

SACTWU Bargaining Conference 2014 declaration: SACTWU also has a good story to tell!

The COSATU-affiliated Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) held its Annual National Bargaining Conference from 6 to 9 March 2014, in Durban.

We met under our union's national theme for the next three years, as adopted by our 12th National Congress held in August last year: "Unity, Cohesion & Radical Transformation for Sustainable Growth & Decent Work"

The Conference was attended by 430 delegates and union officials – double the amount of delegates in previous years. This followed our 12th National Congress decision to broaden worker participation and shopfloor democracy by expanding the Conference to involve more worker leaders and workplaces in our collective bargaining processes. Delegates were 400 shop stewards representing 99000 SACTWU members in the clothing, textile, leather, distribution and related sectors in all parts of South Africa.

Over the last month and a half, SACTWU has collected approximately 18 000 living wage demands from its members in just over 1 610 workplaces nationally. These demands were reconciled provincially, and were collected in metro area-based workplaces as well as workplaces in non-metro areas. Our 2014 Bargaining Conference has now consolidated these living wage demands into more coherent national sectoral demands, to be backed up by an aggressive national programme of action.

We demand a living wage!

The Conference noted that SACTWU will this year negotiate in 3 national bargaining councils (clothing, textiles and leather), 2 provincial bargaining councils (cannass goods in Gauteng and laundry in KwaZulu-Natal), 8 company group level negotiations (including Service Products/Sheltered Employment) and in just over 100 plant level wage bargains. The outcomes of our negotiations will affect over 100 000 clothing, textile, leather, footwear, distribution and related workers.

The main purpose of the Conference was to consolidate nationally the union's workplace-collected living wage demands for the 2014 round of substantive negotiations. The Conference successfully completed this task and re-affirmed our determination:

- to step up the fight for a living wage
- to smash the reactionary attacks on the union's bargaining structures, such as bargaining councils and the extension of our industry-wide collective agreements
- to strengthen centralised bargaining
- to stamp out the scourge of non-compliance with bargaining council agreements and labour laws in our industry
- to strengthen our fight against the scourge of HIV/AIDS
- to step up our campaign against illegal imports and customs fraud
- to strengthen the Buy Local and Proudly South African campaigns with a special focus on ensuring compliance by provincial governments and municipalities with government's directive that all clothing, textile, footwear and leather goods purchased are made in South Africa

- to concretise our solidarity support for other COSATU affiliates' living wage, recruitment and organising campaigns
- to unite COSATU and ensure the federation takes up an aggressive fight for decent work and a living wage for all workers
- to crush bogus cooperatives, set up to deliberately circumvent the provisions of our labour laws, including by using the new Cooperatives Amendment Act to ensure bogus co-operatives are exposed and workers' status as employees with worker rights are restored

- to strengthen capacity building amongst our newly elected and re-elected shop stewards, to help with better service delivery for our members
- to campaign and work tirelessly for a resounding victory by the ANC in the 2014 National Elections, as the best party to advance worker rights and interests in the upcoming general elections
- to use the appropriate structures to address the introduction of the Employee Tax Incentive (ETI) Act without proper consultation and agreement at Nedlac
- to monitor the implementation of the ETI Act to ensure employers who abuse it by firing older workers or employing ineligible workers are reported and fined

The details of our consolidated demands will now first be reported to our members, after which we will submit it to employers in our industry. It will only be released publicly thereafter.

SACTWU's President, Themba Khumalo opened the Conference by calling on the union's worker leaders to remain united and militant to ensure efficient and effective servicing of members and to achieve a living wage and decent work. He reminded delegates that collective bargaining should further strengthen and unite the union. In this election year, he stressed the good stories that the ANC and SACTWU have to tell and said that many of the things that threaten us can actually make us strong.

COSATU's Second Deputy President, Zingiswa Losi, addressed the conference on a number of matters. She applauded SACTWU workers on the power of their union, and noted that the

union's wealth of experience provides it with key weapons for the workers struggle. Delegates to the Conference urged her to secure the unity of the federation in the midst of the current difficulties being experienced in it. SACTWU commits to play its role to help unite our beloved federation, but we re-affirm that we shall refrain from being drawn into factions and cabals, during this process.

The Conference received reports from the SA Labour Research Institute, our research wing, on two pieces of recently promulgated legislation: the Cooperatives Amendment Act and the Employment Tax Incentive (ETI) Act.

