



Workers' Summit '89

Introduction

Worker unity is not unusual. But it was a very unusual crowd of workers singing and toyi-toying in the Saturday morning sunshine at Wits University: they were delegates from unions which have often been bitterly divided on ideological and practical issues. Their T-shirts sported the slogans and logos of unions such as FAWU and NUMSA (COSATU), FBWU and NUPSW (NACTU), and GAWU and OVGWU (independents).

This was a good start to the Workers' Summit, a meeting of delegates from all trade unions in South Africa opposed to the new labour law (the LRA) and apartheid. On the agenda were, first and foremost, the struggle against the new law; secondly, the question of unity between COSATU, NACTU and the independent unions; and thirdly, state repression.

The summit was marred by the absence of NACTU and most of its biggest affiliates. It was NACTU which had first put forward the idea of a workers' summit. But a few weeks before it was due to take place, NACTU asked that the summit be postponed indefinitely so that as a federation it could clarify its position on unity. COSATU decided to go ahead anyway.

The pullout of NACTU was a serious blow. One of the major aims of the summit was to bring workers from COSATU and NACTU together in an effort to build co-operation and unity between the federations. The decision to exclude officials was based on the idea that workers have more powerful reasons for unity than officials. In order to allay fears that the much bigger COSATU would swallow the smaller federation, both groupings were given an equal representation - 250 delegates.

Then, a week before the summit, 11 NACTU affiliates announced that they would defy the decision of their federation, and attend. In the end all 15 COSATU affiliates, 11 NACTU affiliates and 17 independent unions sent delegations. Workers from six other NACTU affiliates attended as representatives of their workplaces. Clearly, the workers' summit had captured the imagination of organised workers. Unity was in the air.

At the summit, which was held on 4-5 March, some 700 delegates took important decisions.

On the following pages, Labour Bulletin interviews Chris Dlamini of COSATU, Longway Kwelemtini, representing the NACTU affiliates which attended; and Cunningham Ngcukana of NACTU. We follow the interviews with an assessment of the summit.





Interview with COSATU

CHRIS DLAMINI, vice-president of COSATU, was one of the rotating chairpersons at the Workers' Summit. He discusses the importance of the summit and decisions that were taken.

Labour Bulletin: *What was the significance of the decisions that came out of the Workers' Summit?*

Dlamini: The Labour Relations Amendment Act (LRA) was promulgated in September, and some employers have already started to use it. Workers conclude that employers have decided on a repressive approach. They want to neutralise the trade union movement.

That was when people decided a summit should be held. In fact the idea came from NACTU. It was discussed in the COSATU CEC, and there were differences in the federation about whether to accept the summit. There were suspicions that it was to replace the Anti-apartheid Conference, which was banned last year.

But through debate it became clear to everyone that

the idea of a summit was a genuine one. Firstly, it would bring workers together. Secondly, it would be a forum where workers could work out a programme to defend themselves against the LRA.

A decision was taken to meet NACTU and draw up an agenda for the summit. We proposed three items for the agenda: the LRA; one country, one federation; and state repression. NACTU was not happy about the second point. It was then suggested that that item should not be termed "one federation", but rather "building unity", and all present in the working committee agreed.

OK. When we debated the LRA at the summit all the unions rejected the Act as it stands because it is a disaster for the working class as a whole. It was then decided that the workers, as they were gathered





Chris Dlamini

Photo: Paul Weinberg/Afrapix

at the summit, should talk about forming their own LRA which takes into account all the sectors in the country. The delegates then went on to say that we need to canvass the ideas of workers countrywide - the domestics, the workers on farms, the rural people, those who are fighting the homeland system - they should all come up and say what they want to see in a LRA.

It will also generate militancy among people in the outlying areas, to get involved in organisation and follow up the demands. So it is also a mobilising factor.

This process would culminate in workers' LRA. The proposals would be discussed at a conference. If there is agreement that this is the sort of LRA we want, it would then be placed before management for negotiating. It

could then become the LRA for our country.

The summit recommended that convening committees should be formed at local, regional and national level, with all the unions represented on them. It was decided that the people who were chairing - there were 3 from the independent unions, 3 from NACTU and 3 from COSATU - should take responsibility for co-ordinating the national structure. This is the long-term programme on the LRA.

The summit also decided on an immediate programme. Delegates decided that unions would continue to call on management not to use the LRA. At the same time, unions should try not to use the Industrial Court, because companies are using it to interdict unions on strike. Since the new LRA no union has won an IC case. There was a feeling that unions should go for arbitration and mediation rather than the IC.

But the main thrust of our immediate programme will be for unions to submit a series of demands to all management in the country by or on 2 May. If they do not respond within 30 days we will declare a national dispute, and we will start balloting. After balloting we will convene another summit. That summit would include all other forces fighting for the liberation of the people of South Africa. That would not mean that we are replacing the Anti-apartheid Conference. But the reason for calling the



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community and all other organisations in the country is that we would be canvassing ideas on possible action to get rid of the LRA. We would need their support. We envisage that summit taking place before 1 September, which is the anniversary of the promulgation of the new Act.

