

COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions)

Formed in December 1985, COSATU is by far the largest union federation ever in SA, representing 1.1 million workers.

In a few years, COSATU has united almost every big SA union in all major industrial sectors into 14 industrial unions.

COSATU's slogan is "An injury to one is an injury to all," which sums up the real meaning of COSATU - to unite all workers against the attacks of the bosses and the government.

COSATU aims to bring all workers under the banner of "One Country, One Federation."

COSATU adopted the Freedom Charter as a guiding document for building a democratic society in SA.

COSATU and the UDF (United Democratic Front) are the major force behind the Mass Democratic Movement and the current Defiance Campaign.

COSATU's THREE PRINCIPLES

(1) WORKER CONTROL - COSATU believes that workers must control all structures in the federation.

(2) NON-RACIALISM - COSATU rejects apartheid in all its forms. To unite the working class, all workers regardless of race should be organised. COSATU has several hundred white workers as members and tens of thousands of coloured and Indian workers. The vast majority of COSATU membership are African (black) workers. COSATU is organising many more non-African workers to join up.

(3) ONE UNION, ONE INDUSTRY - COSATU believes that workers should be organised into national industrial unions. Workers in each major industrial sector should join one national union, through which they are able to more effectively challenge the national power of the big capitalist companies which dominate the economy. All COSATU unions - except those in transport and the public sector - are fully-formed national industrial unions.

COSATU CAMPAIGNS

Since the launch of COSATU, dramatic developments have taken place in the struggle for freedom in SA. COSATU has embarked on many campaigns to mobilise, conscientise and educate workers about their rights. In the process, COSATU has established itself as a leading force in the mass democratic struggle in South Africa.

(1) LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN - demands 40-hour work week; jobs for all at a living wage; abolition of migrant labour; the right to decent housing and proper education; and Sharpeville Day, May Day and Soweto Day as paid holidays.

Many victories have been won. This campaign contributed a lot to the growth of COSATU. COSATU unions have consistently won real wage increases over and above the inflation rate; in some sectors they have won maternity rights and massive wage increases.

(2) UNITED ACTION AGAINST APARTHEID - Disciplined alliances with progressive organizations (such as UDF, SAYCO, NECC, and SACC) have resulted in mass campaigns against apartheid repression. The Defiance Campaign is the most recent.

As the attacks on COSATU itself increased - with many offices being bombed, thousands of members detained, COSATU media confiscated, banning of mass meetings and rallies - the HANDS OFF COSATU CAMPAIGN developed.

(3) ORGANISING THE PUBLIC SECTOR, DOMESTIC AND FARMWORKERS - Domestic, farm and public service workers are the most exploited workers in SA. Even basic union rights are denied to these workers. Domestic and farm workers are not protected by any of the labour laws. Public service workers are denied the right to strike.

(4) THE LABOUR LAW - The new Labour Relations Law severely restricts the workers' legal right to strike and take solidarity action. It is aimed at smashing COSATU's Living Wage Campaign.

COSATU mobilised a national campaign and massive protests against the law. COSATU will fight to the bitter end to stop the law. Since the law passed, the bosses have used it to lock out and dismiss thousands of COSATU members.

(5) ORGANISING THE UNEMPLOYED - Mass unemployment has grown due to continuous dismissals and retrenchments as a result of new technology and the economic recession. Unemployed workers have virtually no benefits and are often used against employed workers in strikes.

The National Unemployed Workers Co-ordinating Committee of COSATU is organising to unite the unemployed and employed workers in the struggle for jobs for all at a living wage. Unemployed workers are being trained to develop necessary skills for co-operative projects.

COSATU UNIONS

1. CAWU (Construction & Allied Workers Union)
Organises building, painting, plastering and brick workers.
2. CCAWUSA (Commercial, Catering & Allied Workers Union of SA)
Organises workers in shops, banks, hotels and restaurants.
3. CWIU (Chemical Workers Industrial Union)
Organises the chemical and petroleum industry.
4. FAWU (Food & Allied Workers Union)
Organises workers in the food, brewing, tobacco and farm industries.
5. NEHAWU (National Education, Health & Allied Workers Union)
Organises workers at schools, technicians, universities, hospitals.
6. NUM (National Union of Mineworkers)
Organises mine and electrical workers.
7. NUMSA (National Union of Metalworkers of SA)
Organises metal, automobile and engineering workers.
8. POTWA (Post Office & Telecommunications Workers Association)
Organises post and telecommunications workers.
9. PPWAWU (Printing, Paper, Wood & Allied Workers Union)
Organises printing, wood, paper and furniture workers.
10. SACTWU (South African Clothing & Textile Workers Union)
Organises textile and clothing workers.
11. SADWU (South African Domestic Workers Union)
Organises domestic and garden workers.
12. SAMWU (South Africa Municipal Workers Union)
Organises municipal workers.
13. SARHWU (South Africa Railway & Harbour Workers Union)
Organises workers at railways.
14. TCWU (Transport & General Workers Union)
Organises busdrivers, security and cleaning workers.

The information is excerpted from COSATU brochures and is reproduced by the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid (November 1989).

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