

## ***Presentation to Cosatu Western Cape Shop Steward Council***

### ***Bargaining Trends, Saliem Patel, 17 April 2012***

Viva Cosatu Viva. I want to thank Cosatu Western Cape for giving the LRS an opportunity to speak here today. Some of you will know the LRS as the Labour Research Service, some will know it as the Trade Union Library, others will know it from our publications - *Bargaining Monitor* or our monthly *Inflation Monitor*. A few of you would have attended our *Negotiators' Conferences* or *Workshops* or would have seen us present research to your union on developments in your sector or the company you work for. Gender coordinators and committee members would know us for coordinating the *Decisions for Life Campaign* which include other Federations as well.

The LRS was formed in 1986 to provide information, education and research on collective bargaining. It was a time when non-racial and independent unions became legal under apartheid and our unions were faced with the challenge of collective bargaining. This was a time of intense learning in the union movement and the LRS provided training to ensure unions were effective in collective bargaining.

And today we do very much the same. From the late 1990s we began to focus more on research because the skills levels in our unions on collective bargaining were quite high, having been built up for some years. We find that today, however, the situation is no longer the case, perhaps because of the turnover of shop stewards. We also find that there is very little preparation for collective bargaining and when we look at the results of collective bargaining this is confirmed. We have high demands going in and low settlements coming out. And when we factor inflation into this over the past five years we can see that wages, in real terms, are not any higher than they were 5 years ago. This is mathematics and your experience may be different, but I doubt it very much.

The big challenge is to link collective bargaining to campaigns and organising. Our unions have plenty of campaigns but collective bargaining is taken up on the side, even though our past experience as unions shows us what a powerful force collective bargaining can be when taken up as

part of bigger campaigns. The results also tell us that without mobilisation no amount of reasoning at the table will shift the stubborn attitudes of business. The *Living Wage Campaign* and the campaign to *Ban Labour Brokers* will be very effective if we link them to shop-floor demands and the collective bargaining process. What workers win on the ground is more sustainable and will drive changes in policy and legislation.

The LRS has over the years built up research, information and education tools for unions that help to link collective bargaining with campaigning and organising. We have developed databases on wages and companies; we publish analysis of wages and conditions and provide information on economic factors that impact on bargaining. These resources are for unions and I call on you to use it.

In this year we will continue to focus on banning labour broking and how collective bargaining can be linked to this campaign. In our workshop in Johannesburg at the end of last year, shop stewards lamented that management pushed their demands on labour broking off the table saying that it was being dealt with at Nedlac. The shop stewards felt that something should be done and we immediately created a space for discussing this problem. A number of ideas emerged of how shop stewards could practically begin to take up labour broking – from simple things like speaking to workers working for labour brokers about their rights, identifying labour brokers and pointing out their bad practices, making workers in their workplace understand how labour broking is bringing back slavery, and many ideas came up about approaching other organisations to make them aware of this problem.

We will be having negotiators conference in Cape Town on the 8-9 May which will expose shop stewards to a range of information, education and research tools we have at the LRS and how to use them effectively. In conclusion though, we must always remember that information and research are tools and are only powerful if we know how to use it to build our unions. We hope that unions will participate in our workshop and invitations have already gone out.

Amandla Ngawethu. An Injury to one is an injury to all!!