Labour Bulletin: *How does the long-term programme of drawing up a workers' LRA relate to the short term plan of declaring a dispute? The demands to be placed before the employers by 2 May, how are those to be drawn up?*

Dlamini: The summit drew up a list of six demands [see Workers' Summit Recommendations, p. 32]. These demands will also be part of the LRA we draft, together with others that will be canvassed throughout the country.

Labour Bulletin: *The process of preparing for 2 May, what will that process be?*

Dlamini: Meetings are going to be held locally and nationally, and across industries. Unions working in the same industry should get together. Workers may add any other demands that they think of. Demands should be completed by 1 May. On the 2nd, these demands will be presented to management and all employer organisations.

Labour Bulletin: *This process of mobilising and adding demands, is it different from collecting demands for*

the workers LRA?

Dlamini: This is different in that this is going to be confined to the working people. It is the trade unions that are going to handle this. If you were to broaden it, it would take long and it would overlap with the long term programme. The next summit will set a timetable for the long term program of drawing up a workers' LRA. As I have said, the other organisations fighting for liberation will also be there, so it is likely that they will be involved in the long-term programme of drawing it up.



Labour Bulletin: *The summit said that the campaign against the LRA should be linked to the campaign for a living UIF benefit for all workers. What is the aim of the UIF campaign?*

Dlamini: One of the aims of the UIF campaign is to bring the UIF payment offices closer to where people live. At the moment people have to travel very far to get the benefits, while as unemployed people they have no money.

Another objective of the campaign is to demand some control by the unemployed themselves over the offices and the UIF funds. They are the ones who should say how it is to operate, yet they do not have a voice. At present the system is run by bureaucrats, and you find a person who has been out of work for six months, without

getting any money from UIF.

Part of the campaign is for organised workers to put these demands on the agenda. This should cement the alliance between workers with jobs and those without jobs.

Labour Bulletin: *What was the effect of excluding officials from the summit?*

Dlamini: Workers were able to put forward their own views without having to support what the officials said. Because what happens in most structures is that officials speak and workers mainly respond around what officials are saying.

But this time - one cannot deny that workers had discussions with officials beforehand - but as the discussion proceeded, even if you had some ideas pumped in you by officials, they would eventually evaporate. It would remain your own ideas that you put forward. Workers were speaking without fear, speaking their hearts out about how they saw the situation.

The problem with officials is that they have personal grudges. They sit in offices, they phone one another, and they happen to clash. They use the grudges in meetings, and you find that people are diverted from what they were debating, and end up supporting their official against the official from another organisation. So it is counter-productive.

Labour Bulletin: *Did the summit bring COSATU and NACTU any*

closer to unity?

Dlamini: Unity comes in different forms. To some it means co-operation and demarcation, that we should talk to each other, not fight each other as trade unions. But we have a different understanding of unity, and our understanding is that the final stage of unity is one country, one federation. That is our ultimate goal. But we are prepared to debate that, and let others come up with their understanding of unity, and on the basis of that we could arrive at a position where we agree.

To me it seems that some workers, whether they are in NACTU or in independent unions, have accepted that we should unite in order to defend ourselves. But the form that that will take depends on how you understand the question of unity. As I said, our understanding is that the final stage of unity is one country, one federation.

Labour Bulletin: *But there could be various compromises along the way?*

Dlamini: That's right. The summit laid the basis for unity. The recommendations suggest co-ordination - that is the basis for the unity we are talking about. If people are able to work together from now, by the time we get to our summit a decision will be quite likely. Although there will still be people who completely reject the idea of one federation. ☆





Interview with FBWU

LONGWAY KWELEMTINI, President of Food Beverage Workers Union, and GOBA NDLOVU, publicity officer of FBWU, speak to the LABOUR BULLETIN about the Workers' Summit and about politics in NACTU.

Labour Bulletin: *What was the significance of the summit?*

Kwelemtini: After all the suspicions are allayed, a workers' summit may be significant because it brings workers together. But workers are always suspicious that they will be swallowed by certain organisations. There are also different schools of political thought.

Ndlovu: It was important, because workers who always thought they could not talk to each other were able to do that at the summit. We have been having dialogue with the [COSATU-affiliated] Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) at the level of the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF). But the summit was

a new level altogether. It was very important for the unity of workers.

Labour Bulletin: *Have the suspicions that you talk about been allayed?*

Kwelemtini: Not really. They have only been tackled at a certain depth, because the question of unity was not directly discussed. What prevents us being united as workers? The more you talk with a person the more you understand each other, but we have

not even finished the items on the agenda. Maybe with some time - because discussing and implementing what you have discussed are different things.

Unity is not just an empty thing, for the sake of shouting. It means unity



in action. That does not mean we've got to be one federation or one union. Those are just sentimental slogans. It doesn't mean I've got to be Ndlovu to be united with him. We can do something together and be united with our different surnames. I'm trying to say, let's respect each other as organisations. Only at a later stage can we form one organisation.

