

THE COLLAPSE OF APARTHEID

In 1990 the National Party government, led by F.W. de Klerk, unbanned the ANC and other political parties, followed by the release from jail of most political prisoners including Nelson Mandela and his comrades. However the transition to democracy was far from over. Business at this point was far more eager to talk and negotiate with the black majority than the government, as they wanted to act quickly and encourage the international community to lift sanctions in order to minimize their growing economic losses. The government clearly desired an end to civil unrest but did not embrace unanimous support for power-sharing with the black majority.

The ANC faced an intense struggle at this point to consolidate political support and distinguish itself from COSATU. Essentially the executive members of COSATU mirrored their roles in the reinstated ANC and union members quickly developed formal political citizenship in local committees. The party battled to reconstitute its local, regional and national representation and develop effective organizational structures as well as having to contend with other opposition parties who rallied considerable support such as the IFP and the SACP. (Marx, 1992: 196)

Immediately after their unbanning the ANC called for the return of all exiled political leaders and presented a set of demands to the government as pre-conditions for negotiation. Outbreaks of violence continued and despite serious contrasts in policy and procedures the ANC joined forces with the Pan Africanist Congress in 1991 and many other smaller parties quickly threw their weight behind the ANC for organizational support. During this period the government and the ANC continually found themselves deadlocked and threatened to end negotiations while civilian militancy increased and nation-wide violent outbreaks resulted in thousands of people injured and killed.

While the ANC was negotiating the political transformation of South Africa, COSATU entered discussions on increasing workers rights and formalizing the role of labour in the post-apartheid economy. Late in 1990 a historic accord was signed by the employers' South African Consultative Committee on Labour Affairs (SACCOLA), the Department of Manpower (NMC), COSATU and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) to rescind the 1988 LRAA. This had the effect of extending collective bargaining rights to previously excluded workers and allowed the union federations to negotiate labour legislation before its enactment in Parliament. (Harcourt, 1998: 7) In the same vein of cooperation and negotiation, COSATU established the National Economic Forum in 1991 for discussing industrial policy with business groups and government. In addition, COSATU agreed to participate in discussions with the NMC, furthering labour's formal role in consultative bodies focused primarily on workers rights to be pursued after the first democratic elections in 1994. (Benner, 1995: 2)

Simultaneously as the major union federations, business and the government were embarking on tripartite negotiations, national stay-aways and protests were occurring across the country. Many South Africans had expected an imminent transfer of power after the release of