

Editorial



FROM THE EDITOR

Writing in this Special Issue Johann Maree states that one of the reasons for the survival of the *Labour Bulletin* 'lies in the focus and relevance of its contents' that promoted 'open debate and critical analysis'. The editorial policy also played a part as it aimed at supporting and helping 'to build the democratic labour movement by providing information, analysis and news'. This is what is reflected in this 40th anniversary Special Issue.

With the help of former editors attempts were made to republish articles that reflected different periods in the history of the *Labour Bulletin*. Trying to condense articles covering a 40-year period is no easy task, and in the process of selection some articles were left out not because of their irrelevancy but as a result of limited space. However, as all the articles published in the *Labour Bulletin* since 1974 are available in PDF format, they are accessible to readers.

The articles by Richard Turner set the tone for the early years of the *Labour Bulletin*. Although discussing serious political topics some of the headings sounded very poetic. 'Slant-eyed men in the city of fear' for instance comments on how not to analyse Mozambique and the danger of reducing everything to communism and 'Two-edged red herrings' is also about using communism as a way of silencing dissent.

'To produce is to learn', written by Samora Machel and translated by Richard Turner explains how Marxist philosophy could be used in peasant production in Frelimo-liberated zones in rural Mozambique.

The article titled 'Participatory democracy' emphasises workers' control, solidarity and strong unions, and is based on Turner's book *The Eye of the Needle*. Although written in the 1970s the article is most useful if one takes into account what is happening in unions today. This article links well with 'Workers' control and democracy' by Jan Theron and 'Ceppwawu's night of the long knives' by John Apolis.

Richard Hyman's review of the IIE's *The Durban Strikes 1973* gives insight into the importance of the book and also lays the basis upon which the *Labour Bulletin* laid its roots.

Solly Sachs of the Garment Workers Union built a class-based union under difficult political conditions of racial segregation, wrote Jon Lewis.

Industrial conflict and strikes are common threads in *Labour Bulletin* articles. Conflict on the mines by Mike Kirkwood explains how difficult social conditions led to ethnic conflict between workers.

Strikes for better wages and working conditions on the East Rand in 1981 were analysed by Jeremy Baskin who argued that worker organisation had 'taken off' and was growing. Ari Sitas also gave a detailed account of the Dunlop workers' strike in Durban and argued that trade unions were 'caught between building the foundations of a democratic labour movement and modernising capitalist relations'.

Few in the Tripartite Alliance (African National Congress-Congress of South African Trade Unions-South African Communist Party) will agree to a leadership code as proposed by Joe Slovo in 1990. 'But if leadership lives it up, if we all go back and start occupying big houses in wealthy suburbs, there is no way we can get people to the sacrifices in laying the foundations for the future... In my opinion it is imperative that our broad liberation movement begins now to develop an effective leadership code of conduct that seeks to counter any tendencies towards elitism.'

Involvement of trade unions in the Tripartite Alliance has been a bone of contention for unions from the early days. Former National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) general secretary Moses Mayekiso argued: 'The experience of communist countries, where trade unions were conveyor belts of the government, is clear testimony that we have to rethink the basis of the alliance.'

Sakhela Buhlungu also outlined Cosatu's views in campaigning for the ANC and how parts of federation's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) were adopted by the ANC.

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The South African Labour

Bulletin's mission is to:

- provide information and stimulate critical analysis and debate on issues and challenges that confront workers, their organisations and their communities; and
- communicate this in an accessible and engaging manner.

In so doing the SALB hopes to advance progressive politics, promote social justice and the interests of the working class.

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The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was innovative in its early years as seen in the interview by Karl von Holdt with then acting general secretary Marcel Golding. NUM not only negotiated for wage increases but also for performance bonuses and social and trade union rights.

Cosatu's support for President Jacob Zuma during his rise to power has always attracted controversy. What was this support based on? Ebrahim Harvey argued in 2005 that Cosatu's support for Zuma did not make sense at policy or even ideological level. Recently some have drawn connections between the support for Zuma and the current crisis in Cosatu.

Whilst the early history of the trade union movement was all about industrial unions later on public service unions appeared on the scene. Ebrahim-Khalil Hassen addressed a number of questions during the 2007 public sector strike including on politics, government involvement, cost to society and the significance of the strike.

Von Holdt argued that hospital authorities and trade unions could work together in managing hospital strikes in ways that protected patients.

Asanda Benya's article is based on her experience underground for two-and-a-half months in a women's team and follows an ethnographic approach in which the researcher is in a dialogue with those they do research so as to get a deeper understanding of how they work. The article won the South African Labour Awards best article of the year in 2010. **LB**

Elijah Chiwota
Editor

Labour at knife's edge

Debates from 40th anniversary event

The labour movement in South Africa is at a turning point and at a knife's edge, concluded participants at the *South African Labour Bulletin (SALB)*'s 40th anniversary event at the Workers' Museum in Newtown, Johannesburg. What has led to this situation? **Elijah Chiwota** outlines the debates.

The anniversary event took place in the wake of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu)'s central executive committee expulsion of its biggest affiliate, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) from the federation on 7 November 2014. Most of the speakers placed the expulsion within a long history of debates on participatory democracy in the trade union movement identifying two opposing views. The first was that unions should remain autonomous and be controlled by workers through union structures and the latter was that unions should come under the control of political parties.

However, the dominant view has been one in which workers 'try to win the heart and soul of the ANC and unions engage with a responsive state,' says Adam Habib, vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand and honorary board member of the *SALB*. Business on the other hand is opposed to the Alliance as they see it as against promoting a competitive market economy. Those on the left of the ANC want 'what is best for the poor and workers' and want unions to be autonomous and not under the control of political parties, adds Habib.

According to Devan Pillay, it is the dominant view that has prevailed since the 'strategic compromise' made in 1990 when Cosatu became part of the Tripartite Alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

It is important to note that these debates are as old as the *Labour Bulletin* itself and have appeared in its many articles, as reflected in articles in this Special Issue.

EARLY YEARS

The *SALB* and the Institute for Industrial Education were formed when Richard Turner and others felt the need for worker education and to support trade unions with knowledge. Thus the early years of the *SALB* were dominated by debates on organising African trade unions. After the 1973 Durban Strikes there was a spike in worker militancy. The thinking was that 'labour is power, knowledge is power', says Foszia Turner-Stylianou widow to Richard Turner who was assassinated on 6 January 1978.

'The aim was to raise the knowledge balance between managers and workers... and most of the articles in the early editions were written by Rick who was banned and had time to think and link ideas,' remembers Turner-Stylianou.

Former editor John Mawbey (1975-1979) also recalls this early period. 'We went from factory to factory distributing pamphlets on participatory democracy and this is how the *SALB* was embedded in the unions and a project of IIE'. He was not only an editor but 'a taxi driver' as well as he did other errands.

Another former editor Merle Favis (1979-1982) explains that during this time there was no editorial independence as an editorial board of seven to eight academics approved 'every paragraph by consensus'. 'Fights would start', she said remembering the 'ideological battles' around the registration debate, worker accountability, worker control, and power of the state.

Long time *SALB* editorial board member and current honorary board member, Eddie Webster, said these were difficult times, especially after the assassination of Rick Turner and David Webster, and the death in police custody of Neill Aggett. These were also times for social movements including the workers' movement and the Black Consciousness Movement. Race and class issues also arose when white middle-class intellectuals with limited knowledge of political traditions and black working-class culture became involved with the union movement.

MISSED CHANCES

Karl von Holdt argued that there were issues that should have been given more attention. These included the weakening of trade unions, as highlighted by Bob Maree. Instead the focus was on success stories such as on collective bargaining and productivity agreements, multi-skilling, and workers' control. Debates on workplace democratisation were also naïve. The effects of worker leaders leaving unions for parliament or ANC positions were also never analysed.

Von Holdt further stressed that during constitutional debates the unions did not put strong positions on issues including worker

ownership of industrial properties. Black Economic Empowerment was limited and appear to have been captured by rentiers. Industrial relations also became dominated by big corporates, big unions and forums such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) became weaker.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was reduced to housing and social grants while traditional authorities were being strengthened in the former homelands and citizens' rights weakened. Patronage relations were common in the ANC and centred on access to state resources and the control of the instruments of state coercion including the National Prosecuting Authority and the South African Police Service.

Von Holdt also mentioned that the state was seen as an opportunity for accumulation. Explaining that the common trend was for a union leader to go into government and then business as in the case of Jay Naidoo (Cosatu general secretary 1985 to 1993 and RDP minister from 1994 to 1996, and Telecommunications and Broadcasting minister from 1996 to 1999, before going into business) and Cyril Ramaphosa (NUM general secretary, business person and current deputy president).

Instead of dealing with disputes, the Tripartite Alliance became an instrument of management containment. Other matters that were not analysed included patriarchy which must be seen as an organising principle. Having a girlfriend in every municipal department, a big car, and a big house were some of the definers of politics that were overlooked in previous discussions.

TAKING DEMOCRACY SERIOUSLY

A presentation on a longitudinal study carried out since 1994 by Christine Bischoff, Malehoko Tshoedi and Andries Bezuidenhout also pointed to some trends that could help explain the current crisis in Cosatu. For example, it highlighted the tension

between participatory democracy and representative democracy. Whilst workers felt they should be consulted before major decisions were made, the union leadership felt they could represent workers on the basis of their being elected officials.

Cosatu members were also becoming more educated with one in 10 being a school teacher. There were also declines in shop floor participation as well as support for the Tripartite Alliance.

Media reports exaggerated on violent strikes as 81% of strikes were non-violent according to the survey. The police were also responsible for violence during the strike the findings confirmed. However, 48% felt that 'non-striking workers should be engaged politically'.

As 48% of migrant workers supported two households including unemployed members of the family the 'class polarisation thesis' did not hold water, said Eddie Webster. According to this thesis workers were divided between the haves and the have nots.

The survey also confirmed that Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi was the most popular workers' leader. Vavi's presentation at the event was published in *SALB* 38.4, 2014 together with the response from the SACP first deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin.

CONCLUSION

The presentations at the *SALB* 40th anniversary event focused on the publication's early history and challenges, what could have been done better, and what the 'Taking democracy seriously' survey says about the working class. Formed during the time when trade unions were in infancy the *SALB* dealt with key issues on union organisation. The debates on worker control and democracy have been central to the publication from the start. Furthermore, issues of Cosatu participation in the Tripartite Alliance have always been contested. ¹⁸

Celebrating 40 years at DUT

Durban University of Technology (DUT) hosted the 40th anniversary of South Africa's most popular labour publication, the *South African Labour Bulletin (SALB)*, at the Hotel School, Ritson campus on 10 November 2014, writes **Waheeda Peters**. This article was first published on the DUT website.



Celebrating SALB with song at the DUT.

SALB is the only alternative anti-apartheid publication which survived into South Africa's new democracy, which has become a resource for key players within the labour movement and those analysing trends within the broader labour market.

It was formed at the height of apartheid in 1974 by Richard Turner, when labour movements were being suppressed and labour activists detained, banned and even murdered. The *SALB* journal provides information and critical analysis and debates on a variety of social issues, such as labour, politics,

economics, health, education, sport, youth, women, HIV/AIDS, the environment, culture and book reviews. Through its bold reportage the *Bulletin* aims to advance the discourse of progressive politics and promote social justice and the interests of the working class.

The event was held in partnership with DUT and the Workers' College. The Workers' College is an education organisation that offers educational programmes for trade unionists and community activists from within South Africa as well as the African continent.

Guests in attendance were DUT's vice-chancellor and principal Ahmed Bawa, UCT's Prof Ari Sitas, Alec Erwin, Mandla Sibiyi, Kassie Moodley and editor of *SALB*, Elijah Chiwota, and various academics and stakeholders.

The evening's programme kicked off with guests viewing an exhibition dedicated to all those who were killed, banned, banished and persecuted, and all those who took collective action, in the struggle for trade union rights and worker democracy and freedom. Exhibition curators Omar Badsha and Jeeva Rajgopaul wanted guests to experience a 'piece of history' by exhibiting some of their own collection of historic photos and the

trials and tribulations experienced by the trade union recruiters and union members at various times in pre-apartheid South Africa.

Ari Sitas from the University of Cape Town (UCT), who was an activist in the anti-apartheid movement, was master of ceremonies. He stressed that 40 years was a long time for the *SALB* to be relevant. 'We are here to celebrate the tenacity of people who built the trade union movement,' he added.

Also speaking at the event, Prof Bawa said it was a fantastic occasion for DUT to have partnered with the Workers' College. 'Partly, it's also sad for remembering the past of apartheid but on the other hand it's also a wonderful occasion to remember where we come from and all the struggles that we fought and are still to come. This is a fantastic opportunity for DUT to form partnerships and we are so happy to be working with the Workers' College and hope to continue the relationship,' he said.

Alec Erwin said for the *SALB* to have survived 40 years was quite an achievement in such a past political environment like South Africa's. He also thanked the late activist Rick Turner for his contribution to the *SALB*.

Viva Labour Bulletin Viva

Surviving and thriving from 1974

When you read a copy of the *Labour Bulletin* you are partaking of a rich, important and continuing history.

Johann Maree, one of the *Bulletin's* longest serving Editorial Board members takes us through some of the highlights of its past, keeping an eye on why it survived.

This article was published in Volume 34, Number 3, 2010.

'The first articles in the *SALB* were done by Rick Turner, so we must pay tribute to him for all his hard work. I also feel privileged to be part of such a history. Back in the day, you stood at the gate at 5am at the factories, and you started talking just to recruit one or two. So it's so important for the youth to understand the struggles of the unions, especially since trade unions were the strongest in KwaZulu-Natal,' he said.

Alec Erwin was the former Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of Public Enterprises. Between 1973 and 1975, Erwin served as a member of the Institute for Industrial Education. After the 1973 Durban strikes, Erwin was part of the group of white activists from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) who participated and held positions in the African trade unions that were subsequently formed.

Giving more insight into the journal, Elijah Chiwota, *SALB* editor said: 'My role as an editor is to highlight the struggles, we looked at unions at what they were doing, for example, 20 years ago which is still relevant now.'

After the formalities were over, a free mike session was held with guests giving poetry recitals, story-telling as well as the singing of freedom songs. Entertainment was provided by the dynamic group, the Internationale jazz band. Dr Kira Erwin ended off the night's celebrations with a vote of thanks, expressing her gratitude to those who had made the event possible. **LB**

Wabeeda Peters has more than 17 years experience in journalism.

When a new industrial sociology, rooted in the analysis of the labour movement emerged out of the political environment of South Africa in the 1970s, academics and other intellectuals began writing clear and easy-to-understand articles aimed at the black African working class in the *South African Labour Bulletin*.

The Bulletin also linked the practice of active involvement in emerging trade union organisations with learning. It did so by helping people who had been denied a higher education the opportunity to understand and use their experience in furthering their struggle for economic and, eventually, political liberation.

ORIGINS AND STEPS TO AUTONOMY

The origins of the *Bulletin* lie in the Durban strikes of 1973 and the upsurge in black unionism that followed. It was in this context that the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) emerged.

At the inaugural meeting of the IIE in May 1973 Harriet Bolton, a leading union figure in Durban,

pointed out the lack of knowledge of workers' rights, which workers who didn't have time, money, or access to educational facilities were unable to remedy. Foszia Fisher, wife of banned pro-labour Rick Turner, proposed a correspondence course for workers and a resource centre to provide unions with material and information.

Turner had the vision of establishing a journal to explain and legitimate unions for black workers.

Thus, the *Bulletin*, a monthly publication circulated to unionists, politicians, academics and other interested parties was launched off the back of the IIE in 1974. The first issue was devoted to making the case for African unions. The two most active members of the Editorial Board were founder members Turner and Eddie Webster. Webster has over many years continued to sustain the *Labour Bulletin* and ensure that it supports the labour movement.

AUTONOMY OF THE LABOUR BULLETIN

Later a struggle for autonomy began in the emerging union movement between the Trade Union Advisory



Foszia Turner-Stylianou makes a point at a social evening organised by the Chris Hani Institute and the SALB in Johannesburg in 2014.

and Coordinating Council (Tuacc) a tight-knit federation of unions that emerged after the Durban strikes and the IIE. It was over whether the IIE would be subordinate to the emerging union movement. In 1975 Tuacc succeeded in subordinating the IIE's educational role to its own organisational needs.

The *Labour Bulletin* was not subject to the same pressure from Tuacc and managed to increase its autonomy within the IIE by means of three incremental steps.

The first was a decision in 1974 to clarify accountability by only listing members of the IIE Working Committee who were involved in the production of the *Labour Bulletin* as members of the Editorial Board.

The second step was a decision by the IIE Working Committee that it was up to the *Labour Bulletin's* Editorial Board to decide about the publication of controversial articles.

The third step was an IIE resolution that the *Labour Bulletin* could appoint people to its Editorial Board who were not involved in the IIE, resulting in the appointment of academics from universities. The outcome was the reconstitution of the *Labour Bulletin* as a national journal with editors in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg.

When the state banned 26 trade unionists in 1976, it delivered a blow to the *Labour Bulletin* which had to pioneer the publication of articles in the universities in order to survive. The academics on the Board helped to ensure a flow of free copy through their own involvement in the labour movement, their extensive social networks, and the research they conducted and supervised. The *Labour Bulletin* had entered a new phase of its existence that secured its survival.

FINANCES

A crucial requirement for the sustainability of the *Labour Bulletin* was its financial viability.

Direct sales of the *Bulletin* raised 41% of total revenue in 1975-76, 44% in 1978 and by 1993 were twice as high as the number of subscribers. The *Labour Bulletin* strove to promote union readers and in 1989 a system of shop steward sales people was set up raising print runs to 9,000 copies. However, this was not a source of revenue it could rely on.

Subscriptions from academic staff and students, as well as from companies and personnel managers, provided a solid revenue base. Many companies during the 1980s and 1990s were faced with black unions for the first time and the *Labour Bulletin* was a valuable source of information for them. The *Labour Bulletin* charged companies, libraries and other institutions double the individual rates in order to cross-subsidise sales to workers.

Company subscriptions rose through the 1980s and more than doubled between 1988 and 1994. It reached a peak of 394 in 1996, but by 2009 it had fallen to a mere 33. At the same time subscriptions from unions totalled 2,524. This was the way of funding the *Labour Bulletin* while making it available to its members free of charge.

The *Labour Bulletin's* finances went through four stages during its first 25 years of existence.

The first, during the 1970s, was one of complete self-sufficiency.

The second stage, during the 1980s, relied heavily on overseas donor funding to survive. Donations constituted 57% of revenue in 1983.

The third stage, from 1988 to 1994, was one of expansion and increased subsidisation. By 1989 donations constituted 70% of its total revenue. At this point the *Labour Bulletin* was made more attractive and easier to read and photos were introduced.