Labour Bulletin: *Do you believe that unity in the form of one organisation is possible?*

Kwelemtini: Yes, but in the long term. Not now, not in 5 years, not in 10 years. In South Africa we have problems, that blacks do not have a say in the affairs of the country. It is this political situation that encourages ideological divisions between workers. Only when we are as free as other countries can we have unity.

Look at COSATU. It adopted the Freedom Charter, and that led to splits in COSATU, such as the CCAWUSA split. Not all workers support the Freedom Charter. They can work together, but have different political affiliations.

Labour Bulletin: *What is NACTU's political perspective?*

Kwelemtini: NACTU has the principle of non-affiliation to any political organisation. Never mind what individual officials are doing, that is its principle.

Labour Bulletin: *There have been*

reports of tensions in NACTU between black consciousness and Africanists.

Then there was division over attending the workers' summit. What is actually going on?



Ndlovu: There have been ideological problems in NACTU. Although the federation is supposed to be non-aligned, there has been a strong influence from the Africanists. In the last elections the Africanists took over 90% of the leadership. Also one of the big unions, SACWU, is Africanist. There are unions which are black consciousness aligned, and they are unhappy with the situation. There was a very clear division, with people voting on ideological lines.

It took black consciousness unawares. But black consciousness is re-organising, and it may again come to dominate the federation. In the atmosphere of black consciousness there is more open debate.

It is unfortunate that some people saw Africanism as closer to COSATU. Traditionally the ANC and PAC are rivals. PAC broke away from ANC, and it would be very difficult to unite them. They are not united outside, and it would be more difficult to unite them here inside.

Black consciousness has always been misinterpreted as racialist. But it is actually non-racial in many respects, because it is saying there is a need to unite at the level of workers. So when the issue of the workers'

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summit came to the national council, it was surprising to find the black consciousness unions were the ones pushing to at least have talks with the COSATU unions.

As far as FBWU is concerned, we stick to NACTU's policy of non-alignment. We were the first to speak to a COSATU affiliate, FAWU - we had to, as we are both affiliated to IUF.

NACTU is Africanist, as far as the majority of votes is concerned. The only mistake in the *Labour Bulletin* article [Vol 13 no 7] was to say that Africanism is closer to COSATU.

Labour Bulletin: *What are the goals of the Africanists, as you see it?*

Ndlovu: It is the same as COSATU. If the PAC had a manifesto or charter they would adopt it. We believe the PAC is a spent force, but this is an attempt to revive Africanism.

Kwelemtini: Perhaps we are more black consciousness aligned. But our policy is non-alignment. We believe the time has come for us to come up with a workers' manifesto as workers. Workers are composed of ANC, UDF, black consciousness, Africanists, Unity Movement. We believe the manifesto could be a uniting factor. That is why I called for a workers' manifesto at the summit.

Labour Bulletin: *By a workers' manifesto are you referring to the strategy of drawing up a workers' La-*

bour Relations Act (LRA) that was proposed by the summit?



Kwelemtini: They are different. The LRA refers to the legal situation. The manifesto should specify what workers would like to see happen more broadly.

Ndlovu: The workers' LRA will deal with the work situation. The manifesto would also touch political issues. Questionnaires should be sent out asking workers how they see politics as workers. On the purely work side there may be some overlap.

Labour Bulletin: *What would distinguish a workers' manifesto from the Freedom Charter or the Azanian Manifesto?*

Kwelemtini: It would be a guiding document for workers as workers. Workers must identify what affects them and what it is they are looking for as workers, in the future - maybe long term. So it will touch on political issues. We have always said even if the ANC or PAC or black consciousness takes over tomorrow, we as workers and managers are here to stay.

So we are talking of bilateral agreements - the LRA is over there, but here in this plant what is it that we can live with? How do we want to live here? That would give workers a say in their lives without political interference, because workers are united as

workers, whether they are ANC, PAC or whatever.

Ndlovu: It could be a socialist document. In the long run it could become a workers' party. The mainline organisations have left workers out of their programmes.

Labour Bulletin: *Has the summit brought unity any closer?*

Kwelemtini: Partly. We have not yet discussed the obstacles to unity. For example the poaching of members is dividing us, despite an agreement reached at IUF that a union should not poach members at a factory where the other union has a recognition agreement. But other unions have gone out of their way to poach. If we retaliate there will be chaos. Maybe such issues can be sorted out. Maybe by the third or fourth summit it will be clear whether there is progress.

Ndlovu: MWASA was at the forefront of arguing that NACTU should not attend the summit. But now they have decided to attend future summits. This shows the summit has done a lot for unity.

Kwelemtini: Even those affiliates that did not attend, their members did attend.

Labour Bulletin: *What impact did the absence of officials have on the summit?*

Ndlovu: It was an unfortunate deci-

sion. Officials do the paperwork, they negotiate for workers, they rely on officials for a number of things. So if for such a crucial meeting we are excluded it is a problem.