Conference welcomed the introduction of the Cooperatives Amendment Act and the efforts by government, using this legislation, to deal with bogus cooperatives, aimed at circumventing labour legislation and minimum wages and standards.

The Conference expressed its concern with the introduction of the ETI Act and the fact that this was done by circumventing Nedlac and without securing the agreement of social partners. It also voiced its concern that parts of the Act (especially the youth subsidy component) will see job destruction among non-subsidised workers and committed to monitor the implementation. However, in a significant decision, Conference mandated the union leadership to explore the job creation opportunities offered by other aspects of the ETI Act, especially its sectoral designation component.

The Conference was addressed by Ebrahim Patel, the Minister of Economic Development (our previous General Secretary) mainly on

- jobs and economic policy, both nationally and in the sectors where SACTWU's members work and
- progress with the implementation of the National Infrastructure Plan

The Conference welcomed Minister Patel's address warmly, including the significant implementation progress that has been made with government's infrastructure drive and the growth in employment witnessed in recent years. This has led to those jobs lost during the recession being recovered and South Africa now having more people employed than ever in its history. We shared the concern that, whilst it is clear that significant progress has been made, unemployment was still unacceptably high and that more should be done to deal with this. Our Conference committed to work together with government and other stakeholders, to help move our country forward to help further crush unemployment, poverty and inequality.

The Conference received a report from SACTWU's Worker Health Programme, which outlined its hugely successful efforts in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS through education, voluntary testing and counselling and voluntary male medical circumcision (MMC). The Conference noted

that SACTWU is now the leading MMC service provider with close to 135 000 circumcisions performed to date, since the inception of this programme in June 2011. Conference appreciated that SACTWU now runs the continent's largest trade union provided HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness program.

On Friday, the Conference received detailed reports by its research wing on the state of the economy and specifically that of the clothing, textile, footwear and leather industry and the economic bargaining indicators, both historic and forecasted.

But it was not just all meeting in Conference: Saturday 8 March was a Day of Action for the Bargaining Conference with delegates staging a mass protest march in the streets of Durban. The Conference marched through the busiest streets of Durban to ABSA Bank's regional office. The march, characterised by a high level of energy, spirited singing of our favourite struggle and union songs, and colourful, pertinent posters, culminated by SACTWU handing over a memorandum to ABSA representatives.

Delegates were protesting against ABSA's role in over R400 million in retirement monies that were lost from some provident funds to which some SACTWU members belong. We have launched a R200 million legal claim against ABSA recently, regarding this matter.

On Saturday, the Conference was addressed by the Minister of Trade and Industry, Rob Davis, on trade and industrial policy developments. Minister Davies commenced his interaction with SACTWU's worker leaders by briefing them on the new credit legislation, including the new directive that the credit history of consumers who have paid their debits would be removed from the records held by credit bureaus. This was warmly welcomed by the Conference. The Minister reported on the work of the dti, to help support our industry. Conference warmly appreciated the report, especially the unprecedented support which the dti has rendered to industry over the last 5 years. The Conference was shocked when the Minister reported that the DA had voted against the Custom's Bill during recent parliamentary vote on the matter. Conference regards it is a vote against SACTWU members, as our union has made representations to the Portfolio Committee in support of the Bill.

Minister Davies' address was followed by a lively address by the Minister of Public Enterprises, Malusi Gigaba, in his capacity as ANC Head of 2014 General Elections. This was followed by a long and constructive engagement discussion with Conference delegates.

Minister Gigaba emphasised to Conference delegates the central role that the manufacturing sector and industrial policy play in the ANC's 2014 election Manifesto. Conference welcomed the report, and noted with deep appreciation the firm commitments made in the ANC's 2014 election manifesto to support our industry, such as the commitment to promote local procurement by requiring government entities to purchase at least 75% of its clothing, textile and leather procurement requirements from local South African manufacturers, the commitment to strengthen collective bargaining, to fight non-compliance and the commitment to especially strengthen the role of bargaining councils.

Conference noted the announcement that Bafana Bafana will now have a new kit sponsor,

Nike. Conference calls on SAFA to ensure that this new supporters t-shirt kits are locally manufactured. Conference extended this call to all other national sporting codes.

Our 2014 wage negotiations kick off in mid-March this year.

We also have a good story to tell!

Issued by
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