

Cosatu tribute to Mandela

When Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela passed last year on 5 December, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) paid tribute not only to South Africa's most loved liberation hero but also to an internationally recognised leader.

Cosatu's 2.2-million members are this week joining the rest of South Africa and the world in mourning the sad passing of our dearly beloved Comrade, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. These are days of great grief, as we all reflect on the sad loss of the greatest-ever South African and the most inspirational leader in our revolutionary struggle for human rights, liberty and democracy.

These days are also however occasions for us to celebrate the life of someone who did more than anyone else to lead our national democratic revolution, to advance the struggle to transform our society and to inspire all those fighting for freedom in South Africa and around the world.

We salute one of the finest political figures of all time, a fearless revolutionary who led his people during the darkest days of our country, who never wavered and was the very essence of compassion, dedication, integrity and selflessness.

Comrade Madiba was a lawyer who could have lived a successful and comfortable life with his family, but he chose to reject this route and opted to sacrifice his future personal and family life, in order to dedicate his life, and risk death, to the revolutionary struggle

to free South Africans from the shackles of apartheid capitalism.

As he famously said at his trial: 'I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to see realised. But if needs be it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die'.

As President of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League he played a key role in radicalising the ANC, from an organisation presenting petitions to the King of England into a revolutionary fighting force that mobilised mass action in militant struggles.

Nelson Mandela was a man of peace. Despite his long and brutal 27 years of incarceration, he never became embittered or bent on revenge against his former oppressors.

But he was not, contrary to the views of some in business who want to claim his legacy, a liberal pacifist, whose sole role was to appease the business community and reconcile their interests with those of workers.

He made necessary tactical compromises, which trade unionists know are sometimes

unavoidable, but never compromised on his basic revolutionary goals as embodied in the Freedom Charter – for a society in which 'the people shall share in the country's wealth'.

As a former Commander in Chief of Umkhonto Wesizwe (MK) he saw the necessity to keep the weapon of armed struggle in the movement's arsenal, should his ultimately successful strategy of a negotiated settlement be sabotaged by the apartheid regime.

As president he remained a humble and modest servant of his people, who never compromised his democratic principles, or thought of anything but how to win the ultimate victory of the revolution he lived for – the struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and free South Africa.

His greatest moment was on 27 April 1994, the day we flocked to the voting stations to queue to vote, for the first time, for a government of our choice. Since then the lives of the majority, particularly the working class and the poor have been radically improved.

Under successive ANC governments we have a constitution which safeguards democracy and human rights, labour laws which protect



Nelson Mandela received tributes from unions nationally and internationally.

workers from the worst forms of exploitation, more than 15-million people are now eligible for social grants and over three-million new homes and a big increase in the number of households with access to electricity, water and sanitation.

Comrade Madiba would have insisted that full credit for all these successes be given to the other giants of the struggle – Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Chief Albert

Luthuli, Joe Slovo, Chris Hani and many others. But he was unique, the South African who, more than any other, became the embodiment of the struggle against racist dictatorship, apartheid brutality and the exploitation of workers and the poor.

He was honoured with over 250 awards, including the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize, the US Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Soviet

Order of Lenin. But for South African workers, the one which we shall always remember is the inaugural Elijah Barayi Award for outstanding leadership and service, presented on Cosatu's 15th birthday in 2000.

There was absolutely no doubt about who should be the first recipient. The citation to that award declared: 'You have been a constant inspiration to us from the days of the Congress of the People, through the armed struggle, the dark days in prison and exile, the mass uprisings of the eighties, to the period of negotiations, and finally the days of liberation and reconstruction.

You have always first and foremost been the leader of the people's movement. Whether you were the young lion fighting to radicalise the ANC, the leader of the defiance campaign, the "black pimpnel" avoiding the clutches of the security police, the MK commander-in-chief seeking weapons and funding in Africa, and unifier and leader on Robben Island, or the negotiator, a statesman and first president of a democratic South Africa, you never lost sight of your role as the leader and servant of the liberation movement.

You have taught us all this lesson, through your commitment, your dedication, your humility, your selflessness, your loyalty and your discipline: that to be a true leader is to be a servant of your people. For this we salute you.'

The citation concluded with the words of a popular liberation song once sung by MK troops in Angola: 'We shall always love you, we shall need you, for the things you've done for us.'

The best way to honour his memory is to take forward the struggle he led, and obey the call he made during the ANC's 50th national conference: 'Here are the reins of the movement – protect and guide its precious legacy;

defend its unity and integrity as committed disciples of change; pursue its popular objectives like true revolutionaries who seek only to serve the nation.'

Our chief challenge now is to match the political transformation which Comrade Madiba led in the area of democracy and human rights with an equally militant revolutionary struggle to solve the problems which we still face, particularly economic apartheid, exposed by our outrageous levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

We need dedicated disciples of Comrade Madiba in the ANC and the Alliance to emulate his role, in our struggle to implement the 2012 Mangaung Conference resolution for the 2nd Phase of the Transition, for the full and speedy implementation of government's existing policies to transform our economy, to create jobs and redistribute the country's wealth and for a radical programme for economic reconstruction, in line with the Freedom Charter.

We need to recommit ourselves to the battle to defend workers' rights, to end the super-exploitation of vulnerable workers and the modern-day slavery by labour brokers, to get rid of the scourge of corruption, and to have a national minimum wage and basic income grant.

The world is poorer today after the departure of this moral and political giant. Tata Madiba will remain a global icon and a symbol of hope for the oppressed. We must rededicate ourselves to defending the oppressed and in building a truly united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa that will never betray his principles. ■

Fedusa mourns Madiba

In a statement released after the death of Nelson Mandela the Federation of Unions of South Africa (Fedusa) said it was saddened by his passing on, and celebrated the contributions he made to peace and reconciliation.



Dennis George, Fedusa general secretary.

Fedusa is mourning the death of former President Nelson Mandela. While saddened by his passing, the federation also celebrates the enormous contribution Madiba made to peace and reconciliation.

'Tata Madiba is undoubtedly the biggest icon ever to emerge from South Africa, and his contribution to South African history can never be sufficiently emphasised. I can still recall when, after elected as president, he wanted to meet with Fedusa. When his office phoned we indicated that we were more than prepared to see him at the Union Buildings, but we were told

that he insisted to meet us at our offices. It was a wonderful experience for our leadership at that time to shake hands with such a great man,' Dennis George remembered.

'Although we are mourning the passing of Madiba, it would be wrong not to celebrate the life that he lived. Nelson Mandela was the pivotal point of the successful and peaceful transition from the apartheid state to a democratic country. We must laud him for not harbouring hate or feelings of retribution, but rather becoming a servant of all South Africans and fostering reconciliation between all the racial groups in our beautiful country. It is only on this foundation of peace that we could start building our country to what it is now, and what it will become,' added George. ■