Kwelemtini: It is unfortunate. Officials are carefully chosen by workers. If at the next summit we invite liberation organisations, I don't see us excluding officials.

Labour Bulletin: *How would you describe the mood of the summit?*

Kwelemtini: It was a bit tense, though with time it loosened up a bit. Still, there was that caution. It helped us to know each other better. For instance, people from COSATU were able to come to me and discuss my speech openly. Some even said that as workers this is what they are looking for. Or Barayi, people have always read about him. But now they can think for themselves what type of person he is. People always heard about Longway Kwelemtini. But now after hearing me speak they can say what sort of person I am.

Labour Bulletin: *What is the future of NACTU?*

Kwelemtini: We see NACTU as surviving. We still owe our allegiance to NACTU. We are not going to simply let it crack. But the more closely we work as federations the better. ☆



Interview with NACTU

LABOUR BULLETIN interviewed CUNNINGHAM NGCUKANA, NACTU's assistant General-Secretary, to get the federations's views on the Workers' Summit.

Labour Bulletin: *What is the NACTU position on the Workers' Summit which has just been held?*

Ngcukana: NACTU is for the summit, it has never been against the summit. All we were asking was to postpone the summit so that we can formulate clear guidelines on how working class unity can be built in this country. We will be holding a national workshop in mid-April to do this. Then we will be prepared to discuss unity on that basis.

We were prepared to go to the summit and discuss the LRA. We told COSATU that, but they insisted on including unity on the agenda. So we said in that case we are not able to come. In principle we are agreed on the need for working class unity, we have never been against it - but it is a question of the mechanics of

achieving this.

It is not that we were pulling out of the summit. The question of the LRA that was discussed, we've got no problem with that, because as a federation we have a position on it.

Labour Bulletin: *What is NACTU's position now on the recommendations that were adopted at the summit?*

Ngcukana: NACTU has a resolution and a position. The summit only produced a recommendation that still has to be discussed. On our side there is nothing to discuss because we already have a position,

whereas COSATU still has to discuss its position.

Labour Bulletin: *The summit recommended declaring a national dispute with all employers by tab-*



ling demands on 2 May. Will NACTU come in on that?

Ngcukana: NACTU is not averse to action. Our resolution which was decided by our national shopstewards' council last year and ratified by constitutional structures, states that we will stage days of protest, and also take protest action against businesses in the towns and cities of our country. This will be decided in consultation with the mass democratic movement of our country including the churches.

But we see a problem with the recommendations of the summit. Our national shopstewards' council re-

solved not to ask employers to contract out of the LRA, because if some agree and others refuse it might divide the working class in future action against the LRA. So we are not prepared to declare disputes with individual employers.

We are only prepared to demand that employers contract out of the LRA if all employers agree, through something like SACCOLA. Likewise we are only prepared to adopt the strategy of declaring a dispute if it is truly national, ie. if it affects all employers. The recommendations



Cunningham Ngcukana at the joint May Day meeting in 1985

Photo: Paul Weinberg/Afrapix

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however create a situation where some employers contract out, others don't, and so the working class is divided. It means some workers will have to contract out of action against the LRA. We have a problem with that, and we would not want to be part of such a strategy.

Now, on the question of drafting an LRA for the government - we do not believe that as a working class organisation we can do that, it is something that will give legitimacy to a government that is illegal in the eyes of the majority. Drafting legislation for the Nationalist Party - that is a serious thing, it would compromise our principles. The government would make a lot of mileage out of that, claiming to be negotiating with organisations that reject violence. We are not prepared to give them that opportunity.

We are not prepared to discuss our objections with a minister, but only his functionaries.

The recommendations also state that the next summit "will involve all forces that are fighting for the liberation of all in South Africa." People speak in different tongues when they refer to national liberation. We approach this question on a principled basis - we are not prepared to involve someone like Mabuza [Chief Minister of Kangwane]. We had a problem with the Anti-Apartheid Conference. We work according to working class principles of non-collaboration. We cannot sit down with enemies of the working class.

Finally, the recommendations link

the campaign against the LRA with the Living Wage Campaign. We need clarity on this.



Different unions are taking different approaches to the Living Wage Campaign. Some have calculated a specific amount as the Living Wage. Our approach is that the Living Wage must depend on what the company can pay and on the level of workers' organisation in that factory. Otherwise you find a company which is paying above the Living Wage, and it then argues that it does not need to pay an increase because it is already paying a Living Wage. To campaign for a Living Wage also clouds the issue of the exploitation of workers by the ruling class. Workers are led to believe that there can be such a thing as a fair wage.

Labour Bulletin: *What is NACTU's position on one country, one federation?*

Ngcukana: It is one of the resolutions of our federation that we need to move in that direction. It is a principle. But how do we achieve it, what is the mechanism? We do not have one federation in the country - we have a myriad unions, we have two federations, we have unions of the left and the right.

