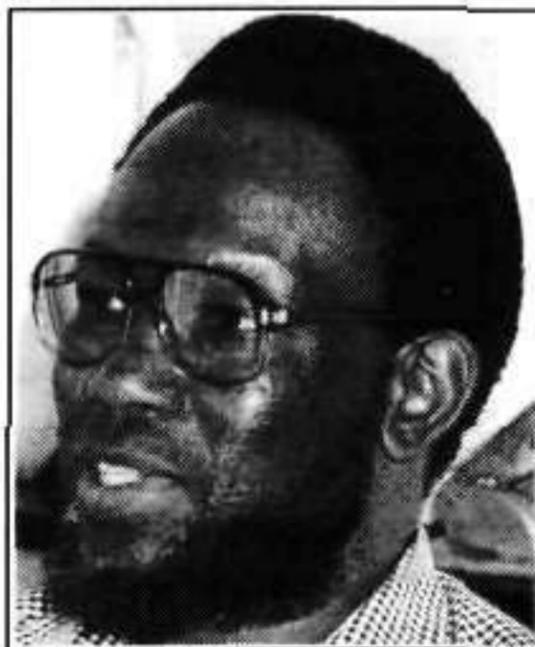
Many COSATU leaders acknowledge that COSATU itself is partly to blame. "It is a problem of all organisations in the alliance," says Moses Mayekiso. According to Kgalima Motlanthe, "COSATU has not prepared itself well for meetings of the alliance. We need to have proper discussions of all political issues in COSATU, so that we can go with a proper mandate." Jay Naidoo believes meetings have been unsatisfactory because "there has been a lack of preparation and follow-up." In Dlamini's view "there has been a lack on the part of COSATU. The ANC is not unwilling to listen, to take the part of the working class."

Despite these self-criticisms, COSATU has had some impact on the ANC, as argued above. But COSATU is seeking much more consistent influence in the alliance. Many unionists recalled COSATU's decision not to participate in 'talks about talks'. This, they said (agreeing with Motlatsi), was a "definite mistake". According to Naidoo, "We should have been there. Negotiation is a site of struggle. With our experience of negotiation and mass struggle, and of mandates and report backs, we could have helped."

SACTWU general secretary John Copelyn is not sure that the unions have that much to offer the ANC. "It is true to say that the problems by the alliance are to a large extent

the problems of the ANC as it tries to establish its positions and its coherence. We need to establish a more stable and structured way of making decisions.

"But the unions are a bit arrogant to suggest they could do that much better in negotiations. The state has tremendous power at this point, and I think the agreements represent the actual balance of forces. Don't forget, we're talking power, not talking clever - I doubt the unionists could do better. Moreover, the union movement itself is very weak and is often unable to service its members or negotiate adequately. I suspect the union is in



NUM's Kgalima Motlanthe  
Photo: Abdul Shariff

much the same position as the ANC. If you took ten of the most seasoned unionists and seconded them to the ANC you would seriously weaken the trade unions."

This issue will be on the agenda at COSATU's congress in July. Affiliates are discussing two options: COSATU could participate directly in negotiations, or it

## the Two hats debate

The emergence of leading national and regional COSATU leaders as leaders in the SA Communist Party, and of regional union leaders as ANC leaders, has sparked a sometimes heated debate as to whether it is desirable for union leaders to wear two or more hats (see Copelyn in Labour Bulletin Vol 15 No 6, Cronin in Vol 15 No 7, and Copelyn again in this edition).

Most COSATU affiliates have accepted their leadership may wear two hats if this does not affect their union work. For some it is a temporary arrangement: when the ANC and the SACP have become firmly established, and when apartheid has given way to democracy, leaders will have to choose which organisation to represent. For some, such as COSATU vice-president and FAWU president Chris Dlamini, and PPWAWU secretary general secretary Siphon Kubheka, this is because they expect the ANC to become the government.

"You cannot both represent and reprimand," says Dlamini. This view leaves open the possibility of dual leadership with the SACP.