Production of *The Shop Steward*, a publication directly aimed at worker readership, was taken on by the *Labour Bulletin* in 1992 on behalf of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Contract money from Cosatu, together with overseas grants, totalled 77% of total revenue.

In 1994 the *Labour Bulletin* joined three other publications in setting up the Independent Magazines Group but by the time the move took place *Work in Progress* had folded and the Independent Magazines Group collapsed.

In the same year the *Labour Bulletin* lost its lucrative contract when Cosatu decided to produce *The Shop Steward* itself. And due to the political transformation of South Africa, the *Labour Bulletin* lost the support of many overseas donors who considered the struggle for liberation over.

The fourth stage of the journal's financial development began in 1995 with an objective of making the *Labour Bulletin* financially self-sufficient again. But by mid-1996 only half of the budget had been raised independently from sales, subscriptions and advertising and although overseas grants were still coming in, it could only achieve 68% self-sufficiency by 1998. From 1999 onwards the level of self-sufficiency started declining again.

By 2009 the *Labour Bulletin* only raised just over one-third of its required income, the balance

coming from donors. A significant change was that the largest donor was now the South African state, signifying the change in political orientation of the country.

The financial survival of the *Labour Bulletin* was thus primarily built on middle-class and corporate subscribers and grants from overseas.

REPRESSION, BOARD AND EDITORS

The first hostile Nationalist state act was to ban two of the earliest issues of the *Labour Bulletin*, claiming it was inciting workers to strike. In 1975 the state detained two members of the Editorial Board under the Terrorism and Suppression of Communism Act – Bekisisa Nxasana and Eddie Webster. Although the charges against them were not related to their involvement in the *Labour Bulletin*, the detention had an impact on it.

The assassination of Rick Turner by the state's security agents in 1978 sent a clear intimidatory warning to those involved in the independent labour movement. In 1987 the house of Jabu Matiko, a writer for the *Labour Bulletin*, was destroyed by petrol bombs on the same night that Cosatu's head office was bombed. And in 1979 the state infiltrated the *Labour Bulletin* by getting a secret agent appointed as managing editor for six months.

The *Labour Bulletin* faced its most serious challenges when editor, Merle Favis, was detained with 12 unionists including Neil Aggett who died in detention. Another editor, Jon Lewis was deported. But even when the *Labour Bulletin* was without an editor for 14 months, six issues were published due to the efforts of Editorial Board members.

Through a combination of competence and commitment, each editor ensured an uninterrupted flow of production and administration of the journal. Working under stressful circumstances, they ensured it was produced and that it fulfilled its role of serving the labour movement.

FOCUS AND RELEVANCE

The final reason for the survival of the *Labour Bulletin* lies in the relevance and focus of its contents. The *Labour Bulletin* set itself clear goals and published a wide array of articles with the aim of always helping to defend and advance the democratic labour movement. The articles were sometimes critical of the unions and, as a result, the debates were intense.

The fiercest debate was over the registration of unions after the Wiehahn reforms in 1979 when African unions were granted the right to join industrial councils. The Western Province General Workers' Union published an article strongly opposed to registration. Fine, de Clerq and Innes replied justifying the Federation of South African Unions' (Fosatu) decision to register. Ten articles on this appeared in the *Labour Bulletin* over three years.

The Board had been caught off-guard and had no policy to deal with such heated controversies. It decided to draw up a policy. This document was also drafted in the light of meetings with Cosatu and Nactu (black consciousness National Council of Trade Unions) leadership in 1988. Cosatu wanted to know to whom the *Labour Bulletin* was accountable and Nactu accused it of an anti-Nactu bias and pressed for an official to sit on the Editorial Board. To deal with these issues, the Board drew up a careful policy document which included:

- The *Labour Bulletin's* primary task is to support and help build the democratic labour movement by providing information, analysis and news that the unions and other organisations need.
- Open debate and critical analysis are indispensable to building and retaining democracy in the union movement as well as broader society.

- The best way for the union movement to account for its policy decisions is to make information available to the broader working class through publications that are not tied to mass movements.
- Unions cannot forbid the publication of material but if they disagree with articles, the *Labour Bulletin* is prepared to carry material that presents the unions' side. The *Labour Bulletin* is committed to a process of consultation with the democratic union movement without being controlled by it.
- The *Labour Bulletin* promotes democracy and freedom of speech. The decision whether to publish or not resides with the Editorial Board although the views of the unions are and will be considered.

CONCLUSION

The *Labour Bulletin* made a significant contribution to the establishment of a democratic union movement in South Africa. Through its policy of critical engagement it helped the labour movement become and remain accountable to a larger public constituency.

It also achieved one of its original goals of becoming a journal for unionists. By so doing, it provided a pedagogy of the oppressed that enabled black workers to overcome their individual powerlessness by organising their collective strength.

The *Labour Bulletin* survived the turbulent 1970s and 1980s by establishing itself as an autonomous journal, remaining financially viable, withstanding state oppression and publishing relevant material. Above all, it survived due to the capabilities, commitment and perseverance of its Editorial Board and managing editors. ^{LB}

Jobann Maree is emeritus professor of Sociology at the University of Cape Town.

Editor recalls battles

The *Labour Bulletin's* continued survival has depended on the dedication and commitment of a number of people over the years, including the editors who have had to work under some rather trying conditions. The *Labour Bulletin* interviewed former editor **Merle Favis** (1979-1981) who recalls the hot debates which engulfed the labour movement in the early years. This article was published in Volume 28, Number 6, 2004.



Calvin Dondo

Labour Bulletin: What were your first impressions of the Labour Bulletin?

Merle Favis: I arrived at the offices of the *Labour Bulletin* and I got a shock. The office, given to us by the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) to utilise, was no larger than a broom cupboard. It was known as a rat hole and was actually a converted bathroom and was about 1,5m by 2m. A few years after that I was given a proper room and Fosatu gave us access to a number of people to assist in the production of the *Bulletin*. But until that point I had to do everything and basically worked 18 hours a day. We would receive articles in the post or delivered to us and then I would edit them with a red pen. Thereafter, I would have to negotiate each and every change with the author and if the article was 'sensitive' or had political implications, I would have to also consult with the Board members.

Labour Bulletin: What about

editorial independence?

Merle Favis: In those times I did not have real editorial freedom to just publish articles. This was in particular reference to articles covering ideologically contentious issues. In those days the labour movement and the *Labour Bulletin* was continuous. Therefore, if a contentious article was published it would ricochet throughout the labour movement.

One has to remember that in the late 1970s early 1980s there was no progressive press to talk about and the *Labour Bulletin* was one of a kind. Anything written in the *Bulletin* had implications for the labour movement. The stakes were high. There were a lot of people in the Fosatu mould who felt that an overt association with politics or anything to do with the African National Congress (ANC) would induce a state crackdown on the union movement. This in fact did occur and after the death of Neil Aggett there appeared to be a conservative shift.

The *Bulletin* was at the heart of all these contentious debates hence, the sensitivity around what was published.

Labour Bulletin: What kind of debates are we talking about?

Merle Favis: One has to remember that we are talking about the days when, a person in the Eastern Cape was convicted and jailed for having a coffee mug with the words ANC on it. It was during this time when the ideological battles in the unions were so rife. The so-called progressive movement wanted to see labour linked to political issues and the community. (That is why the Fattis and Monis strike was such a breakthrough for the labour movement.) However, there was a group in Fosatu who argued against a link between the labour movement and political issues or community-based mobilisation. People like Alec (Erwin) were against this. I remember the many conversations

Listening to exciting conversations

Working for the *Labour Bulletin* in the 1980s

Employed as an administrator in the early 1980s, **Penny Nasoo** had the opportunity to listen to the great labour minds of the time. She goes down memory lane.

we used to have on the balcony in Central Court over this issue. He was very strong about not wanting any connection to politics and a number of Editorial Board members supported this view. Hence, on the one side there were people like Alec, Johnny Copeland, Jabu Gwala and Halton Cheadle and on the other side there were the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu) people.

The differences, which emerged, could partly be attributed to the fact that the politics in Durban was on another level to what was happening in other parts of the country. In other parts workers were becoming involved in community issues as increasingly working-class communities took up broader struggles. So sitting in Durban the perspective was different and people like Alec and Johnny were powerful union leaders and had a powerful influence on the union movement. The *Bulletin* was in the heart of this debate and the registration debate while Eddie (Webster) tried to ensure unity was maintained in the *Bulletin*.

Labour Bulletin: How did the labour movement view the Bulletin?

Merle Favis: Initially it came out of the belly of Fosatu and it was viewed as 'our own'. Fosatu gave us offices and staff etc. But later as dynamics changed and the *Bulletin* started to reflect a 'non-Fosatu' dynamic or rather other struggles taking place in the country, which did not involve Fosatu, that a distance was created. This distance was entrenched when the *Bulletin* moved out of Fosatu's office in Central Court, Gale Street. ¹⁵

Favis was detained in 1981 for five months for her connection with ANC work. During her detention Jeremy Baskin was acting editor.

Positive visioning I think is what it could be called these days because soon after I stumbled on a job advert for an office manager at the *South African Labour Bulletin (SALB)*. It was a labour journal that provided sound analysis of developments in the emerging unions. I immediately decided to take the job aware that I would have to be frugal because it was a half-day position with a drop in salary. I did this though knowing it would be an opportunity to gain more knowledge about the labour movement. It was also the kind of working space I had just been thinking of, relevant and interesting. I attended a formal interview, got the job and then towards the last quarter of 1983 or early 1984, I cannot exactly remember, I started working.

The set up at the *SALB* or '*Bulletin*' as we called it was an Editorial Board, a full-time editor and me to type in papers that were submitted and do other small administrative tasks. Over time I also assisted with an initial edit of pieces for publishing. The

Board depended on papers that were submitted from various sources and usually held their meetings before an edition to choose what to publish. Most of the pieces submitted were chosen because before I started working there, the journal had built up a good, solid reputation with ongoing contributors. It had also attracted a readership not just amongst those interested in labour matters but amongst academics and activists too. Submissions were good and covered a broad range of issues on unionism and in particular the emerging black union movement. Board members had an interest in the field and so also sometimes submitted articles for publication with submissions also sourced.

This was my first paid job where I enjoyed the process and so learnt at an incredible pace. It was also informal and the first open office environment too that I had so far worked in South Africa. This of course meant that we all used facilities with no discrimination. This included the toilets, a seemingly

small issue but in those days a significant and quiet determination to ignore rigid apartheid laws covering private spaces too. For someone like me who up until then inside of South Africa had only been exposed to inflexible apartheid laws, it was significant. So by 1983 and perhaps even earlier for others, I started experiencing the start of these easy places of non-racism in practice. It was a lessening of pressure all round because I could also switch between two pairs of jeans and T-shirts. With the arrival of a new editor I was given more of the editing work to do than previously, as well as a book review to write up but those days I was so overcome with my perceived inadequacies that I really battled with the writing of it.

The offices were just two small rooms and what was said or discussed in the other office was clearly audible. Whether or not I attended Board meetings I can't recall, but I heard the full detail of each meeting.

My self-education and learning did not happen that easily because I would rush to type up the journal in time for publication, on the alert for sentence construction and grammar while attempting to absorb as much of the content as possible. It was also my introduction to more academic or theoretical writing. Often there were submissions from university students, graduates or lecturers. I was surprised how quickly I gained an overall understanding of trade unions, shop-floor and production issues of the time. Articles were discussed and chosen on their current relevance nationally.

The offices were just two small rooms and what was said or discussed in the other office was clearly audible. Whether or not I attended Board meetings I can't recall, but I heard the full detail of each meeting. These were lengthy and lively discussions on the merit and demerits of each submission for publication. Listening in was like sitting through a labour studies class with some of the best students of the subject engaged in debate. I was just the office administrator so no one could really give me much thought, but I inadvertently heard some of the bickering through differing opinions. At the time the Editorial Board were for instance, Eddie Webster, Phil Bonner, Ari Sitas, Eddie Koch and others, who for the most were prominent and engaged academics. At the time of my leaving there were three of us in the office. This happened because a researcher Marcel Golding was employed on contract to research and write on the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). I left the *SALB* in the second half of 1986. ¹⁸

Conflict on the mines

Welkom, Western Holdings and Free State Geduld mines

Mine factional fight – admittedly on a larger scale than usual – or something much deeper? That is the first question which needs to be analysed in seeking an explanation for the 24 murders and 227 assaults which – apparently inexplicably – started on that bloody weekend at Welkom in mid-February, wrote **Mike Kirkwood**. This article was published in Volume 1, Number 10, 1974.

One thing it was not. It was not a management-labour confrontation of the kind that shook South Africa and the mining industry at Western Deep levels last September. The resentment then was over wage increases and changed pay differentials. On the other hand whether the worker-management communication at Welkom was all it should be is an open question.

Nor was the Welkom violence the outcome of a simple factional fight that escalated. It was essentially inter-tribal not intra-tribal.

No one knows for sure what really lay behind the frustration and anger the Sothos felt towards the Xhosas. But there are at least two factors which may help to explain both the attacks and

the subsequent mass exodus of 14,000 Black mine workers, mainly Sothos back to their homelands.

The first is a simple human one; lack of women, particularly felt by the Xhosas (a minority on the mine). The Sothos, in contrast, enjoyed access to the women of the nearby Thabong township with its mainly Sotho population.

The Xhosas understandably resented the success enjoyed by their Sotho workmates and this, so the Sothos claim, led Xhosas to make sporadic attacks on returning Sothos and their women.

Embittered by the failure of the indunas and the mine management to intervene effectively, despite the Sothos having offered proof of Xhosa attacks and having threatened that, if they continued, they would leave the mine, the Sothos decided to take matters into their own hands. Mass reprisals followed.

Peace was eventually restored. Or so it seemed. But within hours Sotho mineworkers started leaving the mine and this soon became a mass exodus from the Free State Geduld, Western Holdings and Welkom mines which has left them with less than half their African labour force.

That is the background as far as we can establish. But complicating these tragic events are deep underlying political tensions.

The Sothos frequently taunted the Xhosas that their nation was not really independent, while the Sothos themselves were caught up in Leabou Jonathan's power struggles at home, with the majority of them backing the opposition Congress Party.

It would be surprising therefore if Congress Party infiltrators did not try to exploit the rising tide of anger and resentment in the hope of creating a situation in which Sotho workers would decide to down tools, return home and strengthen the anti-Jonathan camp.

This political element in the situation is nevertheless discounted

by police investigators who view the killings simply as a tribal clash, despite the fact that there is a surprisingly high degree of party political organisation on the mines concerned, and intense pro- and anti-Jonathan feelings.

The existence of this political dimension seems to be confirmed by the 'fact' that both Jonathan and Congress Party leaders vied with each other in welcoming home the returning mineworkers. Indeed Jonathan has since promised that his government - and not the Chamber of Mines - will in future be responsible for recruiting labour in Lesotho and that he will negotiate directly with Pretoria on mine recruitment and working conditions.

Clearly mine-labour relations generally have been moving out of the era when recruitment and contract terms were purely a matter for private enterprise. Access to Mozambique labour has long been conditional on prior government-to-government agreement; and homeland leaders have also indicated that they have decided to make labour a matter of inter-state policy too. They may well have taken this further when they met the prime minister.

More immediately it is, of course, desperately necessary to restore harmony on the mines affected, to establish a basis for peaceful inter-tribal cooperation, and to get the mines back to full production again. To this end government representatives will preside over two mass meetings at the mines on 11 March at which Lesotho and Transkei leaders will, it is expected, address their people.

So far so good. We hope goodwill will be speedily restored. But to maintain it and to reduce, if not eliminate the risk of future strife, longer term remedies are needed to remove the causes of frustration (which predisposes men to violence); to normalise living conditions; and to accommodate rising levels of political

consciousness - not to mention black consciousness - which threaten to burst the compound-migrant labour system at its seams.

To dismiss the Welkom killings as mindless tribal violence is tempting, but dangerous.

There is indeed no historical enmity between Xhosa and Sotho. Rather is the explanation to be sought in a combination of factors.

Firstly, the acute sexual frustration felt by mineworkers, in this case particularly by the Xhosas.

Secondly, there is the boredom of a monotonous, barrack-like existence in which the close proximity of man to man means that even a petty quarrel between two individuals can flare up and quickly draw, in everyone else.

Thirdly, for those workers who are becoming increasingly politically sophisticated and who sense that they are part of the rising tide of black consciousness, the compound system (which, after all, was evolved in the last century) must be felt as an increasingly intolerable strait-jacket.

Nothing short of the phasing out of the migratory labour system which separates men from their womenfolk, can eliminate these tensions. And it would be surprising if this does not soon become a pre-condition which African leaders will seek to impose on Pretoria for the mines' right of access to their labour.

Welcome as that transition would be, it would have to be flanked by a programme of industrialisation around the goldfields. Mineworkers' womenfolk would also need employment. And as each mine is worked out, the growth points established could provide the nucleus for the additional work opportunities that will eventually be needed by both white and black.

This, of course, would mean vast expenditure by the mines and the state on housing, education and infrastructure. But what better investment could there be than one

which would go a long way towards guaranteeing the continuity and productivity of South Africa's major asset?

WELKOM MINE, 8 APRIL 1974

Some six weeks after the unrest in Welkom had subsided one man died in No. 2 hostel during a new outbreak. A speech by Stella Sigcau, Minister of the Interior for the Transkei, (*Daily News*, 9 April) underlined the contrast between the support given to the Lesotho miners by the Congress Party (and Jonathan) and the attitude of the Transkeian government to Xhosa miners involved: 'I urge them to strive always towards the maintenance of labour peace and to guard against being intimidated by those who pretend to be the friends of the workers, whilst actively engaged in subversive activities or nefarious purposes of their own.'

WESTERN DEEP LEVELS MINE (ANGLO-AMERICAN GROUP), 15-17 APRIL

Ten men died during inter-tribal fighting between Xhosa and Sotho miners, which broke out over the Easter weekend in No. 3 hostel. Fighting began after the death of a Sotho miner in a quarrel. Sotho, and later Malawian miners withdrew their labour and demanded repatriation.

Western Deep expected a production loss of 30%. The mine chairman, JW Shilling, told the shareholders at their Annual General Meeting, on 1 May, that the clashes had no other cause than 'inter-tribal conflict and friction.'

LORRAINE GOLD MINE, (ANGLO-VAAL GROUP), TUESDAY 28 MAY

Two men were killed (one by a police bullet, one apparently by fellow-miners) during the course of a riot at the No. 3 shaft compound after pay negotiations had broken down.

Thus, three months after the events of February, unrest returned to Welkom but centred now on wage

claims and had no apparent tribal or inter-tribal structure. The comparison was with Western Deep Levels at the time of Carletonville, not with Western Deep in April 1974.

As had been the case at Western Deep in September 1973, and was to be the case at Harmony, the trouble came, after what were, by past standards/substantial pay rises.

And again it appears to have been senior workers who, in maintaining their own specific interest, focused and fired the militancy of a substantial body of workers.

The senior workers, who had a standing demand that production bonuses be included in their basic pay, amended this by a demand for further increases. Negotiations broke down and the riot followed. The following day management capitulated to the extent of granting an increase of 33% to all workers. Until the arrival of the police the violence of the workers appears to have been haphazardly directed: a beer-hall was fired, windows were smashed. The police were said to have fired warning shots only, and the man shot dead was said to have 'jumped above the crowd'.

HARMONY AND MERRIESPRUIT GOLD MINES, VIRGINIA, OFS (RAND MINES GROUP), 9-15 JUNE

These two mines are 6km apart and are, it appears from press reports, jointly administered at top management level. They are close to the Virginia Mine (also Rand Mines Group) which has the largest compounds in South Africa. The week ended with a force of police standing by at Virginia. All three mines had been given the same pay increases (subsequently raised, as at Lorraine, after the rioting).

The rioting, which took place at Harmony No. 2 mine on 9 and 10 June and at Merriespruit on the 11th, again began after a wage dispute. Though I have seen no follow-up on a report that the 'cause of the riot was similar to

Carletonville' this might indicate that once again specific claims by senior men supplied the spark.

At Harmony (where four men were killed, one by police 'firing under extreme provocation') the pattern of violence took an unusually distinct form. Compound manager, Bill Soutar noted that when the miners first attacked the flats and persons of the compound indunas, they were possibly attacking the nearest symbol of authority. From there the miners appeared to move against selected symbolic targets in an ascending order which duplicates the system of control in a compound. Thus, Soutar's office was next attacked, followed by the administration offices where files, including long-service records for all miners in the Virginia area, were destroyed (together, however, with furniture etc. - so it may be stretching things to see it as a deliberate act). After this the rioters turned their attention to the mine's training centre. During the rioting, a policeman who was telephoning for reinforcements saw the telephones smashed to smithereens by a brick hurled through the window. Another policemen commented: 'I am going to the border in two weeks' time. I am looking forward to a quiet life'. At Merriespruit, one man was killed.

Workers at both mines were later to accept pay increases 'well in advance of 10%, but attempts to negotiate during the tense day of the 10th failed'. Manager Honnet was shouted down while the workers are reported to have made claims for 500% increases. Reports were also received that Harmony workers were going into the town of Virginia to spread the mood of their strike to municipal workers there.

15 JUNE

Reacting to Lorraine and Harmony, and in order to forestall the spread of the unrest, the Chamber of Mines announced wage increases

ranging from 33 to 50%, raising the novice's minimum wage to R1.20 a shift or R31.20 a month. Simultaneous wage increases were given to white miners such that the average increase (R50) was almost R20 more than the minimum level for black miners. Nevertheless, black wages had been raised 140% since the gold price had started to rise in 1972.

29 JULY TO 2 AUGUST

During this week, at the well-attended and much reported annual convention of the South African Institute of Personnel Management, Anglo-American spokesmen, with qualified approval from the mining industry as a whole and even the right-wing South African Confederation of Labour, revealed a strategy for modernising the labour structure and labour relations in the industry as a whole.

They were reacting not only to unrest on the mines but also to immediate and long-term threats to the established pattern of labour recruitment in neighbouring Southern African states - notably Malawi and Mozambique, suppliers of 50% of the current labour intake on the gold mines.

President Banda had suspended recruiting in Malawi following the deaths of 74 miners in the Francistown air crash of 2 April, and the continued flow of labour from a Frelimo-governed Mozambique seemed doubtful in the long term.

Rapid progress towards market-determined and worker-negotiated wage structures, the phasing out of the wage colour-bar while delicately fiddling the job colour-bar to appease the white miner, black South Africans back on the mines *en familie*, revised labour practices and better drilling and stopping techniques on the old mines, mechanisation from the surface down on the new, civil rights as a necessary extension of civil wages: this was the programme promoted.

The unionisation of black miners was nevertheless regarded as problematic given the present labour structure. On 13 August, however, Anglo appeared to take the plunge: the corporation, it was stated, would be prepared to give a black union full recruiting rights on all its mines. Chief Buthelezi and the Progs gave support, which was needed because the Minister of Labour, Viljoen, 'regarded the decision in a serious light' and PJ Paulus of the white Mineworkers Union reportedly called for a government investigation of Anglo-American.

While the new deal hit early snags (another was the flop of a recruitment drive for 50,000 black South African workers promoted over Radio Bantu) the old deal continued to vibrate with tensions in the second half of the year.

WESTERN HOLDINGS GOLD MINE WELKOM (ANGLO-AMERICAN GROUP), 13 AUGUST 1974

Three men died and 40 were injured in what was described as a 'brawl'. Mention of the national identities of the casualties and combatants was studiously avoided either by the reporter or his source on the mine, and one began to gain the impression that inter-tribal incidents were being deliberately played down.

ERPM GERMISTON (GOLDFIELDS SA GROUP), 13-24 OCTOBER

All the events at ERPM - inter-tribal fighting between Malawian and Sotho miners, withdrawal of labour by Malawian and then Shangaan miners - took place in the South-Western compound. Ironically, the one man killed in the fighting was a Motswana. Relationships with neighbouring black states on the migrant labour issue were now delicately balanced, and an immediate apology was rendered to the Botswana government. As so often, the large-scale fighting developed out of a quarrel between

two men: and (as one may suspect) the cause of the quarrel was also typical - a shortage of beer, or if you like, a conflict over a scarce resource (for example, women, money, and entertainment).

The odd thing about the withdrawal of labour by the Malawians which followed was that they enjoyed an immense numerical majority over the Sothos with whom they worked on day shift (1,600: 100). Mine spokesmen were adamant that the question of Malawian security was not 'the real cause' of the strike, though they had no idea what the real cause was. In the end, the Malawian strike dragged on until the men were repatriated: despite its origin it seems to resemble the incidents at West Rand Consolidated.

The Shangaans in the South Western Compound, who rioted and then went on strike on 20 October, had not been involved in the inter-tribal fighting. Their mood was militant but their demands were never articulated, because they refused to appoint representatives, and management resorted to teargas and dogs when they arrived to put their case *en masse*. Two miners were badly mauled and the hard core of militants made this the basis of their demand for repatriation.

WESTERN DEEP LEVELS GOLD MINE (ANGLO-AMERICAN GROUP), 19-20 OCTOBER

The strike by 1,400 Malawians following the weekend stabbing of a Malawian miner was evidence of what appeared to be a growing disaffection among Malawians on the Reef mines.

HARTEBEEFONTEIN GOLD MINE, STILFONTEINT, TRANSVAAL (ANGLO-VAAL GROUP), 22-25 OCTOBER

The rioting and subsequent strikes spreading sporadically from compound to compound originated in a pay dispute and maintained this focus, though


management refused to budge on the date (1 December) set for wage adjustments. Once again senior workers - 'boss boys and team leaders' - made the explicit demands and led the strike action. The 'ringleaders' arrested, represented all the tribal groups on the mine. The senior men claimed R6 a shift.

The Tuesday night riot took place in the No. 4 shaft compound. One miner was shot dead and another wounded, but the police who contained the riot, claimed that they had not used their guns. Another miner was found stabbed to death.

The following day strike action for the same pay increases was taken in the No. 7 shaft compound, and police baton-charged a group of strikers who disrupted traffic and damaged cars on the road outside the compound.

On Thursday, with the men from No. 4 and No. 7 back at work, No. 5 was on strike. This brought 750 men from No. 4, who work underground with the No. 5 men, out again, but by Friday, the strike was fading.

WEST RAND CONSOLIDATED GOLD MINE, KRUGERSDORP, 13 NOVEMBER

According to management, this was a peaceful strike which had 'nothing to do with pay and nothing to do with fighting either'. The men, 1,500 Malawians, simply said that they were tired of working and wanted to return to Malawi. A year of turbulent labour relations in the gold industry was ending quietly, it seemed. The miners handed in their pass-books and sat around in the sun. That night 100 riot policemen with dogs were out there on standby. 

Mike Kirkwood was from the Department of English at the University of Natal in Durban.

To produce is to learn

To learn through producing is to struggle better

The revolution is learnt through production and not through reading books, argued former president of Mozambique, Samora Machel, whose book was translated from Portuguese by **Richard Turner**. This article was published in Volume 2, Number 2, 1975.

In a short while we are going to begin preparing the farm land for a new cycle of production. For many people production perhaps appears to be a rite, some kind of necessity in which we are obliged to engage in order to eat and dress. It is true that production must satisfy our fundamental biological needs. But it is also necessary in order to free ourselves from poverty and it is necessary in order better to know, dominate and use nature; it is necessary in order to form us politically.

We are revolutionaries; our acts have a political meaning, a political content. For this reason our production, besides having a commercial meaning and content, has a political content.

In the enemy zone, in capitalism and colonialism; people also produce. Men also take up hoes to strike the earth. Men also make objects in factories which we do not have in our zone. In fact, we say that production in the zone of the enemy is exploitation, while in our zone production frees man.

Nevertheless, it is the same hoe, the same man, the same act of striking the ground. Why does there exist this distinction?

A Mozambican peasant who produces rice in Gaza province; what does his production serve for? Does it serve to feed him, to satisfy the needs of his family? Perhaps I to a certain extent. But what is certain is that with what he gets from his production he has to pay colonial taxes, taxes which finance the police who seize them, taxes which pay the salary of the administrators who oppress him, taxes to buy the guns of soldiers who tomorrow will expel him from his lands, taxes which will pay the transport and installations costs of the colonists who are to replace him. The peasant is producing to pay his taxes; by his work he finances the oppression of which he is a victim.

Let us follow through this example of a peasant who produces rice. In order to live he needs other things besides rice. He needs clothing, oil, and many things which he has to buy at the trading store.

To buy these things he needs money, and money does not fall from the sky.

This is to say that our peasant has to go to the trading store or to the company to sell his rice.

He sells his things for a low price, and buys things at prices four or five times as high. With a sack of cotton many metres of cloth and many shirts can be made. But in fact when he sells a sack of cotton the money which he receives is scarcely enough to buy one shirt. Our production, our sweat combined with the earth, benefits these companies and shopkeepers who do nothing.

These are the most delicate and least cruel forms of exploitation in the zone of the enemy. There are other much worse forms. There is the sale of workers for the mines. The young men are strong when they leave for the mines. Many die in accidents on the mines. More than 2,500 die on the mines every year. Others, we do not know how many, come back without an arm or a leg or with their lungs eaten up by tuberculosis. The masters of the mines are the richest people in the world.

The gold taken out of the mines is sold at very high prices, but how much do the men who die in the mines earn?

Along the Zambezi are the rich lands of Sena-Sugar. Sena-Sugar earns many many thousands of contos a year. But what is earned by those who work on the rich lands of Sena-Sugar? In the coal mines of Moatize, in the palm plantations of the Zambezi Company, in the high tea plantations of Gurue, in all the places where the men of Mozambique cultivate rich farms, build high buildings, run factories with complicated machines, it is not those who work, those who sweat on to the earth, those who risk their lives in the mines, it is not they who benefit from the work.

In the zone of the enemy, the work which creates everything is done by the poor, by the 'brutes', the 'savages', the 'illiterates'. The less one works the more educated

one is, the less one works the more civilised one is, the more one exploits the labour of others and the more one despises the workers, the more respected and the more elevated one is in the society. Who can imagine a governor, a doctor, a general, a banker, with calloused hands, with feet sunk into the earth, sweating with the force of his hoe? It would be considered dishonouring, shaming, and low.

In the zone of the enemy, the exploiters like lice, live off the work of the exploited. Everywhere, in the schools, on the radio, in the cinema, one is taught to despise manual work and to venerate the exploiters.

In our zone it is different. Work does not serve to enrich companies and merchants, speculators and parasites.

Work is designed to satisfy the needs of the people and of the war. For this very reason production is the object of constant attack by the enemy.

In our zone, work is an act of liberation, because the result of the work benefits the workers, serves the interests of the workers: that is, serves to liberate man from hunger, poverty, and serves the progress of the struggle. In our zone we abolish the exploitation of man, because production is the property of the people, and serves the people.

So we produce for our own interests. It is in our interests to bring up healthy children, free of illness, strong children free from hunger and rickets.

In producing we contribute to the correct feeding of our children, of our people.

In cultivating, we produce food which is rich in vitamins; we produce carrots with vitamins which strengthen our eyesight; we produce an infinity of products, from grain to tomatoes, from beans to lettuce, which give strength to our bodies. Products which through their diversity and richness enable us to benefit from a varied diet, which, being varied, is not

only agreeable but also gives us a more balanced diet which in itself combats many illnesses and makes us more resistant

And consider also that the physical labour of production, especially in agriculture, not only strengthens our muscles and enriches our bodies, but also keeps us in touch with nature, keeps us in the sun which gives us the vitamins (D,A) necessary for the resistance of our bodies, creates the conditions in which we can enjoy good health.

On the other hand, it is through production and its development, and only through production and its development that we can satisfy our growing needs. In many regions, because we manage to export our excess production to friendly countries, the problem of clothing is attenuated; what we export gives us means to buy what we do not produce ourselves.

Our needs for clothing, shoes, soap, can only be solved in one of two ways. The first is by increasing our exports which increases the amount that we can buy. The second, and the more effective, although more long term, is to produce these goods ourselves.

We speak intentionally of textiles, footwear and soap. The reason is simple.

In our country our farmers produce the cotton with which cloth is made. Artisanal production of textiles is within the range of our possibilities.

We have the hides of cattle, goats, and many other animals, from which leather is made. Artisanal production of leather and of shoes is within the range of our possibilities. We have the raw vegetable material from which soap is made, and experiments in Cabo Delgado show that we are able to produce soap.

On the other hand, the increase of production, through the better use of our resources - using manure and irrigation, the development of horticulture, the breeding of animals etc. - is possible, as is proved by

experiments carried out at certain military bases and pilot centres.

So production serves to solve the problem of a rich diet for health, and serves our needs. For this reason in our zone those who work are honoured and praised, while those who wish to live by exploiting the labour of others are criticised, denounced, combatted and despised.

In our zone, because our struggle is to liberate the exploited workers, it is with pride that we see our hands calloused, and with joy that we sink our feet in the earth. The workers in our zone help us to develop a consciousness of our origins, help us to feel proud of our class; help us to liquidate the complexes that the colonialists and capitalists wish to impose on us.

We say therefore that in production we are increasing or reinforcing the consciousness of our origins, we are developing our class consciousness. We must say also that we are strengthening our unity.

When I, a Nyanja, am cultivating shoulder to shoulder with an Ngoni, when I am sweating with him, drawing life out of the earth with him, I am learning with him, I appreciate his sweat, I feel united with him. When I, from the centre, discuss with a comrade from the north how to lay out a farm, how and what we will plant, and together we make plans, together we combat the difficulties, together we have the joy of gathering the crop growing by our common effort, I and this comrade love one another more.

When I, from the north, learn with a comrade from the south how to make a vegetable garden, to irrigate the plump red tomatoes, when I, from the centre learn with a comrade from the north how to grow cassava, which I have not come across before, I feel myself more united with these comrades.

I live, materially, the unity of our Fatherland, and the unity of our class of workers. Together with

them I destroy tribal, religious and linguistic prejudices, all that is inessential and which divides us.

Like the plant that grows, from the sweat and intelligence which we mix with the soil, unity grows.

Constantly in Frelimo we talk of production. We give our army the task of fighting, of producing, and of mobilising the masses. To our youth we give the task of learning, producing and fighting.

Constantly in our discussions and in our writings we speak of the importance of producing, and we say that it is an important front in our struggle and a school for us.

We have seen that production satisfies the necessities of life and at the same time frees and unites us. But we have not yet seen that production is a school: that in production we learn. Perhaps some people are surprised that in our schools the pupils spend long hours being productive, and that our army also has this task. These people will perhaps say that it is absurd, that the pupils would spend this time better reading books and attending lessons that the task of the army is to fight, not to produce. These people think in that way because that is what has been taught to them by the capitalists and the colonialists.

Since they do not produce but live from our production, because they think themselves wise, and say that we are brutish and ignorant, the capitalists and colonialists cannot recognise that one learns in producing, that production is one of the most important schools.

But we know that production is a school, that production, the revolution and the struggle are fundamental schools.

We say this because we are enlightened by the consciousness and the experience of our class.

Ideas do not fall from the sky like rain. Our knowledge and experience does not come in our dreams while we are sleeping. Without ever having been to school, our illiterate peasants know more

about cassava, cotton, peanuts and many other things than the learned capitalist who has never held a hoe. Without knowing how to read, our mechanics have deeper knowledge of a car engine, of how to assemble it, how to repair it and how to make the missing parts, than the learned capitalist who has never soiled his hands with engine oil. We see our 'ignorant' masons, our 'brutal' carpenters and cabinet-makers, despised by the learned capitalists, making beautiful houses, and the most beautiful furniture which the learned capitalist will appreciate greatly, but about the making of which he will know nothing.

This shows clearly that it is in production that we learn. We do not learn everything all at once. A plate full of porridge is not swallowed in one go, but rather bit by bit.

What we learn, we do: when we do it, we see if it looks bad. Thus we learn from our mistakes and from our successes. The mistakes show us the deficiencies in our knowledge, the weak points which have to be eliminated. That is, it is in producing that we correct our mistakes. It is production which shows us whether this ground is suitable to give us good tomatoes, would need more manure and what kind of manure, and that more water is needed there. It was in carrying out experiments which failed that our students learned to make soap, and it was in making soap that they improved the quality of the soap.

Where do we apply our ideas? How do we know if our ideas are right or wrong? It was not through reading in the sky or in books that our pupils learned their weak points in making soap. It was not by dreaming that in Tete they began to produce manioc; no angel descended from the sky to give us vegetable gardens in Cabo Delgado.

Production is a school, because from it comes our knowledge, and because it is in production that we learn to correct our errors. It is among the people, working with the

Review

The Durban Strikes 1973 *Institute for Industrial Education/Ravan Press 1974*

Reviewed by Richard Hyman

This article was published in Volume 2, Number 2, 1975.

people, that we learn, and teach the people.

If our army had not produced, how could we have gone and produced manioc in Tete, when the people did not know manioc? If we had been content to have study sessions about the cultivation of manioc, would the manioc have grown? How could we have reinforced our capacity to resist in Tete, against bombardments, against chemical weapons and against attacks by the enemy, without diversifying our production, without introducing new products resistant to the attacks of the enemy? How could the people correct their methods of production, see where it was good and where it was bad, without producing?

We usually say that in war we learn war, that in revolution we learn the best way to make the revolution; it is in struggling that we learn how to struggle better; it is in producing that we learn to produce better. We can study much, read much, but what will be the use of all this knowledge if we do not take it to the masses, if we do not produce? If someone keeps grain in a drawer, will he gather a crop?

If someone learns much and never comes to the masses, does not go towards practice, it will remain dead knowledge; an engraving. He might be able to recite by heart many pages from scientific works, many pages from revolutionary works, but his whole life will not create a single new page, a single new line.

His intelligence will remain sterile, like that seed shut up in a drawer.

We need to apply continually, we need to be plunged into the revolution and into production in order to develop our knowledge, and in so doing we can carry forward the work of revolution and the work of production. ■

Most British observers recognised the strikes by African workers in Durban in early 1973 as events of major significance, even though their precise implications could scarcely be comprehended at the time. The immediate effect here was to focus attention on the intensity of the exploitation endured by black workers, most of whom earned substantially below the government's own Poverty Datum Line. In consequence, the employment and wage policies of South African subsidiaries of British firms were subjected to sharp critical scrutiny, and it was revealed that the practices of many of the best known companies were bad even by South African standards. In the aftermath, the Trade Union Congress was shaken from its normally lethargic attitude to the South African question.

In two respects the Durban strikes were clearly unique. The first was the capacity of over 30,000 non-unionised black workers to sustain militant action over a relatively protracted period, displaying a high degree of solidarity and self-restraint, and ultimately winning significant improvements in wages. The second was the passive stance adopted by the government and its agencies of repression, which in the past have consistently intervened brutally in order to smash acts of revolt by Africans. This non-interventionist role may be seen as one of the first

notable instances of the Vorster government's endeavours to cultivate an image of 'racism with a human face', in an attempt to remedy its increasingly desperate international isolation. The Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act, following swiftly after the strikes and offering a minimal legal basis for work stoppages by Africans, was another sign of this partial and often contradictory process of 'liberalisation'.

What explains, the extent, cohesion and effectiveness of the strike movement itself? This excellent study by the Institute for Industrial Education provides a convincing answer. The book falls into four parts. In the first, a fairly straight forward account of the strikes is compiled, largely from press reports; particular attention is given to the disputes in textile factories, especially those of the Frame Group. Typically, the stoppages seem to have followed spontaneous mass meetings at the workplace: wage demands were not normally specified at the outset, but once formulated these involved ambitious increases. Serious bargaining did not occur, for no worker representatives were prepared to come forward and risk victimisation; works committees were ineffectual; while the textile union (the only one to operate in any of the undertakings affected) was weak and discredited. Commonly the employers offered increases of up to R2 a week which, though usually rejected

initially at mass meetings, were normally accepted when it was clear that no further improvements were forthcoming.

The book's second part provides a survey of the attitudes of different groups to the strikes. The authors freely admit the methodological limitations of their findings, but these are illuminating nonetheless. The exceedingly low wages of African workers are clearly demonstrated: over three quarters of respondents earned less than the R18 poverty line. Their replies show that the stoppages were a spontaneous response to economic grievances which employers proved unwilling to remedy. The strikers felt that their action had achieved concrete results, but that far more remained to be achieved, most were prepared to strike again. The survey shows that a high proportion of Indian workers were also very lowly paid. About half of those who joined the strike did so out of solidarity with the Africans, or because they themselves stood to gain; there is little support for the widespread assumption that most Indian strikers acted only out of fear of intimidation by Africans. It is interesting that the large majority of Indians were willing that their trade unions should be able to admit Africans.

The English-language press at the time gave extensive coverage to the disputes, publicised the strikers' wage grievances, and expressed qualified support for their action. These attitudes were endorsed in the survey of whites. Moreover, a majority believed that Africans should be permitted to form trade unions. On most questions, the attitudes of English and Afrikaners did not diverge substantially. Not surprisingly, the employers who were questioned were far less sympathetic. Though all appear to have conceded wage increases; the majority thought that these were unjustified; they tended to blame the strikes on 'agitators', and only a

small proportion favoured unions for Africans.

In the third part the authors seek to explain why the strikes occurred. Wages in Durban were not exceptionally low by South African standards, even taking account of local living costs. Nor was the make-up of the labour force exceptional. Explanations in terms of 'agitators' and 'intimidators' cannot be taken seriously: it is scarcely credible that one of the world's most effective police states could have failed to detect some clandestine organisation masterminding the stoppages. At the same time, the black workers' spontaneous militancy almost certainly developed on the basis of informal networks of social communication, and may have been partly stimulated by such external agencies as the press and black consciousness movements. The authors conclude that a cumulation of objective circumstances and material grievances, none of which would alone have been decisive, sufficed to cause the explosion of militancy.

The final section of the book discusses the broader social, political and economic implications of the conflict. Public debate immediately after the strikes tended to focus on the causes of the wage gap between black and white workers, and on the possibility of African trade unions. The authors show how superficial most public comment was, as whites sought to come to terms with the new phenomenon of black aspirations' and self-confidence which would not simply be suppressed (particularly given the desire for international goodwill) yet threatened the traditional basis of white supremacy.

These issues are analysed in their broader context – a prerequisite of any serious understanding. Low wages for blacks were the historical foundation of rapid

capital accumulation in South Africa, and were derived in turn from the forcible dispossession of Africans from their traditional territories. Blacks were turned into property less wage-labourers by white violence: this brute fact underpins the current reality of the South African labour market. Employment relationships based on crude exploitation served white interests effectively enough for roughly a century; but important contradictions have now emerged. With economic and technological development, the black labour force – like the working class in every industrialised economy – becomes more qualified, less easily replaceable by the employer, possessed of strategic bargaining power. For such an economy to operate smoothly, workers must accept the legitimacy of their situation; if they feel themselves forcibly oppressed, the consequences will inevitably be disruptive.

The Durban strikes were the first serious intimations of the impact of just such disruptive contradictions. In most developed nations, conflict of this kind is moderated by the normative and social integration of the working class, on the basis of political and trade union rights. But while black South Africans are excluded from such rights, the crisis of legitimacy can only escalate: further explosive outbreaks will inevitably succeed those of 1973.

This study compares most favourably with other recent accounts on individual strikes and strike movements. The description of the particular set of disputes links effectively with the book's general theoretical framework. While the authors admit candidly the limitations of their evidence, their explanation of the Durban strikes has the ring of plausibility. Given the development of a measure of strategic power in the context of deeply experienced

Slant-eyed men in the city of fear

grievances, a combination of relatively minor incidents or conditions can easily spark off a major conflict. When this occurs, the precise mechanisms through which the pressures erupt into strike action can rarely be documented precisely. In this respect, what happened in Durban mirrors many other stoppages which have been analysed sociologically.

For the British reader, the book suggests fascinating parallels with the movement of 'new' or 'general' unionism around the turn of the present century. Labourers in docks and road transport, municipal services, and a range of factory industries, long considered beyond the pale of effective collective organisation and action, became involved in a series of dramatic and spontaneous disputes. The strike wave won important improvements in wages and conditions, provided an impetus towards stable trade unionism, and – perhaps most important of all – gave the submerged strata an ineradicable sense of their own collective strength. Such consciousness was later to survive the most adverse conditions.

For this reason, the prediction that the Durban strikes will herald increasing black self-assertiveness is wholly reasonable. By the same token, it is impossible for any student of the history of labour in industrial nations to dispute the authors' argument that only through legal and recognised African trade unionism can the militancy unleashed in 1973 conceivably be contained.

Even this may well be insufficient. Where class antagonism is overlaid by racial oppression, the institutionalisation of conflict through trade unionism alone may prove impossible. This at least is suggested by the recent experience of black workers in Britain and of Southern European migrants in such countries as France and Germany. It is hard to believe that the 'liberalisation' of labour relations which the authors advocate will suffice to curb the antagonisms rooted in South Africa's elaborately institutionalised racism. It is hard also to believe that such liberalisation is in any case seriously in prospect. The preface to this study notes that three members of the research team cannot be associated with the publication because of banning orders. This matter-of-fact announcement is humbling to those of us who publish and research under comparatively unrestrictive conditions. It also suggests that the struggle of black South Africans for trade union rights which are taken for granted in most industrialised societies, like the struggle for social and political liberties, is likely to face bitter and even violent resistance from those whose material interests are most directly challenged. ^{LB}

Richard Hyman, Department of Industrial Relations, University of Warwick.

As Mozambique was one of South Africa's neighbours it was important to understand what kind of society Frelimo wanted to establish, wrote **Richard Turner**. This article was published in Volume 1, Number 10, 1974.

As De Kadt pointed out, 'the supply of labour from Mozambique has always been an important help to the Chamber of Mines in keeping down wages; thus, if the source were to dry up, it could have consequences for the wage-structure of South Africa as a whole'. This is one important reason why the trade union movement should interest itself in developments in Mozambique.

But Mozambique also has a greater significance than this. Everything indicates that the sort of society which Frelimo aims to create in Mozambique will be fundamentally different from South Africa, and indeed fundamentally different from practically any other society in Africa. Because of this, and because Mozambique is geographically so intimately connected with South Africa, what happens there is likely to influence the way in which South Africans, think about all our problems here, including the particular problems of workers.

For this reason it is vital that we be well informed about Mozambique, and that we take great care in trying to interpret and to understand what happens there. The title of this comment 'Slant-eyed men in the city of fear' is the headline given to a story by a usually respected correspondent in the *Sunday*

Tribune. The headline and the story show how not to report about Mozambique or about anything else for that matter.

Of course, far from all the reports in the South African press have been of this low standard. The *Sunday Times*, in particular, has carried sober and balanced assessments of Frelimo policies and of the problems to be faced in Mozambique.

One of the occupational hazards of journalism is the felt need to find an 'angle' for one's story. There are three obvious and dangerous angles which are likely to distort our vision of what happens in Mozambique: the 'communism' angle, the 'settler' angle and the 'race' angle.

THE COMMUNIST MENACE

In many circles in South Africa the word 'communism' is no longer merely a descriptive category. It is an emotive term guaranteed to becloud the best of minds. In the case of Mozambique, it will not really clarify anything to describe Frelimo as 'communist' or 'socialist', 'Marxist' or 'Maoist', although all these descriptions are accurate in some sense. But the question is, in what sense? And to answer that question, it is necessary to get away from the labels and attempt to watch and describe what actually happens, without any preconceptions.

In particular, if we apply any of those terms to Frelimo, this must not be taken to mean that Frelimo is part of a world-wide military plot to destroy western civilisation. While it will adopt some form of 'leftist' internal policy, Frelimo is not likely to become militarily involved in the 'cold war'. Internal socialist policies must not be confused with the spread of 'Soviet imperialism'.

CITY VERSUS COUNTRYSIDE

Mozambique is fundamentally a rural society. About 90% of the populations are engaged in

agriculture, from which come 80% of the country's export earnings. In contrast, only 2% of the economically active population are engaged in industry. The basic fact about agriculture is that at present only 5% of the arable land is actually under cultivation. And of the 11-million acres which are cultivated, 4-million are part of the 3,000 large plantations owned by foreigners or settlers.

The cities are essentially the product of the settlers, and were built to serve their needs. Most industries and most imports are also settler orientated.

Frelimo is a peasant movement. It is not likely to want to do away with cities and city-based industries, but preserving the cities as settler and tourist enclaves of affluent living is not high on Frelimo's list of priorities.

Frelimo's low view of the cities was clearly expressed in a speech by Samora Machel made in Cabo Delgado province just after his return to Mozambique:

'Now we are going into the cities... there are many enemies: alcoholism... tribalism, which we have destroyed here... racial discrimination and scorn between people... there are the rich: to be rich there is to be respected, because to be rich is to be a better exploiter, and they respect those who are the best exploiters. Then there are the educated and the uneducated there are divisions between them... and what I am saying is true of the blacks and the whites. Of all, black and white, do you hear. We have many other problems to resolve; the fruits of colonialism; alcoholism, prostitution, capitalism.

There are venereal diseases in the cities, Children of 10 years old are already corrupted. After 10 years of war are we going to permit this in our country - a new war? We must start a new war, in the same way in which we fought Portuguese colonialism.'

Frelimo's economic policies will be directed towards redistributing the land and bringing new land under cultivation. Frelimo's economic strategy will be based on rural development.

It will involve increasing food production by using more land: increasing cash crops, and developing rural industries to process agricultural goods for re-export, rather than exporting them unfinished. In the short term, and given the massive underutilisation of land, it would be possible to absorb people from the cities back on to the land, and to provide enough food for an adequate diet for all. This means that what happens in the cities and in international trade is only of secondary importance. Most Mozambicans will be able to improve their positions even if the country goes bankrupt and the cities have to close down.

Of course this is not likely to happen, but we make the point in order to put the cities and the balance of payments into their proper perspective. Accounts of Mozambican economic problems must concentrate on what happens in the largely subsistence rural areas, rather than on what happens in the few urban settler enclaves. They must not expect orthodox 'sensible' policies designed to attract foreign investment.

'Exploitation is not a colour. It is a system.' It is very difficult for South Africans, and especially for white South Africans, not to see things in racial terms.

In regard to Mozambique, this tendency will be encouraged by the fact that Frelimo's membership is predominantly black, and that the privileged elite is predominantly white. So it is important to understand that nonracialism is a basic element in Frelimo's policy. Joaquim Chissano, prime minister in the pre-independence provisional

government, has said: 'Exploitation is not a colour/it is a system. In our Frelimo constitution it is written that we are going to struggle against oppression. Nowhere does it say that we are going to struggle against the whites.'

The same theme is repeated over and over again in the speeches of Samora Machel. Machel has also claimed that the conflicts in Frelimo in the period 1967-1968, conflicts which led to the assassination of the president, Eduardo Mondlane, were intimately associated with this very question. The right wing in Frelimo wished to use racist propaganda, and to mobilise the population on anti-white lines. The left refused, arguing that oppression and exploitation were not an exclusive characteristic of whites. In a speech to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU now African Union) last year he gave the following account of the debate: 'Opportunists and adventurists, tactically underestimating the enemy, declared that the struggle could be begun without any political preparation. Failing to recognise the true dialectic of combat, ignoring the real level of consciousness which had been attained, they affirmed that it would be enough to fire a few shots in order for the entire country to rise up spontaneously. Finally refusing to define the enemy correctly, these forces considered a race and a people to be the target of our arms.'

In reality, these people did not want an armed struggle carried through to its ultimate conclusions. Their real aim was to block the popular process of combat and to prevent its full ideological development. They aimed to use the blood and sacrifice of the masses only as a means of pressure which would lead to the substitution for a

foreign exploiting class with a national exploiting class.'

How most of the assembled OAU leaders reacted to this accurate description of themselves we do not know, but the point is that what Machel is saying here is that to speak of race is to confuse the issue. One of the more bizarre events in the days before independence, the massive parade of Frelimo prisoners held at the base camp at Nachingwe in Tanzania was used by Machel specifically to illustrate the point that not only whites could be enemies of the people.

In a press statement the head of Frelimo's information department, Jorge Rebelo, explained the significance of the event: 'Reactionaries are not to be associated with white people. We want to show that black people can be as reactionary or as revolutionary as anyone else. The same for the white people. It is a difficult lesson to learn for people who have been subjected to 500 years of white Portuguese colonialism.'

We cannot assume that action taken against a white individual in Mozambique has been taken because of his or her skin colour. Nor, of course, can we necessarily assume the contrary. There is no guarantee that Frelimo will keep to its principles, or that it will be able to control less politically sophisticated behaviour from people who have noted a 500 year correlation between whiteness and the status of exploiter.'

But the point is that Machel and Frelimo are at present working to prevent racial polarisation, and it would be damaging to race relations both in South Africa and perhaps also in Mozambique if the South African press were to force class issues connected with the struggle against exploitation into a racial mould.

It cannot at this moment be assumed either that Frelimo will

or that it will not succeed. It is always more difficult to build a new economic and social order than it is to keep an old one going, however bad the old one might be. In judging events in Mozambique, the criterion must be the extent to which the lives of the working people of the country are improved, both materially and spiritually. This involves taking into account not only the question of the standard of living, but also the extent to which the government is able to create institutions which will allow popular participation in government and popular freedom at all levels.

In one of his speeches while touring the countryside on the way to Lourenco Marques (now Maputo), Machel warned his audience: 'There will be a war in our midst. We who fought the war are going to struggle in the Government. We are going to have to confront ambition; "why was this one chosen as President? Why was that one chosen as Minister? Why wasn't I chosen as a Minister? Why not a Chief in the Frelimo army?" Do you understand? There will be ambition. And immediately without delay, the struggle will begin.'

It is then that we will have to come to you again.'

The fact that Machel is aware of the problem of personal ambition does not mean that he will not be overcome by it.

The question is what institutions will be developed in order to permit the people to control the possible ambition of the leadership? Here again, we must avoid simple labels or the demand for old solutions, since no society has really found an adequate solution to this problem. Instead we must observe carefully what institutions emerge and how they in fact work. We in the trade union movement will be particularly

interested to observe and to report the form of industrial relations which are established.

At present there is little information on trade union and worker organisation in independent Mozambique. Meanwhile, we are publishing two documents which we think contribute towards an understanding of labour relations in the past and in the future of Mozambique.

The first document is a report prepared for the Transvaal Chamber of Mines in 1922. It is an unvarnished account of working conditions in Mozambique, prepared confidentially by an agent of the greatest labour recruiting organisation in that territory. Of course, labour conditions had improved somewhat by the time of independence, but was both belated and inadequate. And the report tells us how most Mozambicans lived after 400 years of Europe's civilising mission.

The second document was apparently first issued in 1972, but was recently published in connection with the First National Seminar on Agriculture, held from 29 May to 2 June this year.

We have edited out one or two references to the war which was in progress when it was first written. It gives a good idea of Frelimo attitudes towards work, production, education and private property.

With its stress on collectivism and on the combination of education and organisation with practical production, it also shows what kind of development policy we can expect from Frelimo.

Whether their ideology is viable/and whether they can in fact use these methods in running a whole country of course remains to be seen. **LB**

Comment

Two-edged red herrings

By Richard Turner (Published in Volume 1, Number 10, 1975).

Defence:	R948-million
Bantu Administration and Development (Homeland Development):	R385-million
African Education:	R69-million
European Education:	R214-million

At first sight the enormity of these figures is such as to render all comment superfluous. It seems so obvious that the only thing threatening South Africa is internal disturbances sparked off by the failure to allocate money to provide decent conditions for black South Africans. Why spend money on arms when the same money spent on development could make a large army unnecessary.

Opposition spokesmen and newspapers have highlighted this paradox. So it seems superfluous for us to repeat what has already been well said.

Nevertheless, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider an important question: if it is so obvious to you and to us that money spent on development would do more for South Africa's safety than money spent on arms, then why is it not also obvious to the government. After all Mr Vorster and professor Horwood are not unintelligent people.

The fact that the budget allots R214-million to white education, as opposed to R69-million on African education is at least comprehensible, if unpleasant.

When there is a conflict of interest between black and white, they choose white interest. But the case of unnecessary defence spending does not seem to be connected with the direct interest of any particular social group: there is no 'military industrial complex' in South Africa. So what is the explanation?

The first possible explanation is that the government believes that the gap between black and white is so great that not even a sum like R948-million could really remedy the situation. They might therefore argue that, from the point of view of white material interest, it is still far cheaper to rely on repression than on justice. There is probably something in this. But we do not believe that this is the whole reason. In addition, there is a basic inability to understand the nature of social conflict.

In our experience even those employers who admit that their workers have genuine grievances still insist that strikes are caused by agitators. They try to solve the problem by disposing of the 'agitators' rather than the grievances. The government seems to be doing the same thing on a national scale. Just as the employers blame everything on communist agitators, so the government tends to blame South Africa's problems on a world communist conspiracy. Although occasionally ministers let slip that the army is for keeping internal order, the more usual

posture is that South Africa is threatened by external attack from the communists, and that spending more money on internal development would do nothing to remove this external threat.

It is perhaps out of place for the *Labour Bulletin* to enter into a long discussion of international relations. Yet the whole idea of a communist conspiracy is so clearly bound up with perceptions and reactions to trade unionism that we believe we should discuss the issue. The question is not whether communism is a good or a bad thing. The question is whether South Africa is threatened by a communist invasion from outside. And whether internal disturbances, whether strikes or otherwise, are part of this invasion process; 'subversion' rather than legitimate protest.

It is evident that the government and many white South Africans think that the answer to both questions is yes. In an opinion survey taken among whites in Durban shortly after the coup in Portugal last year, the respondents were asked 'Who are the real leaders of the terrorists?' About 60% replied that the real leaders were 'outside communists'. That is, they saw Frelimo as being essentially a foreign communist movement, with no real roots inside Mozambique. One is reminded of a notorious statement made in 1952 by Dean Rusk, then a senior official in the Truman administration, and later to be US Secretary of State under Kennedy and Johnson. He said:

'We do not recognise the authorities in Peiking (Beijing) for what they pretend to be. The Peiking regime may be a colonial Russian government - a Slavic Manchukuo on a large scale. It is not the government of China. It does not pass the first test. It is not Chinese.'

The South African government has shown considerably more perspicacity than did the US

government. It has not waited 20 years to change its mind and recognise that Frelimo is indeed Mozambican. South Africa now accepts that all along Frelimo was a Mozambican liberation movement, not a foreign communist terrorist organisation. Yet there has been no change in the overall strategic analysis that underpinned the earlier assessment. While our Portuguese allies were fighting 'the spread of communism in Mozambique it made some sense to arm ourselves to prepare to take part in the struggle. Now that the 'Fascist Portuguese Colonialist Regime' has given way to the legitimate aspirations of the people of Mozambique' it would surely make sense to drop the pretense that the 'struggle against communist aggression' is, or ever has been, a problem in South Africa.

People in power; whether in Moscow or Pretoria, or in the board room, find it difficult to accept that other people might doubt the purity of their motives and the beneficence of their behaviour. They therefore find it natural to blame 'agitators' for any apparent signs of discontent amongst the masses.

It is of course conceivable that in some situations contented people are led unwittingly into action by the cunning of agitators. This cannot be 'ruled in' *a priori*. But the point is that it should not be 'ruled in' *a priori*. The recourse to the outside agitator explanation should only come after all other possible explanations have been considered.

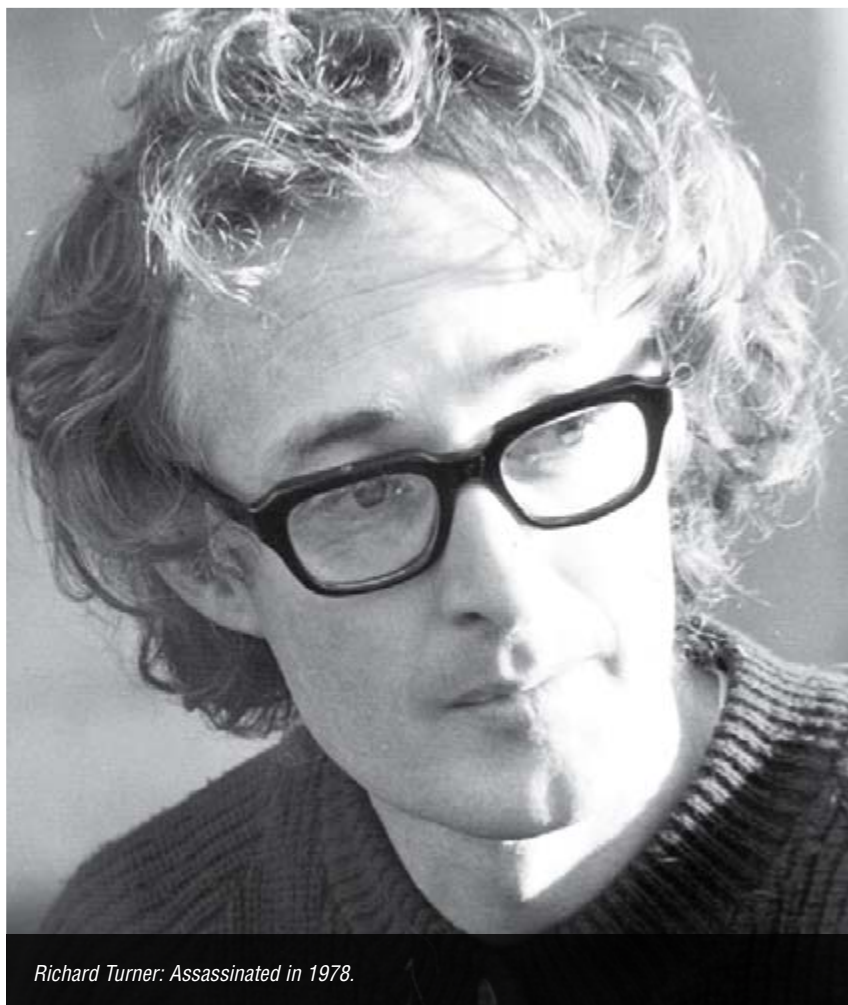
Let's face it, the degree of inequality and injustice in South Africa is such that one can very easily find explanations for social conflict. Afrikaners who rebelled against British rule without needing prompting from Moscow are in a very weak position when it comes to arguing that blacks cannot do the same.

It is worth pointing out that the communist red herring is two edged. The government might believe that it discredits people when it calls them communists and bans them under the Suppression of Communism Act. But it may well have the opposite effect. When all those who work hardest for the cause of justice in South Africa are called 'communists' the most likely effect is that the black South African will develop a pro-communist mystique every bit as unthinking as the government versus myth of the communist bogey. We do not need anti-communist rhetoric. What is needed is serious analysis of the complex phenomenon of communism, and its relation to social conflict.

We do not believe that there is any military threat to South Africa from foreign communist states. The idea that foreign pressure against apartheid is somehow connected with a Moscow plot to grab the wealth of the Rand is ludicrous. Frelimo was undoubtedly armed by communist countries. But for all that Frelimo is not about to hand the mineral wealth of Mozambique over to anybody. Communist governments are obviously going to aid any movement here which tries to overthrow the present South African system by force. But this is beside the point. The point is that it is necessary to change South African society in such a way as to take away the motives for wanting to overthrow it by force. Buying submarines to defend our coastline against imaginary Russian or Chinese invaders is not going to help.

RED HERRING RIDES AGAIN

Since we wrote the above comment it has been reported that the Minister of Justice, Mr Kruger said that: 'Communist subversion in South Africa had decided to concentrate on the organisation of the lack labour force... they are concentrating on organising the



Richard Turner: Assassinated in 1978.

Black labour force with the idea that they would misuse the organised force to stoke up large scale labour unrest which could then lead to revolutionary developments' (*Sunday Tribune* 20 April).

According to a further report Lucy Mvubelo of the National Union of Clothing Workers, Attie Niewoudt of the Confederation of Labour, and Arthur Grobbelar of TUCSA, have promised that they 'will support the Minister in stopping Communist infiltration into the country's labour force' (*Natal Mercury* 23 April).

The purpose of a trade union is to express the interests of its members. It is not a political tool to be used for somebody else's purposes. We would therefore always oppose any political party attempting to take over a trade union for its

own ends. We would not deny that such infiltration is possible. It has certainly happened in South Africa's past. In the late 1930s and the 1940s National Party political agitators were heavily involved in the successful and unsuccessful, politically motivated infiltration of trade unions.

Infiltration therefore is possible. But infiltration can only take place when the trade union is bureaucratic, undemocratic or corrupt. If a trade union is democratically organised, with members trained in the principles of trade unionism and in effective control of the actions of their officials, then it is not possible to 'infiltrate' that union. Members will not allow it to be used for objectives other than their own. A comparison between the Nationalist attempts to

take over the Mine Workers Union and the Garment Workers Union is instructive. The former had become bureaucratic and corrupt with its leaders no longer serving true legitimate interests of its members. It therefore fell easy prey to political infiltration. The Garment Workers Union, on the other hand, was well organised, and had a popular and honest leadership. As a result the takeover attempt failed miserably.

We believe that the best defence against political misuse of trade unions is the development of democratic structures through the proper training of union members in democratic principles. Black trade unions do not need and do not want heavy handed government action to protect them against alleged infiltration. They want and need steps by the government and by other sympathetic trade unions which will make possible their free and democratic growth.

Trade unionists in particular, should remember that the government has provided no proof whatsoever that members of the Communist Party are trying to infiltrate the trade unions.

All the government has done in recent years is to use the provisions of the so-called Suppression of Communism Act to suppress trade unionists without producing an iota of evidence that these trade unionists had acted in any way contrary to the interests of the workers. A promise to support the minister might well be interpreted as the endorsement of further such arbitrary ministerial action.

At present arbitrary government action and intimidation are much more serious a threat to African trade unions than the imagined 'infiltration' of political activists of any kind. In these circumstances the first concern of trade unionists should be to protect their fellow trade unionists against arbitrary action, by insisting that the minister abandon the arbitrary powers granted him by the Suppression of Communism Act. ^{LB}

Management's counter-offensive



After nearly a decade of 'industrial peace' (the number of Africans involved in officially reported strikes does not seem to have risen above 200 per year between 1962 and 1969) industrial conflict has reemerged in the factories and on the mines, wrote **Eddie Webster**.

Over the last six years South African management have been faced with offensives on two fronts. It began in Durban in April 1969 when 200 dock workers struck in support of a demand for higher wages; 13,000 workers went out on strike at the end of 1971 in Namibia. Again in Durban in October 1972, 2,000 dockworkers struck. The climax was in the mass strikes in the Durban metropolitan area in January-February 1973 when nearly 100,000 workers went on strike. This was followed by continuing strike actions in the Durban area and growing conflict on the mines. Many were taken by surprise because it was assumed that the repressive apparatus in South Africa was wholly effective in containing dissent within narrow limits. This then was the first offensive faced by the management.

The second offensive was the international one. With the repression of effective political action within South Africa, the struggle against apartheid had been forced clearly onto the international arena. This was to have its effects in the late 1960s with the emergence of strong criticism of South Africa's poverty wages in the media, and at companies' annual

shareholder meetings pressure groups began to attack the holding companies abroad about their treatment of African workers. The most significant result was the parliamentary enquiry in 1973 in the House of Commons into British companies operating in South Africa.

What effect have these two offensives had on management? It led to a flood of speeches, articles, and even new journals and organisations, where what could be called, the managerial intellectuals tried to persuade the managers and owners of industry to adapt to the changing situation. These managerial intellectuals have a simple message - if companies are going to continue to operate profitably in South Africa they must move away from the old master-servant approach towards the African worker which tended to rest on the 'induna' system, a heritage of colonial employment practices where 'traditional' leaders are used for purposes of control. It is argued that a more sophisticated method of control is now needed that involves an element of democratic participation by the worker in his place of work. It is necessary to regulate the conflict

and to build a core of leaders in the factory who could both represent the workers and negotiate with management. Personnel consultants began to advertise their skill at 'understanding and motivating the African worker' and organisations have been set up to help managers improve the negotiating skills of their African employees. Even academics wrote books on how to motivate African workers. These are boom times for the managerial-intellectual.

Being economically motivated men, managers have treated these managerial-intellectuals with caution but increasing interest. Sometimes they see their ideas as potentially useful instruments for more effective social control and possible co-optation. A way of legitimising the changing nature of South African capitalism.

Most of the time they are complacent about the status quo but are prepared to try and make the government's alternative to trade unions for Africans, the Works Committee or Liaison Committee work. In a study undertaken among employers in the Durban area in 1972, Schlemmer and Boulanger found less than 60% preferred Works Committees, 12% were

prepared to support the idea of registered African trade unions, 2% the possibility of Africans in mixed unions, and 6% merely suggesting that some form of African labour organisation would be advantageous. The respondents' perceived disadvantages of African trade unions emerged in the following order of importance:

- they cause unnecessary trouble
- they are vulnerable to outside infiltration and agitators
- they cause management to bear the brunt of problems and malpractices in other firms
- they are 'a waste of time'
- they develop patterns of leadership which are authoritarian/dictatorial
- they are the first step towards communism
- they have leaders who speak for themselves, not for workers
- the running of trade unions is beyond the ability of Africans.

The authors conclude 'the general impression emerging from these results is that the basic orientation of representatives of management as regards African labour relations is defensive and, in various ways, antipathetic to the idea of organized and clearly defined negotiation as between factions with interests which are opposed in many respects.'

Two points need to be made about the government's policy on African worker representation. The first point is that the Bantu Labour Act of 1953; which set up Works Committees; and the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Amendment Act of 1973 which extended representation to Liaison Committees were both intended as alternatives to trade unions. Faced by growing industrial unrest during the Second World War and the emergence of at least 100 unregistered African unions (Smuts figures in 1946), the United Party government set up what was to become known as the Botha Commission to investigate industrial

relations. Although the Commission recommended the recognition of heavily circumscribed separate African unions, the by now Nationalist government rejected the Commission's proposals and introduced the Bantu Labour Act instead. That it was set up as an alternative to trade unions was made clear by the Minister of Labour when the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act was debated in parliament. 'My proposal are the following. First of all we do not prohibit native trade unions. Consequently, the question of freedom of association does not arise. They will still have the right to associate, they will have the right to form their own trade unions. We do not prohibit it. But what we do in this Bill is to create machinery which will ensure justice to native workers, which will enable them to channel their grievances and bring them to the attention of the authorities - some alternative machinery. If that machinery is effective and successful, the natives will have no interest in trade unions and trade unions will probably die a natural death' (Hansard Co1 872, 1973).

Again the Minister of Labour made the intention of the Act clear when he replied in the debate on the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Amendment Act of 1973. He said: 'If we had wanted to prohibit these trade unions, Minister Schoeman would already have done so in 1953. This has never been done, we have felt that they could simply struggle on like that, I think that the establishment of these workers committees will really deprive these Bantu trade unions of the Hon. Member (a reference to Mrs. Suzman) of their life's blood and any necessity for existence. I think therefore that such a prohibition is unnecessary'. (Hansard Co1 8779 1973).

The second point is the extent to which employers are using these committees as alternatives to

trade unions. An attempt has been made by Ravi Joshi, of the IIE, to gather information from the African Unions on the tactics adopted by employers of using works and liaison committees to evade union recognition. Although the evidence is tentative, it does seem to suggest that management are deliberately using these committees to neutralise working class leadership by channelling it into institutions, i.e. works and liaison committees, which have no power base.

CARAVANS INTERNATIONAL

'At Caravans International, which is 80% owned by Caravans International Ltd (UK), a Works Committee was set up after the 1973 strikes by management to prevent unrest at the factory. However, this elected Committee remained defunct after the first meeting. The Metal and Allied Workers Union began organising workers in mid-1973 and by November when the union strength was 30% the union approached the management. After a time it became clear that management would not recognise the union and would actively fight its presence at the factory. The management claimed that the Works Committee was fully representative of the workers and they would not brook outside interference.

The management has started having regular meetings with the Works Committee, and they have been having regular elections at the factory. But the management has cracked down on union membership. Members have been intimidated and threatened with firing. Checks have been instituted early in the morning as workers are coming in to work to make sure that nobody takes the union membership forms from union officials.'

CHROME CHEMICALS

'Chrome Chemicals factory in Merebank is part of the Tauber

Corsson group of companies. The work force of about 160 makes chrome by-products for use in the leather and soap industry. There has been a Liaison Committee in existence at the factory for many years which is 50% elected. Workers, however, have been dissatisfied with its functioning. There is no machinery whereby elected representatives report back to the general workers and there is complete lack of consultative communication.

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union began organising workers early last year and within months 130 of the workers had joined the union. This was indicative of the rising expectations among the workers as well as lack of faith in the existing channels of communication. At this stage the union officials approached the management for recognition as the only true representatives for the workers in the factory. Management responded by suggesting instead that the union members in the factory contest elections for the Liaison Committee. The union delegation rejected this and wanted management consent to establish a Shop Steward Committee which would meet with management once a month. Management, however, rejected this and said that the workers were satisfied with the existing committee.

Early in 1975 the management made an attempt to introduce a funeral benefit. At the meeting called to discuss this scheme, the workers refused to accept or negotiate anything without union officials being present. This plan was subsequently shelved. Workers also boycotted an election for a new member to the Liaison Committee when one of the seats became vacant. In February, a delegation consisting of two elected workers representatives and the union secretary made another attempt to see the management but the manager refused to see them.

At a recent meeting of members of the union the liaison committee was unanimously rejected. Management promised to inform their parent companies in Germany about the union's request for recognition. The response to this request was negative. After pressure from international trade union the company, is now investigating the question of labour representation in its plants, nine months after the initial request.

The union has in the meanwhile managed to establish on its own a Shop Steward Committee at the factory. Union support at the factory is firm and 70% of the members are paid up members of the union.'

CILLIERS COMMITTEE

It is against the background of a managerial counter-offensive that the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) and the Trade Union Advisory and Coordinating Council (TUACC), were to treat with caution an invitation by two employees of Anglo-American, Alex Borrairie and Bobby Godsell, to attend a meeting to discuss the feasibility of a joint management labour centre. After careful consideration we decided that the proposal was premature and distributed the following memo at the meeting in February in Johannesburg:

'The establishment of "neutral" institutions between management and labour has been achieved in countries such as Sweden, Germany and Holland at an advanced stage of industrialisation when the working class have been incorporated into the vital economic and political institutions of a common industrial society. Joint management-labour bodies have been relatively effective in the "management of discontent" precisely because labour has won recognition for its central economic institution that is, trade unions, and has won the right to common citizenship through universal franchise and the emergence of

powerful working-class political parties. Industrial relations assume a relationship between two equally well-organised and independent groups. This requires a willingness on the part of management to accept the status equal to labour. The necessary condition, therefore, for the success of your proposal is a viable organised labour movement. We welcome your recognition that there is a need to train management and labour on the basic principles of industrial relations and we accept your proposals as a legitimate goal for both management and labour to strive towards.

However, we feel at this stage in the evolution of the labour movement when management are well-organised into powerful employer organisations, that a joint management labour body would be premature. As steps in the direction of your proposal, we would like to suggest the following:

Management education centre

Hostility, ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of management is a major obstacle facing the growing trade union movement in South Africa. The management problem has many aspects. One of these is obviously a misperception of self-interest; a failure to recognise the long-term advantages accruing from institutionalised rather than disorganised conflict. A second facet is the prevalent racism of white management in South Africa.

A third facet is connected with the whole question of status and self-image. Both their early socialisation and the cultural milieu in which executives move leads them to feel threatened by any suggestion that they should be willing to relinquish total control by sharing decision-making power with workers. The business culture places heavy stress on the necessity of "retaining the initiative" in all circumstances. Status and self-

image are therefore bound up with control over the workforce. A demand by the workers to share in decision-making is therefore often experienced as an attack on the very personality. This naturally results in irrational reactions which may do much harm. A manager in this position experiences a demand for a R2 pay rise as an all-or-nothing struggle with ramifications far beyond the issue at hand. It threatens his definitions of his status amongst fellow managers. Since his career prospects are intimately bound up with these questions, he feels himself to be threatened on all fronts.

We believe that it would be valuable to initiate training courses for managers which would educate them about workers' rights, the causes of industrial conflict and the principles of trade unions. We agree that it is important for trade union organisations to play a part in designing and running such courses. Trade unionists could act as resource people and participate in seminars with management in order for both sides to establish and learn the basic ground-rules of industrial relations. Undoubtedly the trade union leadership could gain much from a more precise understanding of issues as they effect management.

Concrete support for an organised labour movement

However, the necessary condition for our participation in such a centre would be the concrete recognition and support on the part of management for the emerging African trade union movement. This involves support in three areas:

1. Support for existing worker education groups: At present there are educational institutions in each of the major centres for worker education. These organisations have to a great extent grown organically with the African trade unions. They cooperate closely with

the union in designing their educational courses. The further development of the African trade union movement is of course dependent on education and training in organisational skills. We therefore believe that an important part of your proposal should consist of financial aid to the existing organisations.

2. Even more important is the question of the recognition of trade unions. Although some leading management spokesmen have come out in favour of the recognition of trade unions, very little has yet happened in practice. African trade unions cannot be expected or cannot be expected to take part in any general projects with management representatives until these bodies have given concrete recognition to the unions already operating within their establishments.
3. Research needs to be undertaken into the factors inhibiting the development of African trade unions in South Africa. We suggest that such research could be undertaken in two stages:
 - The appointment of a top level commission of enquiry into the factors inhibiting the development of African trade unions in South Africa. They should investigate the needs of the trade union movement, the attitudes of management and the various management organisations, and the attitudes of the government and the white trade unions.
 - At this stage ongoing research projects could perhaps best be undertaken through the universities. We therefore suggest that consideration should be given to financing research fellowships at the universities.

As we were unable to persuade those present, the representatives from IIE and TUACC (Bekisisa Nxasana, Eddie Webster, June Rose Nala, and Omar Badsha) withdrew from the meeting.

However, the proposal was accepted by the majority of those present and a committee under the chairmanship of SP Cilliers, professor of Sociology, at Stellenbosch was set up. As the Committee's proposals have not yet been made public, we are unable to comment further on the proposed centre.

Our approach to any proposal will be in terms of the extent to which we think such a centre will facilitate the creation of an independent organisational base for the African trade unions in the factories. This must involve recognition on the part of management of shop steward committees not works and liaison committees – as the true representatives of the workers, and as the only legitimate persons with whom to settle complaints and bargain. It is this insistence on an independent power base which made us treat the initial proposal cautiously. To accept the need to enter into agreements with management does not imply that the trade unions should enter into any sort of alliance. We shall be obliged to negotiate with management, but not to espouse their interests when it lies in our power to do otherwise.

We await the Committee's proposals before we make our final judgment as to whose interests we feel the centre to be'. ^{LB}

Eddie Webster is the director of the Chris Hani Institute and professor emeritus at the Society and Work Development Institute of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

Solly Sachs and the Garment Workers Union

In writing Solly Sachs's obituary, **Jon Lewis** outlines his contribution in organising the Garment Workers Union (GWU) as a class-based trade union in the face of political attacks from the Nationalist Party and its organisations, and the limitations of his political thinking.

Solly Sachs died on Friday, 30 July 1976, in the University College Hospital, London, at the age of 75. However, his effective work in the service of the garment workers had been brought to a premature end long before, when Sachs became one of the first to be banned under the Suppression of Communism Act, on 8 May 1952. After the Nationalist victory of 1948 the full power of the state was used to attack Sachs and his union.

Sachs fought back, at first through the courts when, for example, the Minister of the Interior compelled him to surrender his passport. After these channels had been closed to them and Sachs had been arbitrarily banned, the garment workers took to the streets. A public protest meeting on the City Hall steps, Johannesburg, was called for Saturday morning 24 May. Some 15,000 protesters had already assembled when 10,000 coloured garment workers, marching abreast, reached the City Hall. However, as Sachs began to speak, the crowd was viciously attacked by the police. The protest campaign tested, and proved, the courageous solidarity of the garment workers in defence of their union, as thousands marched under such slogans as: 'Klerewerkers Veg Vir vryheid'. The lasting respect

which Sachs earned from the members of the union is summed up in the words of a banner which draped the platform of one protest meeting: 'They can remove him from the Union, but never from our hearts'.

Sachs' own personal history helps to explain the extraordinary sympathy and understanding he held for the Afrikaner women, who worked for such low wages in the clothing factories during the 1920s and 1930s. According to Senator A. Scheepers, the president of the union, writing in 'Saamtrek', 6 August 1976: 'Solly Sachs was born in Latvia from working parents - his mother was a garment worker and his father a leather worker. He grew up in poverty and expressed many a time the grief he felt that his mother had to work so hard as a garment worker and still attend to her children and all other domestic chores. It was because of these circumstances that he vowed that if he could do something to make the lives of workers easier, he would do it.'

Obliged to leave university in order to gain employment, Sachs nevertheless continued to study law. He worked at a concession store; later becoming secretary of the Concession Stores and Allied

Trade Union. On 14 November, 1928, Sachs accepted the position of Secretary of the Tailoring and Garment Workers Union, in which post he served for 24 years.

GENERAL STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

In order to assess the achievement of the GWU, it is necessary to locate its activities within the specific conditions of the emergence of the clothing industry in South Africa. In particular, it is important to investigate the structure of capital in the industry, and the nature of the labour force.

1) Capital

Secondary industrialisation, and the establishment of a national manufacturing sector in South Africa was not a uniform process. In some areas, particularly steel and railways, capital was provided by the state. In the engineering, construction and chemicals sectors, mining capital and foreign capital was very important. The origins of the clothing industry, however, were indigenous, and dependent for capital on a process of primary accumulation. The large-scale factory production of the 1930s and 1940s was preceded by small workshop and 'outwork' production, run by individuals and family partnerships.

These establishments lacking capital resources and under pressure from foreign competition, existed on low-profit margins, which could only be maintained by holding down the wages of the workers. Thus the first struggles of the GWU from the late 1920s were over wages, and Sachs spent much time ensuring that employers actually paid the rates laid down in the Industrial Agreements for the industry. During this period, employers' sanctions included the keeping of a 'blacklist'.

Pressure on wages increased during the depression of the early 1930s, resulting in two major strikes in 1931 and 1932. The union was defeated, but the employers' original demand for a 25% reduction in wages had to be reduced to 10%. The sheer economic misery of the young women workers is illustrated in the biographical sketches of Hester Cornelius, Katie Viljoen and Anna Sophia Swanepoel in *SALB* 2.4. Thus Sachs always stressed the primacy of 'bread and butter' issues in trade union work, and the very real gains achieved in this area, often through strike action, partly explain the continued loyalty and militancy of the membership. The scale of success in improving conditions is shown in a comparison of the wages of women workers in the industry between 1928 and 1952:

- **1928:** Actual earnings of workers from nil to about £2-10-0 per week. Not a single woman worker earned 3-0-0 per week.
- **1952:** Weekly wage qualified women workers £6-6-11 minimum. About 1,000, mostly Afrikaners, earned from £50-0-0 to £150-0-0 per month.

2) Labour force

Prior to 1939 the workforce in the clothing industry was predominantly newly proletarianised, recently urbanised, female and Afrikaner. Each of these categories involved the union in some new task or responsibility.

(a) Urbanisation

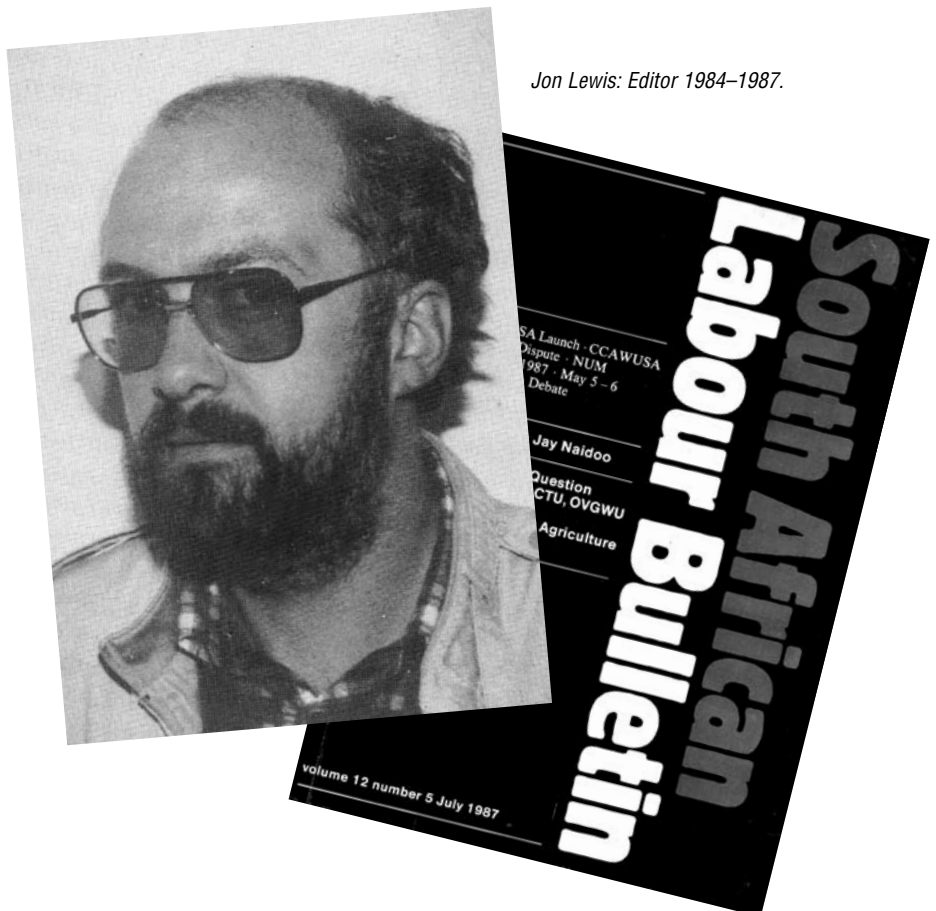
The misery and perplexity of 'poor whites' forced off the land and on to the urban labour market is amply chronicled in the Carnegie Report of 1932. The trauma of proletarianisation and urbanisation is captured in a play titled 'Die Offerande'; written by the National Organiser of the GWU, Hester Cornelius, in the late 1930s.

As well as offering hope, the union gave practical assistance to members newly arrived in the town. The union arranged accommodation, obtained cheap second-hand clothing for its members, worked with the Johannesburg and Germiston authorities to establish cheap hostels and provided a whole social life with dances, picnics, sports days, Christmas parties and beauty contests. These 'home boy' functions which the union performed to produce a very tight-knit organisation.

Such social occasions also had an educative function. This was particularly the case with May Day celebrations. On May Day 1939, for example, the garment workers of Germiston held a demonstration and public meeting in the morning, followed by a picnic by the side of Germiston Lake in the afternoon.

(b) Women

Unlike African societies, where the women were the last to leave for the towns, in Afrikaner rural society, it was the women who occupied the front line in the process of urbanisation. Often, they supported parents, who remained on the land, as well as themselves on very meagre wages. The GWU, therefore, campaigned on issues which specifically affected the welfare of women workers: for example, confinement allowances, and the building of crèches. Furthermore, the union stressed that the



Jon Lewis: Editor 1984-1987.

members were not mere 'factory girls', but 'workers', who need not feel ashamed of their position. Managers and foremen were expected to show respect when addressing a member of the union.

(c) Afrikaners and Afrikaner nationalism

The greatest achievement of Sachs and the GWU was in retaining the allegiance of the members to a class-based organisation, in the face of the massive ideological and political onslaught waged by the nationalist movement. This included sustained abuse against the 'Jew, Communist Sachs' from the nationalist press and politicians (giving rise to a succession of successful libel cases), physical attacks on meetings held by the GWU, repeated attempts to split the union on racial lines, and finally, the banning of Sachs himself.

The methods of the Nationalists, in using racist ideology and manipulating Afrikaner symbols, in order to destroy the union, are demonstrated in the 1944 strike in Germiston. This was led by two Nationalist workers, who objected to the employment of six coloured workers in the same factory. When the two were expelled by the union executive, the whole battery of Nationalist organisations went into action against the GWU: press, Nationalist Party, E.A.K., Ossewa Brandwag, and the Dutch Reformed Churches. The latter formed the Bree Kerklike Komitee which issued a pamphlet titled 'Blanke Suid-Afrika Red Uself!!' in which they appealed for Afrikaners to: 'ondersteun die blanke fabriekswerkster en die drie Afrikaanse Kerke in hulle stryd om die behoud van die Kleurskeidslyn en die Christendom.'

Some of the factors which enabled the union to survive these attacks have already been

discussed: particularly the union's militant lead on the wages front. The achievement of a 'closed shop' agreement was another important factor. But whilst stressing the primacy of economic issues, Sachs always recognised the legitimate cultural aspirations of his Afrikaner members. He believed, for example, that the Labour Party had done so badly in the 1938 elections precisely because it had failed to take up a position on the Afrikaner 'National Question' and had not fought for the national rights of Afrikaners.

The policy of the GWU on 'Afrikaner Nationalism' is seen clearly in its response to the 1938 Voortrekker Centenary Celebrations. A crude socialist response might have been to condemn the whole affair as a propaganda exercise, staged by the nationalists. The union's position, however, was that Afrikaners had a unique heritage which was worthy of celebration. Furthermore, given that the majority of union members were Afrikaners, the celebrations were something that the union should actually participate in. In this way leadership could be kept out of the hands of the Nationalists, and the impact of Nationalist ideology implicit in the celebrations, would be diffused. The GWU organised its members into 'Kappiekommandos'; issued leaflets with instructions on how to make your own 'Kappie' and Voortrekker dress; held Voortrekker dances and hired buses to take the members up to Pretoria for the celebrations. Thus, Afrikaner garment workers would attend the celebrations by virtue of their union membership, rather than their inclusion in the 'volk'.

SOLLY SACHS HIMSELF

Whilst it is important to recognise the general structural conditions in which the GWU operated,

there can be little doubt that much of the responsibility for the achievements (and failures) of the union lies with Solly Sachs himself. It is therefore important to attempt a very tentative analysis (in the absence of more detailed research) of Sachs' general political position, and the theoretical framework within which he worked. This will be in two sections. The first, roughly speaking deals with Sachs' theoretical perspective, and the second describes his consequent political practice.

Class or colour

In Sachs' view South Africa was characterised by a primary division between capitalists and workers. The working class, it is true, he saw as divided into three layers, based on skills, and largely co-incidental with differences in colour, with some blurring at the edges. However, Sachs believed the interests of all sections of workers were fundamentally the same, and there is no hint that the interests of white workers and black workers could actually be antagonistic.

It is largely in these terms that Sachs dealt with the problem of the 'white working class', and where exactly to locate it in South African society.

Essentially it is the theoretical position held by the Communist Party in the period before it adopted the 'Native Republic' slogan, in 1928. It is not clear why Sachs was expelled from the Communist Party in 1931 (the official version being that he failed to turn up at a Communist Party May Day rally, preferring to accompany union members on a picnic), but it would be consistent with views he expressed later, to expect him to have supported the Bunting faction against the 'Native Republic' position, and hence incurred the wrath of the Communist Party leadership.

Solly Sachs devoted much effort to trying to save Afrikaner workers from the hands of fascism and the Nationalist Party. It is precisely in this area that Sachs' greatest achievement lies, as far as the clothing industry is concerned.

We have already noted that, until 1939, the workforce in the clothing industry was predominantly 'poor white' Afrikaner, and there was a real sense in which the interests of these workers were directly opposed to those of their employers. Sachs, it would seem, tended to generalise from this experience, and consistently argued that white workers could be won to an anti-capitalist position.

Hence, he devoted much effort to trying to save Afrikaner workers from the hands of fascism and the Nationalist Party. It is precisely in this area that Sachs' greatest achievement lies, as far as the clothing industry is concerned. However, it has already been hinted at that there were special structural considerations which made this possible.

In the first place, there did not exist the same divisions along lines of colour within the workforce, which was such a prominent feature of the mining industry. For example, in fact, until the Second World War the workforce was overwhelmingly white, and the question of colour was not important. Furthermore, it was a new and relatively small industry. The white garment workers did not have the numerical or economic power to bargain their way into the power block. This contrasts sharply with the early success of white miners and railway workers in achieving considerable economic advance and job protection for themselves, largely at the expense


of black workers. (The period of formal cooption of white workers is usually dated from the Pact victory of 1924.) It must be concluded that Sachs' hopes that the 'white working class could become a force for change in South Africa, were wildly over-optimistic.

It is this complete mischaracterisation of the white working class which lies at the root of Sachs' 'economic determinism', which seems to have developed towards the end of the war. By this, I mean, Sachs' belief, held in common with many at the time (and ever since), that capitalism was a liberalising force, and, that the contrived secondary industrialisation of South Africa would lead inexorably to some kind of meaningful change. He seems to have envisaged a general proletarianisation, in which black and white would all be workers together, and would come to find their common interests in opposition to the capitalist class.

However, the role of white workers within the production process had changed. Increasingly they performed a supervisory, or 'policing' function within production. Their 'productive' function declined, and they progressively came to perform the 'global function of capital', although they did not own the means of production. (I am referring here to Sachs' political strategy in relation to the white working class as a whole. In the area of white garment workers, however, it would not be true to say that, as a group; they became less 'productive' over time.)

Economics or politics

It has been argued that the basis of Sachs' position in the GWU was a successful, militant struggle on wages. However, Sachs tended to carry his trade union economism into the wider politics of the Left. It was on this issue - bread and butter politics - that he clashed repeatedly with the Communist Party. He believed that this was the only platform which could gain the support of white workers. Only by leading (white) workers into the struggle for concrete realities and a better life could they be won over to the socialist position. Again, this kind of political strategy reflects Sachs' faith in the white working class. This faith survived the Nationalist victory of 1948, after which he continued to believe that the white working class could still be relied upon to defeat the Nationalists at the ballot box.

Paradoxically, in trade union affairs, Sachs always dissociated himself from union leaders who would have nothing to do with politics. In fact, one of the reasons given for establishing an official union journal - *The Garment Worker* - in 1936, was precisely to facilitate the political education of the membership, and in particular, to combat the rising tide of racialism and fascism during the 1930s. However, crucial as this activity was to the survival of the union; the area of political discussion was largely confined to 'white politics'. The primary concern was always to unite the white working class, both in the trade union movement, and at the ballot box. 

Participatory democracy

A chapter from *The Eye of a Needle* was reprinted in 1978 in the *South African Labour Bulletin* (Volume 4, Number 7, 1978) in memory of the late Richard Turner struck down on the night of 6 January 1978 by an assassin's bullet. To his pioneering work on the nature of South African society and his guiding inspiration we all owe a priceless debt of gratitude. Had he not been a banned person he would have been an editor of the *Bulletin*.

A Christian society is one in which we prefer people to things, a society based on freely expressed love. Our problem is to work out what kind of institutions, social, political and economic, would be needed for such a society. In answering this question it is obviously going to be necessary to theorise, for such institutions do not as yet exist. But it will be useful to look at those societies which have tried non-capitalist ways of life, even if all we learn from them is what not to do.

We can thereby discover some of the problems specific to post-capitalist societies and thereby give the theorising at least some practical reference points.

In building an ideal possible society, let us start from the individual and her/his needs for freedom and love, as postulated by the Christian model. In terms of this ideal human model, I need to be free from hidden conditioning processes, I need to be free to be open to other people. I need to be free from external social coercion, and I need meaningful and creative work: work that is an expression of my own autonomous being, and

not something I do unwillingly and without understanding what my particular job is for. Thus the social system required for the satisfaction of human needs must be one which (a) enables the individual to have the maximum control over her/his social and material environment, and (b) encourages her/him to interact creatively with other people. These two ideas are combined in the idea of participatory democracy.

The essential problem is – how can we design a set of institutions which will give all individuals power over their own lives without permitting them to exercise power over other people? How can we design political institutions which will give people the maximum freedom to choose what to do with their own lives?

In what circumstances do people come to exercise power over other people? In any contemporary society the most vital area of a person's life is the place in which she/he spends the largest part of her/his waking hours, uses up her/his energy and around which she/he organises the rest of her/his life – is the work place. What are the power relationships at the

workplace? Our society is one of private ownership of the means of production. To own something is to have power over it.

Because the owner of the factory has power over the factory and over its product, he/she can control the people who are dependent on these things – the workers. As a worker, I have no power over what I produce, where I produce, how I produce or why I produce. The only power I have (assuming I am not an African in South Africa) is the power to remove myself from the control of one owner and to place myself in the control of another owner. The owner has power over me. It may be delegated to a board of directors, a manager, executives, and foreperson, thus creating a whole hierarchy of power, with the worker at the bottom – power-less on his/her own.

An economic system is a system of power relationships. And power within the economy gives, as we shall see, power in other spheres of society as well.

The first essential for democracy is that the worker should have power at her/his place of work – that is, that the enterprise should be controlled by those who work in it.

The trade union is a first step in the direction of power for the workers. Through organisational solidarity they are able to begin to assert some control over wages and over working conditions. But by the very nature of the case the trade union places merely a negative check on management, which retains day-to-day control.

Furthermore, control over the product – that is, essentially over the profits – remains in the hands of the owner. As worker I can, with the aid of the trade union, make my work situation more comfortable, but I cannot make it more meaningful. This is manifest in the whole issue of restrictive practices. My job remains a means to satisfy personal ends external to it. My interest lies purely in more pay and shorter hours. I have no intrinsic interest in the job, because it is not something in which I can exercise my human autonomy.

Only full workers' control can permit this. How do workers run an enterprise? Do they have the skills necessary to do so? How are decisions to be made? An enterprise in a capitalist system contains two intertwined hierarchies – a hierarchy of control, and a hierarchy of technical knowledge. The boss has to have a means of ensuring (a) that the workers are actually working – this involves a hierarchy of control, and (b) that what they are doing is what is required for the efficient running of the factory – this involves a hierarchy of technical knowledge. The hierarchy of control is only necessary because of the basic conflict of interest between workers and employers. But the hierarchy of technical knowledge, and hence, to a certain extent, also of decision-making, will be necessary in any sort of enterprise. How can workers' control handle this problem? Not all decisions can be taken by the mass of workers together. And if

each worker is to be allowed to make her/his own decisions chaos will result. To solve these problems, the following institutions will be necessary.

1. Regular meetings of all workers where together they can discuss and fix certain basic priorities: wages and wage-scales, hours and times of work, and what to do with profits. It would be necessary to decide whether profits should be reinvested, distributed or spent for purposes of collective consumption, either by improving conditions within the enterprise beyond the level dictated by sheer profitability, or by other local improvements not directly connected with the enterprise.
2. An elected workers' council, whose members would continue as full-time workers during their terms of office. The council would have final responsibility for the regulations governing labour relations in the factory, for hiring and firing, for the annual balance-sheet and for the distribution of surplus. It would prepare the annual plans, and appoint and supervise the director and the other executives. The director would look after the day-to-day running of the enterprise. He/she would be accountable for his/her decision to the workers, and might ultimately be dismissed by them.

At the other end of the scale from the director, the enterprise could be broken up into smaller units, each having a degree of autonomy over the organisation of the work it was required to do in the context of the enterprise as a whole.

To prevent a new bureaucratic hierarchy arising from the elected posts should not be renewable indefinitely. This would mean that there would always be both new and experienced members on the

Workers' Council and management committees, and informal power cliques could not easily develop. Such a system (a) ensures the maintenance of the necessary hierarchy of knowledge through the appointed director and his/her staff that is, it ensures that people actually know how to do the jobs they are appointed to do; (b) ensures that the workers retain ultimate control through the Workers' Council and general meetings; and (c) ensures that as many people as possible participate actively through the rotation of office based on popular vote.

As we have seen, in capitalist society there is little relation between effort and reward or between social contribution and reward. Reward is usually based either on property ownership or on educational level, which is in turn to a very great extent a function of social and economic privilege. But the problem is that in any society with a complex division of labour it is very difficult to estimate exactly how much each individual contributes to the final product. If I work twice as long as you at the same job, then I contribute twice as much. But if I have special skills acquired through education if I am an engineer and you are a factory hand? On the one hand my work probably contributes more than yours to the social product. But on the other hand, my work is perhaps intrinsically more satisfying than yours, the skills I have acquired were themselves the product of a whole common cultural history, and my education was paid for by the community. Taking all these factors into account, it is impossible to lay down hard and fast rules, or simply to let market forces, which take no account of social cost, set wages. The workers themselves must decide, through discussions in the concrete situation, who deserves what and why.

The major objections always raised to such a system, obviously by employers and other members of the middle classes, but also sometimes by workers themselves, is - 'But the workers don't have the competence to choose intelligently. They will choose the nicest guy, not the most qualified person. They will always vote for higher wages and for distributing rather than investing the profit, thus running down and finally ruining the business.'

This argument seems *prima facie* silly. After all, the idea that it is in the workers' interest, and in theirs alone under such a system, for an enterprise to stay in existence and to run efficiently, isn't really difficult to grasp. And at elections they are not choosing between two impersonal candidates talking about abstractions on television; where perhaps all they have to go on is which one smiles more convincingly. They are choosing between individuals with whom they work day in and day out, and whose worth and reliability are made clear to them in many different situations. And the issues being dealt with are ones with which they are thoroughly familiar, and which affect them immediately and obviously and personally.

From where, then, comes the argument that workers are incompetent and couldn't possibly understand or operate such a system? It comes from common sense thinking and the 'human nature' argument. In capitalist society the workers are not interested in the enterprise itself - why should they be, since it does not belong to them?

They have neither opportunity nor stimulus to see it as a whole and to understand how what each individual does is related to the rest. Their situation is one in which they are told what to do, given little opportunity for the exercise of their initiative or intelligence, and so do not

develop initiative or intelligence. One writer compares the situation of the worker with the situation of the child: 'The main thrust of the autocratic organisation is to drive the mature adult back into childhood. The mature individual strives to take an active part in his world, but the chain of command renders him passive. He seeks to be independent and to control his own behaviour, but as an employee he is rendered dependent and essentially lacking in control over his own behaviour.'

The mature individual strives for the long time perspective, but as he does not possess or have access to necessary information at work which would permit this, his time perspective is consequently shortened. He seeks to achieve relationships based on equality, but as a subordinate, he becomes just that, once again as in "childhood".

The enterprise is not only a workplace - it is also a socialisation process. Once the worker has been through this process, it is scarcely surprising that he/she does not appear to have the competence to run an enterprise. What the capitalist system has made the worker into is then produced as evidence for the impossibility of any other social system. But in fact it is one of the strongest arguments for the absolute necessity of an alternative social system. For, as we have seen, it is only if the worker participates in the control of the central part of his/her life - his/her work - that he/she can develop the personal qualities of autonomy, initiative and self-confidence necessary for our human model.

Workers' control is not only a means whereby I can control a specific area of my life. It is an educational process in which I can learn better to control all areas of my life and can develop both psychological and inter-personal skills in a situation of cooperation with my fellows in a common task.

There is ample sociological evidence that participation in decision-making, whether in the family, in the school, in voluntary organisations or at work, increases the ability to participate, and increases that sense of competence on the part of the individual which is vital for balanced and autonomous development.

Participation through workers' control thereby lays the basis for love as a constant rather than as a fleeting relationship between people, and is thus the basis for Christian community in the work situation.

There are experiments in workers' control in a number of different countries. In each country, of course, workers' control within enterprises has to be seen within the overall social context. Various factors can complicate the operation of workers to control, such as the level of economic development, the political system, the type of enterprise in which workers' control occurs, and the mode of introduction of workers' control. In the following brief survey I can do no more than indicate which of these factors is relevant. I shall make no attempt at complete evaluation. These are examples from whose problems we can learn, rather than models we should imitate.

In most advanced capitalist countries there are small numbers of firms run by the workers in them, either as the result of a decision by the original owner, or because they were started by a group of workers with egalitarian intentions. Units such as these where members are self-selected, and hence highly motivated, and of a relatively high standard of education, are probably the most immediately successful. The Kibbutzim of Israel, communally owned and run farms, are in a similar position, often with the added advantage of a strong religious and nationalistic cement.

In some countries particular social sections are worker controlled. In the Soviet Union one form of collective farm - the Kolkhoz - is supposed to be run by the workers through general meetings and an elected management board.

Although there is more real worker autonomy in the Kolkhoz than in the Sovkhoz, or state farm, with its state-appointed director, nevertheless the presence of a bureaucratic and highly centralised Communist Party means that even the Kolkhoz is not really an example of workers' control.

In Tanzania, the Ujamaa village schemes are the most impressive African examples of workers' control. Julius Nyerere outlines the organisational principles as follows: '... a really socialist village would elect its own officials and they would remain equal members with the others, subject always to the wishes of the people. Only in relation to work discipline would there be any hierarchy, and then such officials would merely be acting for the village as a whole.

Let us take an example. It would be a meeting of the villagers which would elect the officers and the committee, and a meeting of the village would decide whether or not to accept or to amend any detailed proposals for work organisation which the committee had drawn up in the light of general directions given by earlier meetings. Let us assume that a 40-member village agrees to a cotton farm of 40 acres and a food farm of 40 acres. It would be the committee's job to propose where in the land available these different crops should be planted, and to propose the times and the organisation of joint work on the land. At the same time the committee would have to make proposals for the other work which had been decided upon, perhaps the digging of a

trench for a future piped water supply, or the making of a new road, or the improvement of village drainage. These detailed proposals they would bring to the next village meeting, and once they had been accepted it would be a job of the officers to ensure that all members carried out the decisions, and to report to a general meeting any problems as they occurred. As the village became more established and the need for a village carpenter, or a village nursery, or a village shop became more pressing, the committee would work out proposals as to how these could be organised, and run by a member for the common benefit. The village officials would also be responsible for liaising with other villages and with the general machinery of government.

In the Ujamaa villages the organisational problems seem to be very simple ones. But there is one very difficult problem which the Ujamaa villages are designed to cope with, and seem to be coping with at least more successfully than are other institutions. This is the problem of introducing new agricultural techniques, whether they be organisational or technological, to a naturally conservative peasantry.

The government can either simply give these techniques, or command that they should be adopted. It is only if these techniques relate to a felt need of the peasants, and can be shown to them to be relevant to that need, that they will be adopted. And only if they feel that they have themselves really participated in the decision, will the peasants maintain the machinery or keep up the organisation. The participatory structure of the Ujamaa village is ideally suited to this. The system is in its early stage yet. Moreover, by its very nature it cannot make for rapid economic development. But it does seem

to be laying the foundations for all-round social and political development, by drawing the peasants into a change process without disrupting their lives or their value systems and self-concepts, and by giving them the skills of organisation and initiative which are vital to personal autonomy. Thereby it is also laying the foundation for long-term solid economic development.'

In Eastern Europe the idea of workers' control is deeply embedded in the Marxist ideology, although obscured by Communist Party practice. However, it tends to emerge in moments of crisis, as in Poland in 1956, and again at the end of 1970, with the fall of Gomulka as a result of workers' protests. In Czechoslovakia workers' control was one of the most important developments in the later reforms of 1968, and in some industries even continued to spread for a while after the Soviet invasion.

Workers' management of a kind also operates in China. My information on the actual working of the system is inadequate, but the principles of the organisational structure are clear. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, there were two forms of management. In the major industries the leading managing role was played by a committee elected by all Communist Party members in the factory rather than by all the workers. This committee was supposed to represent the Party, rather than the workers. But it was supposed to work in consultation either with workers' representatives, or with mass meetings of workers. It had control over day-to-day running, but no financial autonomy. This is certainly not an example of workers' control. ¹⁸

This article is based on a chapter of a book by Richard Turner, The Eye of the Needle.

1981 East Rand strike wave

In the five months July to November 1981, the East Rand was the scene of more than 50 strikes involving almost 25,000 workers. It is one of the areas in the country where unionism has grown fastest. This article is an attempt to examine some of the features of that strike wave. Although the focus of the strikes was in the Germiston-Benoni-Brakpan area, this article includes discussion on the East Rand as a whole and covers occasional strikes as far afield as Springs, Olifantsfontein and Steeldale, wrote **Jeremy Baskin**. This article is a shorter version of one that was published in Volume 7, Number 8, 1982.

Roughly half the strikes involved workers organised by the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu), affiliated Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu). Other Fosatu unions, in chemical, food, textile, paper and transport sectors, were also involved in a much lesser extent.

CUSA-affiliated unions in the chemical in the chemical and construction industries were connected with three strikes. The independent commercial workers union (CCAWUSA) was linked with one stoppage, whilst the Africa Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU) had members come out in two major stoppages. In addition, a few of the recorded strikes occurred in places with no known union presence.

The East Rand, built on the gold mining industry, has become one of the major centres of the metal and engineering industry in the country. Companies such as Dunswart Iron & Steel, Dorbyl Engineering, Scaw metals and Salcast can be

found in the area, alongside smaller engineering firms. Factories, both big and small, multinational and local, and covering most sectors of industry, are also to be found. A major employer in the area is still the Rand Mines-owned ERPM gold mine in Boksburg.

The workers themselves come from different areas. The white employers mostly live in the residential parts of town or on mine property. Black workers are housed in a number of townships which fall under the East Rand Administration Board (ERAB). A significant proportion of the workers, especially in heavy and dangerous metal jobs, are contract workers who are mostly housed in hostels in townships like Vosloorus and Tembisa.

This article does not aim to detail every event. Instead it examines some of the features of the strike wave as a whole. Strikes themselves are not the sum total of labour activity and organisation. They are simply the most dramatic

manifestation of conflict between management and labour. Other worker action, such as go-slows and refusals to work overtime, accompanied the strike wave, although these incidents are not examined here. Further, this article does not comprehensively detail numerous very brief stoppages which occurred. These limitations should be borne in mind.

The focus here is on the background causes of the strike wave coupled with analysis of the issues which precipitated such action. Attention is also directed to the way in which the strikes spread and the respective roles of the unions and the state.

GENERAL CAUSES

The East Rand strikes were the result of general as much as particular workers' grievances. These will be dealt with in turn.

Generally inflation was exerting pressure on workers' wages. Massive price increases, particularly of basic foodstuffs, came into effect



Workers in jovial mood during strike.

during the year. In August, for example, the bread price rose by 30-40%. Bus fare increases affecting workers from Daveyton, Wattville, Katlehong and Vosloorus were announced in June and July. There were also widespread rent increases in the 12 months preceding the strike wave. An indication of the looming dissatisfaction was shown by the protests and rioting which occurred in April following rent increases in Tembisa. The ERAB and the local Community Council had agreed upon increases of almost 30% for rented houses and 70% for hostel dwellers. Inflation officially running at 14.6% in the 12 months to June 1981, had an even greater effect on working classes. This was largely because of the especially high inflation rate for basic items of expenditure (food, clothing, transport and rent) and because growing unemployment meant that breadwinners have more people to support than in the past. It has been estimated that the level of inflation which the lower income groups experience is twice as high as the official Consumer Price Index (CPI). The result was that East Rand workers were feeling the financial squeeze keenly and they needed substantial pay increases simply in order to keep up with inflation.

Contract workers, who account for approximately 30% of East Rand workers were being especially squeezed. In addition, the common problems of exploitation which they share with other workers, contract workers were also being confronted with additional burdens from two other directions. On the one hand, the small rural subsistence base

which they still possess was being further eroded, particularly in KwaZulu which was experiencing the worst drought in memory, and which suffers from massive and growing unemployment. A high proportion of workers from the strike-hit metal industry come from remote and drought devastated areas of KwaZulu.