Labour Bulletin: *What is the position of NACTU affiliates who attended the summit? They stated that they represent NACTU.*

Ngcukana: They do not represent NACTU, the national council of NACTU represents the federation. I have said repeatedly that there were no NACTU affiliates at the summit - there were some individuals only. We leave it to our affiliates to take action against the individuals who attended in their name.

Labour Bulletin: *But some affiliates took the decision to attend as unions.*

Ngcukana: To give you one example, and it appeared in the press: one such affiliate on the East Rand actually dismissed an organiser who advocated going to the summit. That is why I say we leave it to the affiliates. Of course, there were differences on going to the summit, but the democratic process took its course and the majority decision is binding on all affiliates.

Labour Bulletin: *In many circles the divisions in NACTU are interpreted as conflict between Africanists and black consciousness supporters, now that Africanism is dominant. What is your comment?*

Ngcukana: There is no trade union that is politically homogenous. No trade union organises on the basis of political line - they organise on the basis of the material conditions of workers on the shopfloor. Workers do not join any trade union on the basis of political line - that you must be clear on. If there are political differences in

NACTU they are in every trade union. COSATU itself has serious political divisions. Why single out NACTU?



Labour Bulletin: *But people inside and outside NACTU are saying that there are attempts to turn NACTU into an Africanist federation. It also seems that the divisions over the summit show serious tensions in NACTU.*

Ngcukana: It is not true. Differences are not divisions. The unity that you will find in NACTU is greater than in any other federation. The whole issue of the summit we have put behind ourselves, and we are looking forwards and continuing to do our work as a united federation. Unlike COSATU, which is Charterist, NACTU has not adopted a political position.

Labour Bulletin: *What distinguishes NACTU from COSATU?*

Ngcukana: We have not adopted a political position and they have. That is a clear dividing line. Secondly, we have not chosen who our allies will be. Our allies will be all who hold the interests of the working class to be paramount, and it will be determined by the base of the struggle and on the basis of the principle of non-collaboration. We have not placed NACTU in a political camp. ☆



The summit - a step towards unity

by *KARL VON HOLDT*

Last year the organised working class spearheaded the biggest stay-away in South Africa's history. The stayaway was called in protest against state repression in general, the new Labour Bill in particular. This year the ongoing battle against the LRA could see widescale industrial action, if decisions taken by the workers' summit in March are implemented.

The summit decided to make a series of six demands to plant and company management, and to national employer organisations, on 2 May. If the employers do not respond favourably within 30 days, the unions will consider lodging disputes. This would amount to a national dispute with all employers, which could open the way to national industrial action.

This is a bold strategy for regaining the initiative in the struggle against the LRA. But it will be no easy task.

The need to mobilise again

The first difficulty will be to mobilise factory structures and membership around the demands again. The first half of last year saw a growing mobilisation and anger against the Bill. Several factors contributed to this. Firstly, there were intensive union education and information drives. Secondly, COSATU affiliates organised weekly lunch-time demonstrations against the Bill. And thirdly, there was a climate of political militancy provoked by the repression in general, and in particular the banning of UDF and 16 other organisations in January.

This mobilisation culminated in the extremely militant COSATU Special Congress in May, and the three-day stayaway which followed.

But after the stayaway mobilisation stopped. It may be that this is one of the weaknesses of the stayaway as a tactic: it is a massive demonstration

of protest and strength, but it does not necessarily lead anywhere. The stayaway is such a big action that it seems pointless to return to lunchtime demonstrations and lesser forms of action.

At any rate, COSATU and NACTU leadership became bogged down in protracted negotiations with the SA Committee for Labour Affairs

If the summit decision is to be implemented, the unions will have to start again with the massive task of mobilising and educating workers, so that they can back the demands and put pressure on management. The campaign will have to take root at a



Keynote speakers: Elijah Barayi of COSATU, Laurence Phatlhe from OVGWU and Longway Kwelintini of FBWU (NACTU)

Photo: Labour Bulletin

(SACCOLA) and neglected mobilisation. Unions turned to shopfloor issues. In the end the negotiations fell apart. Employers must have been well-pleased with their success: they had conceded nothing, the mass movement against the Bill had run out of steam, and the Bill became a law in September.

mass level as it did last year. The summit decided on a series of May Day meetings country-wide to start this process, but it cannot stop there.

The second difficulty in implementing the summit strategy is simply the logistical difficulty of co-ordinating such a large number of disputes

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and negotiations with hundreds of companies and employer organisations. This will require proper structures for organising, co-ordinating and directing the campaign. Apparently such structures are soon to be set up.

The third difficulty is that employers will not present a united front on the issue. Some will accede, others will engage in protracted negotiations, others will refuse outright. One can also expect a flurry of legal cases as employers attempt to prevent action. All of this will make it difficult to coordinate simultaneous national action. One may see something like a series of rolling strikes instead, as unions target the intransigent employers, and as disputes come to a head one after the other.

Even if the unions are only partly successful in overcoming these difficulties, the summit strategy could open the way to unprecedented national industrial struggle.

Towards a workers' LRA

As a long term programme the summit called on workers to formulate a "workers' LRA." It is not yet clear what this means. According to Chris Dlamini, convening committees could be established at local, regional and national level to collect demands from workers country-wide. These would then be drafted into an LRA, in a process like that which produced the Freedom Charter.

One of the principle aims would be to reach workers at present ex-

cluded from the LRA - farmworkers and public sector workers especially. The process of collecting demands



could serve to mobilise and organise these workers. Some delegates to the summit stressed that housing, education and land should also be addressed by the workers' LRA.

What is not clear at this stage is what status this document would have. Would it be tabled for negotiations with employers and, ultimately, the government, with the aim of establishing a new LRA for the country? Some who attended the summit have suggested this, referring to the fact that employers always ask unions what their alternative to the current LRA is.

Or would it take the form of a workers' charter, mapping out the role and the rights of workers in a post-apartheid South Africa? Would it serve as a linking document between current struggles and the position of workers in a liberated South Africa? If it does take this form, it could open up important debates in the working class movement. It would link to earlier debates in COSATU about the Freedom Charter and a possible workers' charter.

At that stage the debate was polarised in such a way that a workers' charter was seen as an alternative to the Freedom Charter. But since then both the ANC's Constitutional Guidelines and the SA Communist Party¹ have endorsed the idea of a workers'

charter as a complement to the Freedom Charter.

Such a document would also echo the call by the Mtwi wing of CCAWUSA for a worker's manifesto as a "non-sectarian" document. A similar call was made by Longway Kwelemtini in his speech on behalf of the NACTU affiliates which attended the summit.

It is clear that the idea of a 'workers' LRA' has many possibilities, and that different political tendencies could have very different conceptions of its role and its purpose. While it may provoke heated debate, it could at the same time promote unity and co-operation between different

tendencies. This would only be possible if it was seen, not as an alternative to the Freedom Charter, but as complimentary to it.



Such a programme could take on special significance in the light of the circulation of the ANC's constitutional guidelines. The ANC has stated that the guidelines are a draft to be discussed by organisations inside South Africa, and expanded and amended where necessary. A workers' LRA or charter could provide an important avenue for organised workers to discuss the guidelines and contribute to them.



It is particularly important that the mass democratic movement take on this task now. The ANC is under great international pressure to present a 'moderate' image, and it is important for the mass movement to put forward with confidence and strength its own views and demands for a liberated South Africa.

The summit - forging unity?

Delegates were cautious as to whether the summit had contributed to building unity. In the first place, NACTU's withdrawal was a blow. It was also a surprise, seeing as the idea for the summit had come from NACTU.

Secondly, the fact that by

Singing together....fighting together?

Photo: Labour Bulletin

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the end of two days only the first item on the agenda had been discussed shows that it was not easy to establish common ground. However, decisions were reached, and an immediate and a long-term programme were agreed on. This is a significant step forward. Clearly the different unions felt they faced common problems, and there was a will to compromise and reach agreement - although the NACTU affiliates insisted that the decisions should be called "recommendations" so that they could go back and discuss them in their unions.

The fact that the summit happened at all is a sign of how far the quest for unity has developed already. Just one year ago it would have been impossible. The need for unity with NACTU was one of the motivations behind the resolution on working class unity put forward by NUMSA and CWIU at the COSATU special congress last year.² This was rejected in favour of deepening unity with COSATU's UDF allies, and convening a broad Anti-Apartheid Conference, to include NACTU as well as middle-class and liberal forces.

The June stayaway and the subsequent negotiations with SACCOLA, however, saw co-operation between COSATU and NACTU for the first time. Both federations began to compromise their hardline positions on unity. COSATU was prepared to co-operate with the smaller federation, even while it maintained its commitment to one country, one federation as the ultimate goal. NACTU on the other hand committed itself to the

principle of one federation, while stressing its reluctance to see that as an immediate goal. It was these developments that paved the way for the workers' summit.



Political tension between NACTU and COSATU had by no means disappeared, however. While they might co-operate on the LRA, the Anti-Apartheid Conference convened by COSATU in September sparked heated arguments in NACTU as to whether it should attend. The state banned the AAC, and this saved NACTU from having to make a decision that could have divided it as a federation.

These political differences between COSATU and NACTU appear to be a major factor in NACTU's decision not to attend the summit.

Tensions in NACTU

The summit revealed that the tensions in NACTU run deep. At its annual conference in August last year Africanists became increasingly influential in the leadership of the federation. Observers had expected it would now be sympathetic to closer links with COSATU.³

Historically, the NACTU unions had been associated with an ideology of 'black working class leadership'. They objected in principle to white intellectuals playing an important role. It was this issue that divided CUSA and AZACTU from the non-racial

unions that went on to form COSATU. When CUSA and AZACTU merged to form NACTU in 1986, black consciousness was a powerful influence. The Africanists who have become a powerful force are ideologically more flexible on the role of whites.*

It was this that made NACTU seem more open to co-operation with COSATU.