NUMSA general secretary Moses Mayekiso disagrees. "We want the ANC to be biased towards the poor, the workers, even if it is the government. This will be very important for reshaping the society. You cannot only do this through the alliance. You need to be inside where policies and ideas are shaped. If you are then forced to resign from the union you will lose touch and no longer have a base to influence you." Mayekiso believes there are dangers - but only if the trade unions go blindly and without ideas about the future. "We must help drive the wagon, not just be

driven."

Kubheka feels the wearing of two hats is only necessary because there is such a shortage of experienced leadership. "It is an urgent task to create new layers of leadership," he says. Even in unions which do accept dual leadership, many unionists fear the union will suffer from overstretched leadership. This is believed to underlie the motion brought by the Secunda region of the NUM to their congress, demanding the end of dual leadership within 30 days. The motion was defeated.

NUM president James Motlatsi believes unionists should play a leading role in the ANC, but not as representatives of the unions. "They should not be pushed by COSATU - they should be chosen by their branches and regions because they are active members of the ANC. However, being from the labour movement we will push a working class perspective."

A minority of unionists in COSATU believe dual leadership should be banned immediately, not only because of overstretching, but because of a potential conflict of interests even in the current situation.

SACTWU and its general secretary John Copelyn have argued this position most forcefully. Although this is a minority position now, there may well be a majority in favour of placing some limitations on dual leadership of COSATU and the ANC if and when the later comes closer to forming a government. As for dual leadership of COSATU and the SACP, this may depend on how the party develops. If it succeeds in developing as a mass workers party with very broad appeal in the working class, dual leadership may become uncontroversial. ❖

could second skilled personnel to ANC negotiating teams. Many unionists interviewed seem to favour seconding skilled COSATU negotiators

to the ANC team. They point out that this would ensure COSATU influence, since such personnel would retain their links with the federation.

### Hopes and fears

Most COSATU unionists believe the liberation movement is extremely important for the union federation. In Jay Nai-

doo's view: "The alliance is a very important vehicle for us to achieve our ends. The forces ranged against us are very powerful - big business, imperialism, a powerful state. *We ourselves will need a powerful state orientated towards the working class - the ANC has to be strong...*" Mayekiso says, "The trade union movement wants to change society, but it cannot do this alone. It needs to influence other organisations, it needs friends to push our aspirations."

Whether the state is weak or strong will affect the extent to which society is orientated towards the needs of the working class: "The question is how to intervene in society and the economy in a way that meets the interests of the working class and the people," says Naidoo. "It will be easier if there is a strong state, Although we cannot rule out progress in this direction even if the state is weak, as even the employers may realise a change is necessary. But the changes would not be as dramatic or radical."

Naidoo fears that if the ANC fails to "develop a programmatic approach to winning power, with a role for the mass of people," demoralisation may set in, and the ANC could lose elections. "We could then land up with the 70% marginalised / 30% privileged society which is the objective of capital and the state."

Sipho Kubheka hopes the ANC becomes strong and democratic. "This will allow the ANC to balance the de-

mands of capital and the demands of labour, but at the same time take a firm position on restructuring the economy with a bias towards labour." This means the unions would have to be prepared for hard battles against the employers in support of government programmes: "The government alone would not be able to force employers to do what it wants." If his hopes materialise, Kubheka expects a "march to a socialist order in the long term."

However, if the ANC is not



SACTWU's John Copelyn  
Photo: William Motlala/COSATU

democratised, Kubheka fears it will be taken over by class forces "which will go against the interests of the working class." The ANC would then be under pressure to meet the demands of capital, and "we will have to face blows against the working class, as in Zimbabwe."

If these fears materialise will the tradition of militancy and mobilisation be lost? Kubheka thinks not. "Our experience shows that if leadership comes with a settlement that does not satisfy, the struggle will con-

tinue." He recalls that when he started working in 1972, and tried to organise fellow workers, "people were scared of unions and would not talk about the ANC." With a lot of work "we broke out of that shell". Then "we suffered the terrible blows of the state of emergency, but we survived." Now even if there are obstacles he is confident that the struggle will continue.

