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AN OPENING ADDRESS TO THE PPNAHU NATIONAL CONGRESS:

13 - 16TH, JUNE 1991

BY GOVAN MBEKI

COHRADE CHAIR, CONRADES AND FRIENDS.

HISTORIANS IN THIS COUNTRY TEND TO SHORTEN THE STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING CLASS IN OUR COUNTRY TO THE PERIOD AFTER THE WIEHAN COMMISSION IN 1979 RECOMMENDED THE RECOGNITION OF TRADE UNIONS ESPECIALLY AMONGST AFRICANS. IT IS OF COURSE UNDERSTANDABLE WHY THEY DO SO BECAUSE THE REFUSAL BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THIS COUNTRY TO RECOGNISE AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS WHEN THE INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION ACT WAS PASSED IN 1924 IS SOMETHING BOTH THE NATIONAL BOURGEOISIE AND THE GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKE TO HAVE BURIED AND FORGOTTEN. THE EXCLUSION OF THE AFRICAN WORKERS FROM THE PROVISION OF THE INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION ACT BY DEFINING AN EMPLOYEE AS A PERSON WHO DID NOT CARRY A PASS CONDEMNED MILLIONS OF AFRICAN WORKERS TO A STATE IN WHICH THEY COULD NOT DEFEND THEMSELVES AS AN ORGANISED FORCE AGAINST SOME OF THE WORST FORMS OF EXPLOITATION IN THIS COUNTRY. IT ALSO CREATED DIVISIONS AMONG THE WORKING CLASS ALONG RACIAL AND ETHNIC

LINES, ESPECIALLY AFTER THE PASSING OF THE NATIVE LABOUR SETTLEMENTS OF DISPUTES ACTS OF 1953 WHICH PROVIDED FOR THE SETTING UP OF WORKS COMMITTEES.

WHEN HOWEVER AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS WERE RECOGNISED AS FROM 1979 IT HAS AS A RESULT OF THE DETERMINED STRUGGLE BY THE WORKERS THEMSELVES TO FIGHT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS AND FOR THE HIGHER WAGES TO RAISE THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING. IN SPITE OF THEIR EXCLUSION FROM THE PROVISIONS OF INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION REGULATING LABOUR RELATIONS THE WORKERS COMBINED AS A FORCE TO STAKE THEIR CLAIMS AND FORCED THE HAND OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE EMPLOYERS TO RECOGNISE THEIR TRADE UNIONS.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS TOOK PLACE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE BROADER STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE WORKING CLASS ALWAYS TO BEAR IN MIND THAT THEY WERE DENIED THE RIGHT TO BE ORGANISED INTO TRADE UNIONS AS RESULT OF THE OVERALL STRATEGY OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THIS COUNTRY TO OPPRESS AND EXPLOIT ITS PEOPLES. WHAT I AM TRYING TO EMPHASISE IS THAT WITHOUT ATTAINING LIBERATION FOR ALL THE PEOPLES OF THIS COUNTRY THE STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING CLASS WILL NOT MAKE PROGRESS. AT THIS STAGE OF THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION THE STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING CLASS TO ELIMINATE EXPLOITATION IS INSEPARABLE FROM THE STRUGGLE TO REMOVE OPPRESSION.

PPHANU IS A VERY IMPORTANT AND SIGNIFICANT LINK IN THE STRUGGLE BECAUSE IT OCCUPIES A KEY POSITION IN THE WHOLE SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION IN THIS COUNTRY. IT IS HOWEVER ABSOLUTELY IMPORTANT THAT WHILE WE, IN PPWAHU ARE STRUGGLING TO UNITE THE WORKERS IN THIS INDUSTRY WITH A VIEW TO RAISING THEIR STANDARDS OF LIVING AND PROTECTING THEM AGAINST EXPLOITATION, WE KEEP BEFORE OUR EYES THE NEED TO UNITE THE ENTIRE WORKING CLASS WITHIN THE COUNTRY. IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT COSATU HAS FORMED.