But surprisingly, it was NACTU leadership and the Africanist unions such as SACWU which pulled out of the summit. There have been suggestions that the Africanists may have stayed out of the summit because NACTU is the only significant base for Africanism inside South Africa. In recent interviews, "Africanist leaders elaborated, saying the Africanists had come to the realisation that NACTU was the only remaining Africanist organisation able to operate lawfully internally. There was therefore a reluctance on their part to risk diluting this one source of strength - which would certainly occur if unity developed with the far more powerful COSATU."⁴

Thus the rise of Africanism in NACTU had contradictory effects. On the one hand there was greater ideological flexibility and therefore a possibility of co-operation with COSATU. On the other, there was a strong need to establish an inde-

pendent base for Africanism. This need seems to have become stronger over the last while.

The reluctance to be diluted would underline more general fears in NACTU of being swallowed organisationally and politically by the bigger unions in COSATU.

Clearly the black consciousness tendency is quite bitter about the way in which Africanist dominance has been established.⁵ It seems as if there is a sizeable grouping of non-aligned unionists who have also been alienated by the political clashes. It seems to have been the black consciousness unions such as BAMCWU and the non-aligned unions such as FBWU which opted to attend the summit.



Origins of NACTU

In order to grasp the dynamics in NACTU, and the prospects for unity it is important to understand its origins.

When NACTU was formed CUSA was the bigger federation, with large affiliates such as FBWU, SACWU and BCAWU. AZACTU had been formed in 1984, was smaller, and was associated with AZAPO.

CUSA unions had started at much the same time as the major industrial unions that went on to form COSATU. The CUSA unions were

* No-one has explained very clearly what the programmatic differences are between black consciousness and Africanism, beyond the obvious fact that the former is associated with AZAPO and the latter with those who are sympathetic to the PAC. In fact, one worker leader in NACTU confided that he had always thought AZAPO was part of the PAC tradition until acrimonious argument between the two positions emerged in NACTU last year.



COSATU's Elijah Barayi addresses the summit

Photo: Frank Meintjies/COSATU

generally less militant, weaker, and they had a lower degree of worker control.⁶ They



tended to be less hostile to management, and organised far fewer strikes than the non-racial unions. CUSA affiliated to the ICFTU, and unlike the non-racial unions, it did not stress socialism.

The different responses of CUSA and COSATU to the political crisis of 1984 and after shows something of their different approaches. The non-racial unions and later COSATU became more involved in mass actions such as stayaways, and began to develop alliances with UDF-aligned mass organisations in the townships. CUSA tended to be non-committal or even opposed stayaways, as in 1986 when it issued a joint statement with the major employer organisations stating that "conflict can be resolved through negotiation, discussion and compromise."⁷

Several of these tendencies continued in NACTU. COSATU unions generally have a greater capacity to mobilise, as was demonstrated in the metal industry negotiations and strike last year⁸. There are a host of small unions in NACTU, and there have been no attempts to merge them in bigger industrial unions. The NACTU conference last year stressed the need for mergers, proper auditing of membership figures, and a greater degree of worker control. Despite these problems NACTU does have some big and effective affiliates, especially

SACWU, FBWU, BCAWU and TAWU. These unions have led important struggles in the chemical, food, construction and transport sectors.

The merger with AZACTU, and the development of a strong Africanist position, added a militant rhetoric of socialism and liberation to the more moderate unionism of CUSA.

NACTU is no affiliated to the ICFTU. Apart from the black consciousness and Africanist political tendencies, there is a grouping of non-aligned former CUSA unionists.

Despite political differences between NACTU and COSATU, and within NACTU, the summit has been a significant force for unity thus far. Not only did it bring together COSATU, the independents, and 11 NACTU unions, but members from other NACTU affiliates defied their federation's decision and attended as workers. They are likely to carry the message of unity back to their unions - the NACTU 11 believe this is why there has been no attempt to discipline them.

The summit will give unity a push forward if its recommendations lead to co-operation and joint action. It is especially encouraging that NACTU has indicated its willingness to join in

the anti-LRA campaign, and that MWASA, as an affiliate which opposed going to the summit, has decided after heated debate to attend the next one.



Time will tell whether NACTU splits over this issue, whether it withdraws from the unity process, or whether it joins the mainstream drive for unity. ★

References

1. See interview in *Work in Progress* 50/51, Oct/Nov 1987
2. It is ironic that NUMSA's and CWIU's opposite numbers in NACTU were amongst those which did not attend. The IMF alliance between NUMSA and NACTU unions has also fallen apart since the special congress.
3. See SA Labour Bulletin 13.7, Nov 1988)
4. Webster, E. and Fine, A., "Unions and politics - transcending tradition?" in SA Review 5, forthcoming.
5. Interviews and Azanian Labour Journal, Vol 1 No 2.
6. J.Maree, "The struggle for industrial democracy by the democratic trade union movement", unpublished seminar paper, CAS, UCT, 1976
7. SA Labour Bulletin 11.7, Aug 1986, p. 87-8
8. See SA Labour Bulletin 13.6, Sept 1988





Worker's summit recommendations

This summit noting:

1. The Labour Relations Act does not cover all sectors of our country e.g. excludes public sector workers, domestic workers, farmworkers and forestry workers;

2. This Act is intended to erode the legitimate rights of workers;

3. The Labour Relations Act undermines gains that we have achieved through hardship and sacrifices;

4. It does not serve the interests of the working class but those of the capitalists and the racist regime;

5. Despite our protest action against the Bill on 6, 7 and 8 June 1988, employers trapped us shrewdly into fruitless negotiations and supported that the Bill be enacted.

And further believing that:

1. Workers in this summit have united to campaign against the LRA and also to seek an alternative that

will cover all sectors in our country;

2. The basis for ultimate unity of the working class can be achieved through unity in action;

3. The working class must determine the direction for a future South Africa free of exploitation and oppression;

4. This Act is intended to divide workers at the shop-floor level and also to destroy the labour movement in total.

Therefore recommends to:

1. Call upon workers countrywide to formulate their own LRA that will cover all sectors of our country including farmworkers, domestic workers, forestry workers and public sector workers as a long term strategy.

2. Find ways of not using the Industrial Court.

3. Revise our recognition agreements to circumvent offensive clauses of the Act.

4. Submit our demands around the

LRA to SACCOLA, other employer organisations including individual employers on/by May 2 1989. To include the following demands:

4.1 The right to strike and the right to picket;

4.2 No dismissal without proper hearing(s);

4.3 Retrenchment should be negotiated with representative unions and will address the LIFO system;

4.4 Recognition of majority unions;

4.5 The right to sympathy strikes;

4.6 Any other demands that have been put forward by COSATU and NACTU in previous negotiations.

5. Isolate employers who use the provisions of the LRA against unions.

6. Give employers 30 days to respond to our demands and to declare a national dispute with employers if they refuse to make positive progress towards meeting the demands.

7. Link the LRA campaign to the Living Wage Campaign and the campaign for a living UIF benefit for all workers.

8. Mobilise workers and the community around these issues nationally, regionally and locally.

9. Use May Day rallies to mobilise the working class around the LRA both nationally and internationally.

10. Conduct national ballots around these demands in all industries.

Further recommends to :

1. Call for future summits that would involve all forces that are fighting for the liberation of all in South Africa.

2. Intensify our rejection of the present LRA through further protest actions.

3. Continue discussions on the LRA amongst the two federations, COSATU and NACTU, and independent unions.

The committee co-ordinating this historic summit must take responsibility for carrying forward these recommendations and should include the chairpersons of the summit. ☆



**List of unions attending the Workers Summit
on the 4/5 March 1989**

COSATU affiliates

- Amalgamated Clothing & Textile Workers Union of SA
- Construction & Allied Workers Union
- Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union of S A
- Chemical Workers Industrial Union
- Food & Allied Workers Union
- National Education, Health & Allied Workers Union
- National Union of Mineworkers
- National Union of Metalworkers of S A
- National Unemployed Workers Co-ordinating Committee
- Paper, Printing, Wood & Allied Workers Union
- Post Office & Telecommunications Workers Association
- S A Domestic Workers Union
- S A Municipal Workers Union
- S A Railway & Harbour Workers Union
- Transport & General Workers Union

NACTU affiliates

- Food Beverage Workers Union
- Black Electronics & Electrical Workers Union
- Brushes & Cleaners Workers Union
- Banking, Insurance, Finance, Assurance Workers Union
- Black Domestic Workers Association
- National Union of Public Service Workers
- S A Laundry, Dry-cleaning and Dyeing Workers Union
- Black Allied Mining & Construction Workers Union
- Natal Liquor & Catering Trades Employees Union
- Electrical & Allied Workers Trade Union

Representatives from the following NACTU unions attended in their capacity as workers committed to action against the LRA:

- S A Chemical Workers Union
- Black Construction & Allied Workers Union
- National Union of Wine, Spirits & Allied Workers
- Transport & Allied Workers Union
- National Union of Farmworkers
- Media Workers Association of S A
- MWASA Western Cape sent a message of support

Independent unions

- Durban Integrated Municipal Employees Society
- Electricity Workers Union
- Garment & Allied Workers Union
- Natal Baking & Allied Workers Union
- National Union of Brick & Allied Workers
- S A Wood Workers Union (sent a message of support)
- University of Western Cape Workers Union
- Zakheni Transport & Allied Workers Union
- S A Postal Telecommunications Employees Union
- Orange Vaal General Workers Union
- Engineering & Industrial Workers Union
- National Workers Union of S A
- S A Post Office Employees Association (TVL)
- National Union of Steel & Allied Workers
- Combined Small Factory Workers Union
- African Mineworkers Union
- National Union of Leatherworkers (Dbn)