Naidoo is less optimistic: "The working class in Europe and in the Soviet Union had a history of militancy and revolutionary struggle, and that has been lost. Our 30 000 shop stewards could become trapped in bureaucracy and inaction. Our tradition of organisation and struggle could be immobilised. We are placing our hopes in the organisations of civil society - but a strong state would be an enormous help. The state defines the ways in which civil society is empowered."

### Common perspectives in COSATU...

There is broad agreement within COSATU on several issues:

- *The need for the trade union movement to remain independent and powerful, both now and in the future.* While the unionists associated with the 'independent worker' position which was dominant in FOSATU, GWU and FCWU have always held this view, some of the unionists who come out of the 'national democratic' tradition have become more aware of the need for union inde-



*A strong ANC, a strong state - necessary for restructuring the economy with a bias towards labour*

*Photo: Afrapix*

pendence following the collapse of communist regimes and the unbanning of the ANC. At any rate, one can confidently state that COSATU unionists across the spectrum support union independence - although they have different ideas about how to ensure this.

- *A critical assessment of the ANC leadership's understanding of democracy and consultation, and concern about its strategic and*

*negotiating weaknesses.* Once again there is probably broad agreement that these problems exist, but different views on the causes and solutions of these problems.

- *The alliance with the ANC.* There is broad agreement on the need for this alliance. Again, there are different views underpinning this agreement. Some unionists may not feel enthusiastic about the ANC, but do not see any alternative. No other

political organisation has the potential to end apartheid, become a government and at the same time have at least some sympathy towards the interests of the working class. Those unionists who have long been ardent supporters of the ANC remain loyal to the organisation despite their criticisms, believing that struggle within the organisation can ensure its mass character and orientation towards the working class.

### **... and differences**

The majority view is probably expressed in the resolution on the alliance adopted at NUM's congress in May this year. The resolution notes that "decades of illegality has imposed serious limitations on the ANC" and argues that "building and strengthening the ANC will hasten the downfall of apartheid and enhance the attainment of votes for all"; that "the experience and leadership of the working class is an important element in shaping the policies of the ANC", and that the "accumulated experience of participatory democracy, accountability and mandates of the trade union movement must permeate ANC structures at all levels."

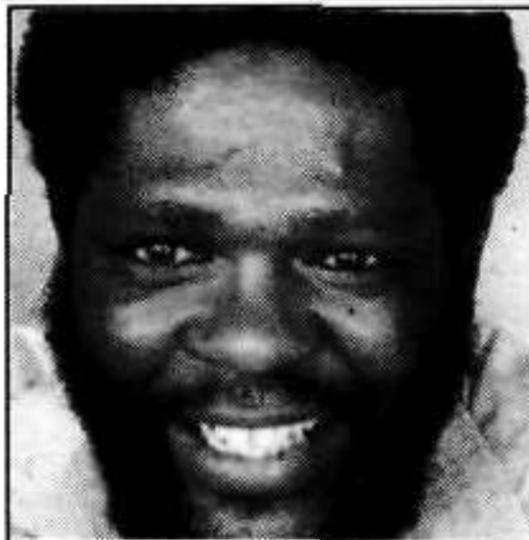
Mayekiso shares these views: "We need a strong ANC, an ANC biased towards the poor and the working class. Workers see the ANC as a vehicle to achieve their ends." He believes workers should strengthen the ANC both through its alliance with CO-

SATU, and through joining and working within it. "It would be proper for workers to have an ANC government."

According to Chris Dlamini, "the aspirations of the working class have to be reflected in the ANC. If it rejects or dishonours those aspirations there will be no need for us to be in an alliance with it."

Moses Mayekiso says that the problems experienced in the alliance have been raised and discussed. The alliance partners are now working systematically to solve them. Khubeka also says he is optimistic, although "it will be a long and painful process revitalising the ANC."