LET US THEN EXAMINE THE ROLE WHICH COSATU, THE BIGGEST FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS, IS CAST TO PLAY IN THE STRUGGLE THAT IS BEING FAGED IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY. FOR A LONG TIME BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE EMPLOYING CLASS SUCCEEDED TO CREATE DIVISIONS AMONG THE WORKING CLASS SO THAT THEY COULD MORE EFFECTIVELY MAKE THE WORKING CLASS FORGET THE FACT THAT THEY WERE THE MAIN CREATORS OF WEALTH IN THIS COUNTRY. THEY TREATED WHITE WORKERS DIFFERENTLY FROM THE REST OF THE WORKERS IN THE COUNTRY ON GROUNDS OF COLOUR. IN TURN DURING THE PERIOD OF CAPITAL ACCUMULATION BY AFRIKANERS THEY SET UP AFRIKANER TRADE UNIONS WHICH THEN WERE MARRIED TO THE POLITICS OF AFRIKANER NATIONALISM IN ORDER TO APPEAL TO THEM TO SUPPORT ONLY AFRIKANER BUSINESS CONCERNS. WHEN THE GOVERNMENT AMENDED THE INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION ACT IN 1953 TO PROVIDE FOR SEPARATE UNIONS

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FOR THE COLOURED AND INDIAN WORKERS WHILE THEY PLACE THEM UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE WHITE WORKERS IN MIXED TRADE UNIONS THEY SUCCEEDED IN FURTHER FRAGMENTATION OF THE WORKING CLASS, SO THAT A TRADE UNION REPRESENTING AN ETHNIC GROUP TENDED TO CARE ONLY FOR AND SEEK TO PROMOTE THE INTEREST OF THE PARTICULAR GROUP.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT RULES OF COSATU IS TO AROUSE THE WORKERS IN THIS COUNTRY TO THE REALISATION OF THE FACT THAT THEY BELONG TOGETHER IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR ETHNIC ORIGINS. THEY HAVE A COMMON GOAL WHICH IS TO PROTECT WORKERS AGAINST EXPLOITATION. IT MAYBE THAT AT SOME OTHER TIME WE SHOULD CONSIDER SERIOUSLY HOW FAR A TRADE UNION GOES TOWARDS THE ELIMINATION OF EXPLOITATION. IN OTHER WORDS SHOULD TRADE UNIONS AIM AT ONLY FIGHTING FOR A TARGET PORTION OF THE SURPLUS VALUE THEY HAVE CREATED, OR THEY SHOULD WORK TOWARDS THE COMPLETE ELIMINATION OF EXPLOITATION WHICH WOULD MEAN THAT THEY SHOULD TAKE OVER THE CONTROL AND OWNERSHIP OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION? THIS IS A QUESTION WHICH AT SOME TIME THE WORKERS IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL TRADE UNIONS AND AT THE LEVEL OF COSATU WILL HAVE TO DISCUSS SERIOUSLY TO MAKE SURE THAT WHEN WORKERS TALK OF HANTING TO ADOPT SOCIALISM THEY ARE CLEAR ABOUT THE STEPS TO BE TAKEN TO ACHIEVE THAT GOAL.

BUT AS AT PRESENT COSATU IS ENGAGED ALONG WITH OTHER PROGRESSIVE FORCES IN THE COUNTRY IN THE STRUGGLE TO TAKE

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ARE SUBJECTED TO THE SAME DISADVANTAGES THAT THE COMMUNITIES FROM WHICH THEY COME ARE EXPOSED. MILLIONS OF OUR PEOPLE LIVE IN APPALLING CONDITIONS IN SHACKS; THE OLD MATCHBOX HOUSES ARE UNSIGHTLY AND IN A STATE OF DISREPAIR. THE STREETS IN THE TOWNSHIPS ARE UNCARED FOR AND ALL FULL OF POTHoles AND EVEN DONGAS, WHILE THE ONLY TARRED ROADS ARE THOSE THAT FACILITATE THE MOVEMENT OF THE POLICE AND THE ARMY IN CARRYING OUT THE ENFORCEMENT OF OPPRESSIVE LAWS; THE STREETS AND HOUSES, TO SAY NOTHING OF THE SHANTY TOWNS ARE NOT PROVIDED WITH ELECTRICITY WHILE THERE'S VIRTUALLY NO DRAINAGE SYSTEM TO ENSURE THAT DIRTY WATER DOES NOT ACCUMULATE ON THE STREET. THESE CONDITIONS AFFECT ALL THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THE TOWNSHIPS, AND IF THE CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE SUCH CONDITIONS IS TO BE CONDUCTED, THE TOWNSHIP DHELLERS, WHETHER THEY ARE WORKERS, PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE, BUSINESS PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO BE INVOLVED. THE WORKERS COME OUT OF THE FACTORY TO LIVE IN THESE CONDITIONS. HE OR SHE THEREFORE CANNOT CLAIM THAT THE CONDITIONS WHICH AFFECT THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY DO NOT AFFECT HIM/HER UNLESS HE/SHE IS PREPARED/WILLING TO LIVE IN SQUALOR OUTSIDE THE FACTORY. SIMILARLY THOSE OF THE COMMUNITY WHO DO NOT EARN THEIR LIVING AS WORKERS CANNOT STAND BACK AND NOT SHOW AN INTEREST IN THE STRUGGLE OF THE WORKERS BECAUSE THE INTEREST OF ALL THE OPPRESSED PEOPLE ARE INTERLINKED. AT PRESENT THE ANC. TOGETHER WITH ITS ALLIES COSATU-SACP IS ENGAGED IN PRELIMINARY TALKS WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO

PREPARE THE WAY FOR NEGOTIATION TO TAKE PLACE WITH A VIEW TO DRAWING UP A NEW CONSTITUTION FOR SOUTH AFRICA. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT ALL THOSE WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE ORGANISATIONS THAT CONSTITUTE THIS ALLIANCE SHOULD REALISE THAT EACH ONE MUST PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING THE ANC. IT SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND THAT IN THE PROCESS OF DRAWING UP A NEW CONSTITUTION FOR SOUTH AFRICA PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT VIEWS. THERE ARE SOME WHO WOULD WANT TO HAVE SPECIAL PRIVILEGES FOR TRIBAL OR RACIAL GROUPS; AND IF THE NEW CONSTITUTION IS TO BE DRAWN UP TO ENSURE THAT THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE OPPRESSED PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY ARE MET WE WILL HAVE TO SUPPORT THE POLICIES OF THE ANC AS SET OUT IN THE FREEDOM CHARTER. J

IT IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL AT THIS STAGE TO ENSURE THAT HE HIGHLIGHT THE NEED FOR 'A MEASURE OF UNITY AMONG THE OPPRESSED AND EXPLOITED PEOPLE. THE FORCE THAT CARRIES THE SUPPORT OF THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE OPPRESSED AND EXPLOITED PEOPLE WILL DETERMINE THE TYPE OF CONSTITUTION WHICH A NEW S.A. WILL HAVE. WHAT THIS MEANS IS THAT THE ANC MUST SHOW THAT IT HAS THIS SUPPORT, AND THE ONLY PROOF ARE THE NUMBERS OF ITS MEMBERSHIP. THE WORKING CLASS IN ANY COUNTRY CONSTITUTES THE MAJORITY. COSATU HAS THEREFORE A VITAL ROLE TO PLAY IN ENSURING THAT THE ANC HAS THE MEMBERSHIP THAT WILL ENABLE IT TO HAVE A DOMINANT SAY IN DETERMINING THE TYPE OF CONSTITUTION THAT WOULD BE IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY.

IT IS CLEAR AT THIS STAGE THAT COSATU AND THE TRADE UNIONS AT THE REGIONAL LEVELS HAVE NOT YET GOT THIS MESSAGE CLEAR, BECAUSE VERY FEW OF THE MEMBERS OF THE TRADE UNIONS ARE ACTIVE IN RECRUITING AMONG THEMSELVES AND THE COMMUNITIES FROM WHICH THEY COME, MEMBERS INTO THE ANC. THIS MEANS THAT THE INDIVIDUAL TRADE UNIONS ARE IN EFFECT NOT CLEAR ABOUT THE ROLE OF COSATU IN THE ALLIANCE. OFTEN WE READ FROM THE PRESS THAT THERE WILL BE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AT THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WHICH WILL DRAW UP THE CONSTITUTION. THE MEMBERS OF THIS ASSEMBLY WILL BE ELECTED ON A NON-RACIAL BASIS AND IT IS AT THAT STAGE THAT THE POLITICAL ORGANISATION THAT HAS THE GREATER NUMBER OF VOTES WILL BE IN A POSITION TO INFLUENCE THE TYPE OF CONSTITUTION UNDER WHICH THE S.A. IS TO BE GOVERNED. IT WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE OPPRESSED AND EXPLOITED PEOPLE THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE BY FAR THE LARGEST NUMBER OF THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES TO ENSURE THAT THEY WILL HAVE THE CONSTITUTION THEY WANT. IT THEREFORE REMAINS IN YOUR HANDS TO SEE TO IT THAT THE CONSTITUTION WILL GUARANTEE THE PROMOTION OF THE INTERESTS OF THE OPPRESSED AND EXPLOITED PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY.