

COSATU Press Release on the CEC

The Central Executive Committee met in its normal session from the 8 April 1997 to 10 April 1997. The meeting was preceded by a workshop on the September Commission on 7 April 1997. The CEC is the highest decision making structure in-between the National Congresses. A number of decisions were arrived at. Some of those decisions are contained in this statement, others will be released to the press over the week of the 14 April 1997.

1. State Assets Restructuring

The CEC received a report on the restructuring of the state assets. Arising out of discussions the following decisions were taken:

a) Water

The CEC expressed its shock and disbelief at the statements attributed various tiers of government that water provision is to be privatised. The CEC unanimously condemned any suggestion or proposal that water should be privatised and provided by private companies on the basis of profit chasing.

Water is a national resource and an essential support to the livelihood of all our people irrespective of their class differences. Water is amongst the nine essentials which COSATU will never accept privatisation of. As our policy dictates, we are prepared to consider equity partnership when there are compelling reasons including in these sectors. A wholesale privatisation of water is non negotiable and any attempt to force this down our throats will be fiercely resisted.

The attempts to privatise municipal services will also be resisted. COSATU will raise this issue at the next meeting of the NFA's 6-aside. If our fears are not adequately addressed in this meeting, we will launch a campaign to thwart these ideologically driven agenda's. The CEC has also endorsed the SAMWU campaign which is scheduled to begin on 1 May 1997.

b) SAA

COSATU took note of the reported statements attributed to the Ministers of Transport and Public Enterprises with regards to the wholesale privatisation of SAA.

COSATU wishes to put it on record that these statements are not in line with protracted negotiations between government and transport unions and are also out of line with the NFA agreement.

The CEC expressed its disappointment of this growing tendency and strategy by some Ministers of making public announcements on issues which are in the process of being negotiated and hope to force these announcements as *faite compli*.

COSATU will be taking up this matter in the NFA 6-aside scheduled for the 21 April 1997.

c) Eskom

COSATU CEC is fully behind the positions taken by NUM and NUMSA with regard to the restructuring of ESKOM. We reject the positions that have recently been announced by Minister Maduna. We call on communities to support the march planned for 14 April 1997.

A broad discussion was held on these matters. The CEC reaffirmed its position as decided by the previous CEC which is outlined below:
There may be state assets which should never have belonged to the state sector in the first place, whose retention does not benefit the majority of people or helps perpetuated the apartheid divide. These would need to be identified and sold. As a movement we will need to ensure that workers and community will not suffer as a consequence.

Others may require the involvement of the private sector (in a limited form), based on the need for more capital, new technology, enhanced delivery etc. Where there is a compelling case for such an approach, the Federation would be willing to consider them. In such situation, the state should remain the majority shareholder rather than withdraw from such a sector or activity.

In pursuit of the need to involve the state in production, new enterprises and sectors need to be established. An example would be in housing and health, where the current system is failing.

Furthermore, as envisaged by COSATU's 1995 Economic Policy Conference and the RDP, where the balance of evidence point to the need for strategic nationalisation, there must be political willingness to follow this route.

In this way, the debate shall focus on the role of the state in the productive sector rather than its withdrawal. The CEC also identified sectors which should be in the state sector. These are post and telecommunication, electricity, public transport, housing, health, water, state forests, municipal services and education.

2. Employment Standards

The CEC evaluated the campaign underway against the fact that there has been no formal negotiations on the Employment Standards since late last year.

COSATU reiterated its position on all the issues currently in dispute. These are:

- a). 6 months maternity leave of which at least 4 months must be paid
- b). 40 hour week which should be phased in, in the next five years.
- c). variation which will not lead to the derailment of rights in which a more favourable test shall be used with a tight exemptions procedure through Bargaining Councils.

- d). 16 years as a threshold to enter in the labour market.
- e). Sunday Work with retention of the status quo which should be extended to all workers.

The CEC decided to intensify the mobilisation and mass action in support of these demands. All COSATU regions will hold regional Shop Steward Councils on the 19-20 April 1997. COSATU CEC calls on all these Shop Steward Councils to adopt programmes and take this campaign to new heights.

COSATU CEC has called a special Executive Committee (EXCO) to be held on 18 April 1997. This EXCO will study the Employment Standards Bill which the cabinet will be discussing on the 16 April 1997. Subject to the progress achieved, the Special Exco was given powers to decide whether to continue or suspend the general strike scheduled for 12 May 1997. In the meantime, we are mobilising for the general strike.

3. Industry Demarcation

The CEC discussed its approach to the industry demarcation for the purpose of the collective bargaining as required by the new LRA. The CEC endorsed the principles which should guide our approach to industry demarcation. These principles include the following:

1. Fewer bargaining instead of the current 82 industrial councils.
2. The accommodation of differences within bargaining councils through special schedules for smaller companies, different sectors or "non standard" employment if necessary.

A process of finalising sectors was agreed upon. Our position shall be submitted to NEDLAC on 17 April 1997.

4. CCMA

The CEC evaluated progress since after the CCMA was launched. Arising from these discussions CEC expressed its uneasiness at the increasing case load the CCMA has to deal with. To this effect a research was commissioned to study all cases submitted to CCMA. COSATU wants to check if the increase is as a result of incompetence of union organisers or the decline in the ability of shopstewards and factory managers to resolve mini problems on their own without resorting to referring every small dispute to the CCMA.

A concern was also raised that the government expenditure cuts was affecting the capacity of the CCMA to deliver and discharge its mandate. The budget of the CCMA is about R20 million for the current year. This budget is well below what the CCMA will require in order to meet the volumes of cases referred to it in terms of the LRA.

The CEC resolved to take this matter up with the relevant Minister and seek to have this reversed.