

YCL using newspapers to attack workers

The South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) strongly objected to a Young Communist League (YCL) statement that was released following the May Day gathering at the Sisa Dukashe Stadium. **Armstrong Poswa** urges YCL to support working class struggles.

If the newspapers concerned, *Herald* and *Daily Dispatch*, had not rushed to exploit the tension created by the inflammatory statement issued by YCL on 2 May, but had instead followed a journalistic norm of asking for a response from Samwu, they would have received an entirely different view. Had they done this, they would have more accurately reflected what actually happened in the stadium on May Day.

The fact that the YCL issued its insulting statement without also consulting Samwu will be taken up within Alliance structures. Given that it is now in the public domain, we have little choice but to respond, and set the record straight.

Firstly, Samwu members from all corners of the province attended the May Day rally and participated in the protest against Comrade Jeremy Cronin, and not just a small unrepresentative group as alleged by the YCL. Furthermore, it was not just Samwu who expressed their displeasure at the presence of Comrade Cronin and other dignitaries, particularly when they were introduced, but a large section of comrades from other unions. To therefore claim that a small group of unrepresentative Samwu

members were solely responsible is frankly, to be economical with the truth.

DISTORTING THE TRUTH

Why have the YCL attempted to distort what actually happened, and not asked themselves why workers from all unions expressed their anger and not only to Comrade Jeremy? If the YCL had taken the time to ask Samwu and the other unions before issuing its insulting commentary they could have been given a clear picture.

Workers were extremely angry because Comrade Jeremy as the deputy minister of Transport has been in the forefront of developing and then trying to justify the e-toll system, which the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) rightly describes as the commodification and privatisation of public roads. It is now widely understood that the e-tolling system would have further impoverished the poor, and explains the massive opposition to it that has developed, and which has forced the government to re-think its implementation.

WORKING-CLASS ANGER

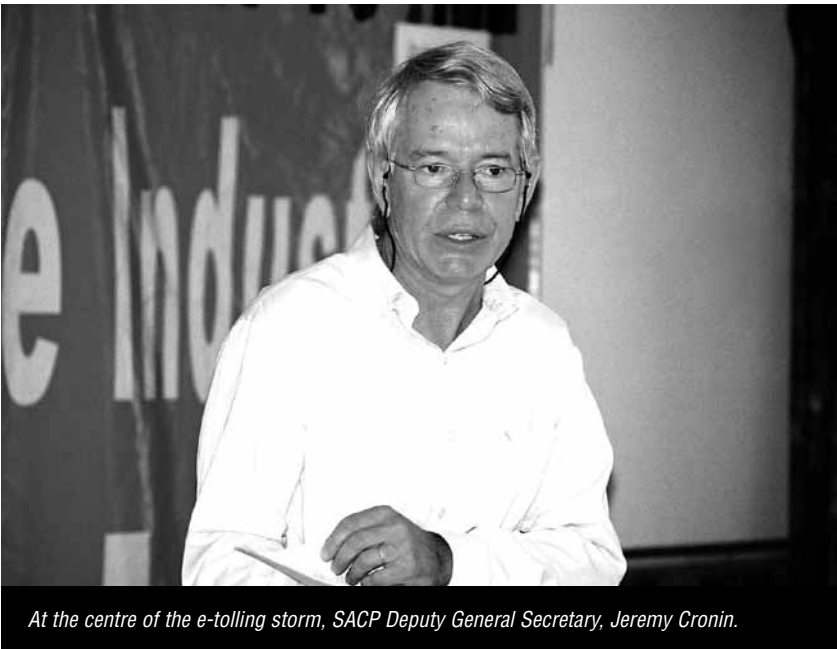
The anger of workers has its roots in an earlier event. On 7 March 2012 Cosatu embarked on a national stay-

away protest against labour brokers and e-tolling. The South African Communist Party (SACP) was, in our view, lukewarm in the support it gave to its Alliance partner Cosatu. Instead of engaging Cosatu, and supporting the struggle of the working-class, the party preferred to restrict its comments to the evils of labour broking and was almost silent on the e-tolling issue.