SACTWU's John Copelyn raises some very important reservations about this perspective. "In general it is quite appropriate for trade unions to enter into alliances with political organisations - providing of course that they operate under their own authority. But the key question is whether an alliance with the ANC will foster unity among our members or not. Our union's membership is quite distinct in COSATU. Whereas probably 90% of NUM's membership would support the ANC, I am not confident that the majority in our union would vote for it. This poses a special burden on our union to avoid divisiveness. We have 80 000 members in Natal, and 70 000 in the Western Cape - more than all the other COSATU affiliates put together. But they come from communities which are not bases for the ANC." This is a particularly



NUMSA's Moses Mayekiso

Photo: Afrapix

important point. Given that COSATU wishes to organise coloured, Indian and even white workers more effectively, the federation will have to examine SACTWU's experience carefully.

Copelyn believes an alliance of unions and political organisations within a broad patriotic front would be more likely to promote unity within the trade unions than the COSATU-ANC alliance. However, he does not see divisions within the unions posing a serious threat while SA is still governed by apartheid - "everyone supports the struggle for democracy". Once we have a democracy divisions would become more serious because workers would support different political parties. At that point an ANC-COSATU alliance could threaten splits in the union movement.

Copelyn argues that the focus of the alliance should be to struggle for a democratic constitution. "This is the key issue at the moment." What happens after that will have "depend on how things work out".

Copelyn differs from most COSATU unionists in believing that too much union influence on the ANC could

weaken the ANC. "COSATU is often intent on pushing radical demands within the ANC - such as nationalisation, or abortion. Are those demands feasible now, or will they alienate very big constituencies from the ANC, such as the church? There is no discussion in COSATU of what platform is appropriate for the ANC, of what demands are legitimate for it, given that socialism is not objectively possible now."

"The NUM resolution almost suggests that the unions should be building blocks of the ANC. But the ANC has to represent different sectors of society. Trade unions are very specific class-based organisations - are they sufficiently broad to represent this wide range of interests, as they would have to if they were building blocks for the ANC? Or would they simply narrow the base of the ANC? Anyway, would it be desirable for them to dilute their specific working class programmes in this way?"

Copelyn concludes that the unions could offer the ANC an understanding of mass democratic organising, but that they do not necessarily offer appropriate policies for the ANC, which needs to blend a range of class interests.

According to Mayekiso, the problems experienced in the alliance have been raised and discussed. The alliance partners are now working systematically to solve them. Kubheka also says he is optimistic, although "it will be a long and painful process revitalising the ANC."



*Factory banners on 'Peace, Jobs, Freedom' march: increasing worker influence, but could it narrow the ANC's appeal?*

*Photo: Abdul Shariff*

### **The struggle for working class hegemony**

Despite the many problems raised by unionists, the overwhelming majority believe their main political task is to contribute to building and strengthening the ANC, as it is the only political organisation with the capacity to lead the struggle against apartheid and lay the foundations for a democratic SA. This will mean strengthening the alliance between COSATU and the ANC.

The July conference of the ANC will be a very important moment in the life of the organisation. It will probably take significant steps towards democratising the ANC and electing a greater proportion of COSATU and former UDF leadership into the ANC. This should allow greater working

class participation at all levels, and help develop strategic clarity.

But this would open up new strategic problems, some of which are suggested by Copelyn. Would an ANC that is strongly influenced by the trade union movement be sufficiently sensitive to the aspirations of a wide range of sectors in our society? How would an increasing expression of working class interests within the ANC be reconciled with the need to win wider layers of 'middle ground' support? In particular, could a militant ANC with a 'bias towards the (African) working class' at the same time present itself as a force for reconciliation, non-racialism and nation-building, overcoming the fears of a significant section of the coloured, Indian and

white communities? For if the ANC fails to do this it may well be forced to enter a coalition government with a political organisation that represents the majority of white, Indian and coloured citizens - ie with the NP!

Complex questions, enormous challenges - but they raise the central political task facing the South African working class: how to win hegemonic leadership within the broad struggle to build a new nation and establish a new democracy. The first step in this process will be for the unions to contribute some of their strength to the ANC, without trying to make it their captive. ☆

**Unfortunately, attempts to interview the ANC on these issues were unsuccessful.**