

workers will be the first step in narrowing this gap. There should be absolutely no space left for the unfair allegation that we represent the working class 'elite'. The second step is to ensure that our local, provincial and national structures respond and link to the issues that are expressed on the ground. Quality service delivery is the most obvious issue. In this regard our locals in many areas have been very responsive.'

CORRUPTION

'Corruption in our ranks is something that we don't really want to talk about. But our members have spoken through the Naledi survey, and we have an obligation to tackle it. "Corruption" for our members can mean many things, from selling out to management without any financial exchange through to the abuse of union funds, creating privilege for leaders, and being bribed by management. How can we be seen to be a leader in society on this matter, unless we act decisively against corruption, as well as the perception of corruption, in our own ranks?'

CONCLUSION

Unlike most Cosatu meetings where there is much analysis on socio-economic and political contexts, the CBOC conference was organised differently in that efforts were made to deal with problems that affected particular sectors. In that respect the conference was able to look into the problems facing unions and how solutions could be found. This was reflected in a larger way by the overview by Vavi. ^{LB}

This article is based on the presentation titled 'An overview of the collective bargaining, organising and campaigns: Challenges we face' which was presented by the general secretary of Cosatu, Zwelinzima Vavi at the CBOC conference in Boksburg in March.

Media leaks: how Cosatu responded

After the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) in February, there was a flurry of media reports on allegations of corruption against the federation's general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi. The 'corruption allegations' revolved around the sale of the Old Cosatu House. **Elijah Chiwota** looks at how Cosatu responded to the media stories.

Those who have studied the news media have concluded that in the process of making news a lot of things happen. These include selection of what to write, the choice of words one uses, and the framing of the story.

Here is how Matuma Letsoalo of the *Mail & Guardian* broke the story in March. 'Cosatu leader Zwelinzima Vavi could find himself out in the cold in as little as three months, if his adversaries in the federation have their way.

The *Mail & Guardian* has learned that a powerful faction is planning to show Vavi the door as Cosatu's next central executive committee in May.

Vavi – serving his fourth term as Cosatu general secretary – this week came under attack from his comrades, who accused him of, among other things, collaborating with opposition political parties and rival unions to destabilise the African National Congress and government.'

Other papers that workers read, such as the *Daily Sun*, *Sowetan* and the *City Press* also ran the story.

Phuleng Thethela's analysis of newspaper reports on the 1998 Southern African Development Community's military invasion of Lesotho makes an observation that can be applied to how the media recently reported on Cosatu.

'The news is not only reported, but it is also interpreted and interpreting any event 'involves the beliefs, opinions and hopes and aspirations of those gathering, reporting and publishing the news' and in that process 'ideology inevitably codetermines what gets published, when it is reported and how the reporting is done,' she remarked.

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe expands on how journalists interpret news events. 'In one sense you want journalists to be objective, but of course you know that cannot be, but you do not want them to distort facts either. There are always

different interpretations, different aspects and different perspectives. It is important for journalists to be able to show these differences, to make people think for themselves.'

The reporting and interpretations of events on the Cosatu issue saw the favouring of anonymous sources at the expense of others. It was also an opportunity for the media to talk of cracks within the federation and the implications for the Tripartite Alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). This also added voices to the debate on the decline of union influence.

MEDIA STRATEGY

In responding to the media when the story broke Cosatu's strategy was to 'think carefully and say nothing that is not agreed policy and to communicate forcefully and vigorously', says Patrick Craven, the federation's spokesperson who added that debates had to be aligned to policies.

'What made life better for us was that unlike other trade union federations - nationally and internationally - it was the media that came to Cosatu. Media come to us constantly. We do not have to chase or entice them,' said Craven.

However, he said that the reporting on Cosatu by the print media was not fair as it was 'always biased in favour of the employer. But because we keep pressure on worker issues we get coverage all the time. We also believe that we can do better on how we represent workers and are always discussing this in our departmental meetings.'

SOURCES

Michael Schudson writes that some of the power of the media is found in the news sources. 'Sources: they are the deep, dark secret of the power of the press. Much of this power is exercised not by news institutions themselves but by the sources that feed them information... News represents *who* are the authorised



Policies inform media engagement: Patrick Craven, Cosatu spokesperson.

knowers and [what] are their authorised versions of reality'.

Most of the information that was published as coming from Cosatu's central executive committee was provided by anonymous sources. However, the versions of reality of the Cosatu sources were disputed.

Says Patrick Craven: 'We believe that anonymous sources should be used when lives are at risk but not on personal agendas. Why do you not want to be known for your personal views? Anonymous sources put the spokesperson in a difficult position. We do not want to debate issues raised by anonymous sources.'

The practices of some media houses fuelled the use of such sources. 'The media is culpable. Why are they not checking information against three other sources? This means that they are not complying even with their own ethics of checking facts. So, anonymous sources should be treated with suspicion. If they have a clear

mandate from their members, why do they not want their names to be published?' asks Craven.

CLASS & NEW ENEMIES

Vavi has no kind words for the anonymous sources, some of whom are union leaders who were causing 'self-afflicted' wounds and class enemies interested in 'fatally' weakening the trade union movement. 'That is why we condemn in the strongest possible terms the tendency of anonymous individuals within the federation to "leak" to the media distorted and false information about decisions made in constitutional structures,' he says.

Speaking at the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa)'s national bargaining conference in March he almost named the sources. 'The newspapers' "sources", who we now can say without any fear of a contradiction are a few senior leaders of our affiliated unions at the level of the



Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi at the Numsa NBC.

presidents and general secretaries, are the new enemies of the working class. They have been given a mandate to destroy Cosatu or at best create so much division that the federation can no longer be an independent movement capable of fighting for the interests of members.'

Vavi added that the sources were after tarnishing his name. 'The mandate of the sources is very clear: target the general secretary and smear him continuously in the newspapers until workers lose trust in him. After all they know the only way to kill a snake is to smash its head. At this stage I am of the view that there will be no common ground with those leaders, whoever they may be.'

'Either they succeed to divide and weaken Cosatu or we expose them and crush them. The real reason why they won't disclose their identities is that they act without any mandate from the members of their unions. Eventually we shall defeat these few

individuals acting as sources of the newspapers; we have no doubt about that.

The sources were diverting readers' attentions away from the problems currently faced by the unions and the country.

'What the sources are doing to this movement, which they clearly don't know what it took to build, is worse than just committing treason. It forms part of the unfolding tragedy in our broader movement. Divisions among the forces of change have moved focus away from driving real change – to defeat unemployment, poverty and inequalities and build a better life – into internal, unending strife that has left us incoherent and enjoying less and less confidence from the people we want to lead.

'In the end it is not even the parasitic sections of capital but the real ruling class that will be the main beneficiaries of these divisions the sources are promoting. There will be no implementation of the Freedom

Charter or any second phase of a radical economic transformation if workers allow Cosatu to be divided and weakened. Cosatu will no longer be able to fight for the total banning of labour brokering or fight against corruption, which is an elite programme to steal from the poor,' said Vavi.

CONCLUSION

The way newspapers used sources and interpreted events on matters raised in the central executive committee also reflected their own interests. This also applied to how they dealt with trade unions such as Cosatu. When there is an agreement between their interests and those of sources within the trade union movement the newspapers had no problems in publishing without giving much thought to diverse views that existed on the issue. Cosatu's response, as seen in its media strategy on this issue, was in line with the federation's mandate and policies. **LB**