

The Workers' Charter

At the COSATU National Congress in July 1989 a resolution on the Workers' Charter was adopted. It was agreed that we needed to collect demands from workers to be included in a Workers' Charter and that we needed to involve all workers, both within and outside of COSATU.

WHAT IS THE WORKERS' CHARTER?

While some comrades in NUM have been attending workshops on the Workers' Charter, there are still many workers who do not know what the Workers' Charter means.

A Workers' Charter is a manifesto of all workers' demands. It sets out all the demands and rights which workers are fighting for, both in the short and the long term.

WHY DO WE NEED A WORKERS' CHARTER?

After years of struggle, the ANC and SACP have finally been unbanned. Some people feel that because of the talk of negotiations there will not be problems in the future. They think that the road to a new non-racial and democratic South Africa will be a smooth one.

But not all comrades think that the road will be smooth. There are many who feel that there will be many obstacles and detours on the road to freedom.

OBSTACLES ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

Many workers fear that a negotiated settlement will not meet all their demands as workers.

What happens when a new democratic government does come to power? Will workers still have the right to demand a

living wage? Will they still have a say in the economic policy of the government?

A NEW CONSTITUTION

The Pretoria Minute states that negotiations for a new constitution will soon take place.

A constitution is the most important law of any country. It gives rights and freedoms to the citizens. It also says what the government can and cannot do.

The present S.A. constitution is racist and only serves the interests of the white minority. We need a democratic constitution that will give rights and freedoms to all its citizens.



Delegates at the Workers' Charter Workshop

Because workers are the majority of citizens, it is important that above all, the constitution protects the rights of workers - ensuring that they have the right to to organise, the right to strike and so on.

Workers need to start thinking about what what we need to say as workers and as COSATU. They need to ask "How do we best protect our rights as workers?"

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

A Constituent Assembly is a democratically elected body, elected on a one person, one vote system. The party/organisation that gets the most votes will get the majority of seats in the Constituent Assembly. The function of the Constituent Assembly will be to draft a new constitution for a future South Africa.

But we cannot leave all the discussion about a new constitution until the Constituent Assembly. The ANC is already looking at a draft constitution. We as NUM and COSATU

need to look at what we want to see included in a constitution. The alliance of the ANC, SACP & COSATU may well put forward common proposals on issues that we agree on.

But because we are an organisation representing workers, we cannot allow other organisations to do our work for us - we need to be clear about OUR DEMANDS as workers. We can then feed our demands into the negotiating process as part of the COSATU/ANC/SACP alliance.

We cannot just sit back and expect others to think out demands which will meet our needs. We know what our daily problems are. Our years of struggle to build COSATU and to develop democratic worker leadership have taught us how important it is to establish guidelines for how we operate.

BUILDING A FUTURE SOUTH AFRICA

Building a future South Africa is like building organisation, we need to make sure all the ingredients are right.

We need to make sure, not only that the loaf of bread will rise but that as workers, we will be entitled to our fair share of the loaf.



COSATU General Secretary Jay Naidoo



NUM's Jesse Maluleka

ISSUES WE NEED TO DISCUSS

A COSATU Workers' Charter Conference was held on 17-18 November. 35 delegates from NUM attended. Some of the main issues discussed were:

- The right to strike;
- The right to organise as unions and to remain independent;
- The relationship of the unions to the new government and other political parties;
- The democratic process in constitution-making ie. by whom and how a new constitution will be drafted;
- Economic rights in the new constitution;
- Protection of the freedom of the media;
- Gender and the constitution eg women's and parental rights.

All these rights must be included in a new constitution if we are to protect what we have won through years of struggle.

CONCLUSION

Within NUM we have not gone far enough in this campaign. We must develop ways to involve the majority of mineworkers in the campaign. The collection of demands must continue. We must involve workers by discussing this at:

- Mass meetings
- Room discussions
- Shaft Steward Council Meetings
- Meetings with other organisations.

As NUM we need to discuss some of these issues in much more depth. We will be looking at specific demands in much more detail in future editions of NUM NEWS.