Only when it became clear that working class opposition to e-tolling was gathering momentum did the SACP issue a statement. Even then, Comrade Jeremy continued to make statements designed to save the e-tolling system, and to refute those who opposed it. YCL comrades must check the record and acknowledge the truth.

Workers expect communists to support their struggles, and especially when they are in the interests of the entire working class, and not to undermine them. This is why workers were angry, and rightly so. If the YCL expected workers to suspend their class consciousness and welcome Comrade Jeremy without raising these issues, then they need to rethink their approach, and learn from their mistakes.

By the way, May Day belongs to the working class, and not to individuals,



At the centre of the e-tolling storm, SACP Deputy General Secretary, Jeremy Cronin.

regardless of the high office they occupy, and workers reserve the right to use the May Day platform to express their dissatisfaction regardless of who is speaking!

From a Samwu perspective, we have engaged the government and the African National Congress (ANC) on many occasions including before the last local government elections. At that time Samwu faced challenges largely caused by government's inactivity and from ANC controlled municipalities who were victimising Samwu members (see *SALB* 35.3).

The ANC resolved to put our issues onto a fast track for resolution. Some issues were addressed, but many others were not. It is this inconsistency which fuels disapproval and disappointment. It also undermines the Alliance, not a robust protest at a May Day rally.

DON'T INSULT WORKING CLASS

We also want to place on record the manner in which the YCL have raised their complaints and the language they used. To refer to those workers who protested against Comrade Jeremy as 'lumpen' and as 'traitors' and 'hooligans' is completely inappropriate.

To be lumpen means you are not only marginalised, but regarded as intellectually empty and socially inferior. Why is the YCL using this term to insult workers? Millions of our people are marginalised, and have been denied opportunities that make it possible to escape impoverishment. Does the YCL regard the poor and impoverished in our country as enemies? Are they to be treated with disdain in the manner that YCL has?

Furthermore, to be a 'traitor' is to consciously engage in betrayal. Is the YCL saying that Samwu and other unions have betrayed the working class by demanding that Comrade Jeremy listen to their complaints on Workers' Day? As to the accusation of hired hooliganism, the YCL must provide evidence to indicate that rowdy criminal behaviour took place, and was paid for by unions that were present.

Sadly, the YCL seem to be more concerned with the embarrassment to Comrade Jeremy, than the real concerns of workers. This explains why they used harsh and insulting language to cover the fact that Comrade Jeremy and others have let the working class down on the e-tolling issue. There is no escaping the fact that Comrade Jeremy

cannot expect workers to change their tune when he switches from wearing a ministerial to a party hat!

FIND ANSWERS NOT SCAPEGOATS!

The workers who took part in the protest on May Day were not pressurised, paid or bullied to do so by their union leadership. The anger of workers was an expression of extreme discontent and disappointment, and the SACP must listen to what workers are saying. They are feeling let down by those who are supposed to be defending their interests in government, and do not expect them to support their further exploitation through e-tolling; labour brokers and many unjust situations facing not only workers but the broader working class.

Workers are suffering, and if the party and the ANC are not listening and doing something to ease their burdens then workers will just have to shout louder and mobilise more millions to demand that our government keep its promises. Government must serve the working class and the poor, not the capitalist class.

The YCL have given the media a stick to beat the organised working class, when they should be defending workers as we used to do in the 1980s, and linking arms with them to fight capitalist exploitation. They have insulted Samwu and all those unions that were present on May Day. They have made very serious accusations, and in so doing have strained Alliance relations. On our side we commit ourselves to be ready to engage with the YCL, but only when it is prepared to subject itself to self-criticism and recommit itself to working-class unity and solidarity by clearly retracting its misleading and inflammatory statement, and apologise to Samwu and the other Cosatu unions. Anything less will make matters worse. **LB**

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