On the other hand, migrants are being increasingly squeezed from the cities by the influx control laws and especially their rigid application by the ERAB. With more and more people coming onto the labour market, contract workers are confronted with ERAB clamping down on 'illegal' workers, cutting down on the proportion of jobs available to contract workers, and no longer allowing them to transfer or take up contracts in the urban areas.

One hostel dweller expressed the overall situation graphically: 'the countryside is pushing you in the cities to survive, the cities are pushing you in the countryside to die... the drought is coming to the cities'.

It is not surprising that migrants adopted a particularly militant attitude during the strike wave. Webster and Sitas have estimated that 60% of workers' strikes which occurred in the metal industry (approximate half of the total) were contract workers. Another background cause which can be identified is the growth of the independent trade union movement. Later the role which unions played in the wave will receive closer scrutiny. Here one need only mention that worker interest in trade unionism has been increasing.

The level of dissatisfaction is high and workers have realised that they need to organise if they are to achieve anything of worth. On the East Rand alone Mawu a significant organisational force in the area claims a membership increase of 50% during 1981 with a total of 25,000 members signed up by the end of that year. One unionist said the workers organise themselves and come to the union offices. 'We don't have to go to factories to recruit these days.' Similarly, the significant growth of the AFCWU in the area has been a phenomenon of the last two years. The growth of the unions should be seen as both a cause and a consequence of a growing worker militancy and self-confidence.

The general political climate is also an important consideration. In the Transvaal, particularly, 1981 was a year of heightened militancy. Apart from the wave of strikes which occurred, there were also numerous protests in the communities over rents and other issues. Mobilisation against the community councils was particularly strong in Daveyton. Tembisa hostel dwellers protested violently against rent increases. Politically, there was much publicity surrounding campaigns such as anti-Republic Day and anti-SA Indian Council. Increased African National Congress (ANC) activity was apparent including actions by armed guerillas. The period saw the 'progressives' gain ground in opposition to a narrowly defined 'black consciousness'. The components of the 'progressive' ideology were working-class leadership of the national liberation movement, mass mobilisation/organisation, and non-racialism.

This was a political position with which almost all the trade unions on the East Rand found it easy to sympathise. It was a position which gained ground even within the black-consciousness Azania People's Organisation (AZAPO)'s

East Rand branches, as a result of growing worker membership there. The political climate of 1981 was an important background factor not only because of the high level of militancy but also because, for the first time in many years, a 'progressive' trade union movement was complemented by the hegemony of a 'progressive' political ideology.

IMMEDIATE CAUSES

The factors outlined above made the East Rand situation volatile. But it caught ablaze for more specific reasons. Webster and Sitas, in their study of the strikes in the metal industry during this period found that arbitrary control by management was the central demand in the majority of work stoppages. This conclusion is true for the strike wave as a whole. In well over half of the known strikes the central demands concerned questions of management control: the unfair dismissal of fellow workers or shop stewards; the arbitrary actions of certain foremen; the demand that worker representatives who had been 'bought' be removed, and changes in work-load required by management. About one-third of the strikes revolved around wages or related issues, whilst about 10% concerned demands that management recognise a particular trade union. The significance of these figures is that they reflect the increasingly sophisticated strike action which black workers are now undertaking. Struggle is occurring over issues which were previously the undisputed prerogative of management. It is worth examining more carefully the specific cause of grievances which sparked the strikes.

WAGES

Inflation made wage increases necessary if workers were to maintain their living standards, to say nothing of improving their conditions. For this reason demands occurred in all sectors – paper, metal, chemicals and food. Many of the

demands centred around calls for a 'living wage' of R2 per hour. However, in no case was this demand won. Instead it was common for workers to return to work after having been granted either a small increase in hourly rates or an attendance bonus. In some factories management responded with no concessions. At Triomf Fertilizer (Chloorkop), workers stopped work demanding a 35% pay increase. Management refused to talk to the strikers and the 500 were immediately dismissed.

Many of the wage strikes occurred in the immediate aftermath of the new Industrial Council (IC) agreement for the metal industry, which came into effect at the beginning of July. The agreement set a new minimum rate of R1.13 per hour, and granted most black workers 20-23% increases over the agreement of the previous year. Inflation between these two agreements ran officially at 14.6%, but if we remember that Keenan's estimates put the level for workers at twice that, then it becomes obvious that the agreement was totally inadequate.

The experience of Hendler & Hendler workers repeated itself in various guises at a number of metal factories. Mawu had been organising at this large Boksburg factory, and had finally been recognised by management in May 1981 after winning 90% of the votes in a referendum. The shop stewards had immediately started negotiating for the demand of a 50c per hour increase. When the new IC agreement emerging from negotiations where these workers were not represented resulted in a 21c per hour increase, there was general unhappiness. The workers called on management to explain, and when they refused to attend a general meeting the workers struck. Two thousand workers downed tools for three days, beginning 15 July. Mawu and the shop stewards decided to call for a return to work after management agreed

to negotiate. Although no basic increases were won, management conceded payment of a R5 attendance bonus. An increase of 7c per hour which was announced by management in September was doubtless a further consequence of the strike.

At Hendler & Hendler the workers were not only unhappy with an inadequate increase but also with the fact that it had not been negotiated with them. Thus the strong opposition to ICs amongst the independent unions received expression.

UNION RECOGNITION

Although only about 10 of the strikes revolved around questions of union recognition, the dispute over this issue was of great importance at one factory in particular, Colgate-Palmolive. The Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), affiliated to Fosatu, first approached management for recognition in early 1980. Management finally agreed to recognise the union in August 1981 after a protracted dispute involving a lengthy exchange of correspondence, discussions between the union and the company, the threat of a legal strike, a boycott of Colgate products and finally, a two-day strike.

What concerns us here is not simply that a recognition agreement was signed, since this is becoming increasingly common. Rather, what was important was the quality of recognition. The Colgate workers defeated a determined effort by management to force them onto the IC as a prerequisite for recognition. The fact that only 20 Colgate employees were covered by the agreement was relevant. More important was the workers' objection to the whole IC system as undemocratic, bureaucratic and an attempt to circumvent meaningful plant-level bargaining. When after having agreed to negotiate and after CWIU had called off its boycott and its threatened strike and management continued to delay and bring up new

problems, the workers came out on a two-day strike. The workers were strong and organised enough to compel management to recognition on their own terms. An agreement was finally signed on 21 August 1981.

A contrast was provided by two strikes at Johnson Tiles during September and early October which revealed the dangers of weak organisation. Some 300 workers struck demanding recognition of the CUSA affiliated Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union (BCAWU). The union represented only 365 of the 860 workers at the firm and was therefore in a weak position. Management decided to dismiss some of the strikers and to re-employ selectively. The BCAWU suffered a defeat.

CONCLUSION

This article has looked at some aspects of the East Rand strike wave of July-November 1982. Many other areas remain to be explored such as the details relating to managements' responses, or the role which SEIFSA played. The creative role of the shop stewards councils also deserves to be examined in more depth.

Hopefully this article provides some basis for an assessment of the strikes which have been occurring lately on the East Rand, particularly in the Germiston area. These strikes, in contrast to those addressed by this article, have been largely over wages. For all the differences, however, what the current strike wave indicates (and there have been at least 20 strikes), is that last year's strike wave was no isolated occurrence and that worker organisation in the area has 'taken off' into a period of rapid growth. ¹⁸

Jeremy Baskin was the editor of the SALB.

Dunlop strike

A trial of strength

Ari Sitas looked at how Dunlop workers in Durban managed to maintain long strikes amid mistrust and credits this to confident shop stewards and a strong union. This article is part of a longer piece published in Volume 10, Number 3, 1984.

'Whilst walking, thinking about the workers' problems I saw a fist flying across Dunlop's cheek.' A.T. Qabula

On the 18 September the Dunlop strike ended with management agreeing to the unconditional reinstatement of all 1,200 striking workers. The strike lasted for four weeks. The workers, jubilant about their victory, poured out of St Anthony's Hall in Greyville to return to work marching and chanting through Durban's busiest streets. Scenes of elation spilled over into the factory yard rounding off a trying period of conflict and discipline; a conflict which, in its strategies, duration and tone, might prefigure much of what industrial relations will be like in South Africa; a trial of strength between employers and strongly organised workers.

'It is like a labalala game,' explains a worker, 'where the winner takes all. You throw the stone. He blocks it. You throw another one. He blocks, but at the same time he is on the offensive... You block... The difference is that there is no time for the struggle to end. Each minute going by, you both lose something.

You lose a finger, by the second week you are a cripple. The same with him. He loses money, profits. So one of you will have to stop and say OK.' Trials of strength are costly for all concerned: 'They are in many respects,' asserts Richard Hyman, 'the industrial equivalent of war between nations' such confrontations have been a rarity in South Africa's history, given scant trade union resources, black workers' meagre savings and adverse legislation proscribing such actions. Natal's history in particular is marked by hundreds of outbursts, volatile demonstration strikes, all of short duration. Save the 1937 Falkirk Iron and Steel strike which lasted for 13 weeks - already hazy in living memory - the strike at Dunlop's appears as one of the few poignant exceptions. This factor alone would warrant lengthy commentary. Furthermore, such an account could go some way in redressing the balance in commonsense opinion which sees behind each outbreak of conflict

Shop stewards articulated the four issues which were at the bottom of the workers' discontent: (1) management had suspended their shop stewards wrongfully; (2) management had short paid them; (3) they were being abused and ill-treated by a manager and his foreman, and (4) management was systematically preventing an 'unfair labour practice' case of four dismissed Mawu members from coming to the courts by blocking Mawu's conciliation board application.

agitators looming in the shadows. Nevertheless, this article seeks to assert a proposition – that the friction, the sparks, the explosion and the discipline of the strike was the outcome of a collision between a strong, confident shop steward leadership and the traditional managerialism of a tough, anti-union company. What then were the immediate causes of the strike?

According to Dunlop's industrial relations manager, G Sutton, all workers were dismissed for unlawful industrial action. The dismissal followed stoppages on 9, 15 and 17 August. For management the issue was clear cut: 'In spite of the workers and the union being informed that any further industrial action would lead to dismissal, the shifts refused to work and were dismissed.' According to the trade union, Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu), they were involved in a legal strike action, having held a ballot on 17 August conforming to the procedures laid down by the Industrial Conciliation Act. They were dismissed an hour after the overwhelming majority voted for legal strike action. Behind the conflicting interpretation of the status of the strike whether it was legal or not, lie the immediate causes of the strike.

The first stoppage occurred on 9 August as a response to the suspension of three Mawu shop stewards. Management suspended the stewards because they had allegedly breached the disciplinary procedures agreed to in the recognition agreement with the union. The shop stewards refused to sign the disciplinary warnings

of workers who refused to work overtime. They felt that they could not be a party to such disciplinary measures since it was within the rights of workers to refuse overtime. The union argued strongly in support of its shop stewards. Management agreed then to resolve the dispute the following week at a meeting with the trade union and the shop stewards. On hearing this, workers agreed to return to work, but were told they should return to work the next day, Friday the 10th.

The second stoppage occurred on Wednesday, the 15th, when workers discovered they were being short paid. They stopped work and asked management to justify and rectify the problem. Management argued that the pay was short because the first stoppage wasted a day's work. The workers retorted that it was management that closed the factory on that day despite willingness to return to work. Management closed the factory again and called for a special meeting with the shop stewards and the trade union. It was at this meeting that the shop stewards articulated the four issues which were at the bottom of the workers' discontent: (1) management had suspended their shop stewards wrongfully; (2) management had short paid them; (3) they were being abused and ill-treated by a manager and his foreman, and (4) management was systematically preventing an 'unfair labour practice' case of four dismissed Mawu members from coming to the courts by blocking Mawu's conciliation board application. Management articulated strong objection to the way workers were 'forcing' the issues

through stoppages. Yet at the same time they were ready to rectify the issues if the workers returned to work. The union agreed.

On Thursday, the 16th, workers returned to work. That afternoon a meeting was held between the shop stewards, the union and management. A deadlock developed and management refused to rectify any of the four issues tabled for discussion. The shop stewards said that management's intransigence would anger the workers.

Management indicated that they did not care, but agreed that the shop stewards and the union would report to workers on Friday, the 17th. The mass meeting with the workers was to cause a dramatic turn in events. According to Mawu and its shop stewards the meeting decided to take legal action on the first three issues, but hold a secret ballot for a lawful strike on their fourth grievance. There was an overwhelming majority support. Management though, an hour after the announcement of the result of the ballot, advised all 1,200 Sydney Road tyre workers that they were dismissed for unlawful action.

Over the course of the following week the strike began to escalate: the Benoni, Ladysmith and the Durban sports and commercial plants of Dunlop held their own strike ballots in support of the Sydney Road workers. The votes indicated a majority support for solidarity strike action. In other words, all Dunlop's workers in South Africa – save the Eastern Province factories – were ready to flex their muscles behind their Durban brothers.

In Natal, all these workers were Mawu members. In the Transvaal (Benoni) they were members of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) also an affiliate of the Federation of South African Trade unions (Fosatu). The strike was taking on national proportions. On the 23rd, workers at the small sports factory in Durban came out on a sympathy strike and all 120 were dismissed, also for unlawful action. The commercial branch workers followed immediately after. As the Ladysmith and Benoni factories were gearing themselves for action too, Dunlop's management initiated a novel legal intervention: they appealed to the Supreme Court for an injunction prohibiting the secretary of Mawu and/or the organisation from inciting unlawful strike action. If won, this injunction was to sever the trade union from its rank and file, proscribing the strike as an affair between Dunlop's management and its workers.

From its first week then, the strike appeared to gain momentum and become a major, if not national, confrontation between management and labour. Yet, these immediate causes of confrontation hide a broader reality which needs to be addressed before the explosive, dynamics of the strike can be elucidated. A few words then are necessary to introduce the protagonists of this industrial dispute.

Dunlop SA has a reputation for being an efficient and profitable multinational corporation. Since the erection of the Dunlop Holdings factory at Congella (Durban) in 1933 it has been at the pinnacle of South Africa's manufacturing developments. Throughout its history it stood to benefit immensely from the ebb and flow of local industrialisation; its operations expanded through the war years in support of the allied war effort; then during the reconversion of industry to

peace-time concerns, through the Rubber Manufacturers' Conference a cartel of rubber manufacturers in South Africa which ensured joint pricing policies. By the 1960s, Dunlop stood to gain from the 'local content' programme of the automobile industry, despite competition. Given the increasing sophistication of the local chemical industry - Sasol and Sentrachem's efforts - it stood to benefit from the availability of synthetic rubber and finally it stood to benefit immensely from South Africa's 'decentralisation incentives', creating cheap labour pools in 'border areas' - erecting a car tyre plant at Ladysmith. Its growth locally, alongside national capital's interests, is best symbolised by the appointment of Dr T Muller - doyen of national and parastatal capital - as the chairman of its board of directors.

Now Dunlop sprawls all over South Africa: its Sydney Road, Congella factory is the largest and oldest (1,100 workers). Not as large, but of comparative importance are the Ladysmith (800 workers, car tyre), the Benoni (650 workers, industrial products), the East London (450 workers, mattress and pillows) factories, and a small plant in Jacobs, Durban (150 workers, sports goods). By now then, Dunlop SA is an industrial giant with assets exceeding R110-million and planning a further R55-million expansion programme to further modernise production facilities. Finally, despite the bleak economic environment, Dunlop has shown a remarkable degree of profitability.

The South African operation though contrasts radically with the performance of the mother company, Dunlop Holdings UK. The British multinational has been for some time in a crippling state of depression and its attempts to reorganise its facilities on an internationally competitive scale has earned it amongst union circles

the title of a 'union basher'. In the face of declining profits after the oil crisis of the early 1970s the company was caught in a vice whose ever tightening jaws spell, on the one hand, declining demand, on the other, a debt crisis arising from high interest and short and long term loans from financial institutions. In short, all this has precipitated an international reorganisation of its world empire.

This reorganisation has reached a dramatic intensity over the last five years: after its failed joint operations with Italian rubber multinational, Pirelli, it instituted a series of measures that caused turmoil amongst its workers in the UK. It closed down its Merseyside factory affecting half of its 11,000 UK labour component. It squeezed 40 productivity increases and reorganisation of its shift-systems out of its Washington Durham workers, to compete with its German and Japanese operations. It transferred its golf ball production to Georgia, USA to take advantage of the changing relationship between the dollar and the pound.

Through its associate company, Sumitono, it internationalised its sportswear production in the Far East. Yet, the vice kept on squeezing, necessitating repayments of debts which in turn saw Dunlop selling its Malaysian rubber plantations and its New Zealand operations. Of late Dunlop Holdings UK is at the mercy of the banks that financed its internationalisation. They demand repayments of a crippling 2,800-million debt. It is from this predicament that rumours arose that Dunlop SA is 'for sale' in order to make some of the repayments. Another rumour had it that pressures on Dunlop SA were increasing because its high profit runs were to be the lever through which Dunlop UK would buy its freedom from the banks. Whatever the case, whether Dunlop SA was to be the prize jewel, or the fairy

godmother to turn Dunlop UK away from the banks' control, the pressures on the local corporation's performance were escalating. Part of Dunlop's behaviour can be ascribed to this international pressure.

For its part, Mawu, is also propelled forward by issues wider than its relationship to Dunlop management. The union formed in 1974 in Natal in the aftermath of the Durban strikes has in its first period experienced both enthusiastic expansion, and decline. The 1970s' recessionary period was to cause strains on both its financial and organisational structures. It is only since 1982 that the union has begun to experience a period of militant revival in Natal (as opposed to the renewal in the late 1970s in the Transvaal): its membership has doubled between 1982 and 1983 to reach a paid-up membership of 8,000 workers. Its confidence has increased after a series of victories on wages, dismissals and recognition agreements. As an affiliate of Fosatu it has been committed to strong grassroots organisation at the workplace through shop steward structures; and has been a hard bargainer for a 'living wage'. Its militant renewal in Natal has gained it the title of being an 'uncompromising problem' for the rubber and metal industries. For Mawu Dunlop's management symbolised a traditionalist authoritarian management with a tough anti-union stand. They pointed out Dunlop's behaviour in East London, where after a strike, the workers were dismissed and all new recruits were 'screened' in cooperation with Ciskei's security police to weed out the South African Allied Workers Union (Saawu) supporters from the factory. They pointed out, Dunlop's traditional hostility to trade unions and Mawu in particular refusing to deal with it and its shop stewards as anything more than a 'glorified liaison committee'. But

if Mawu is faced on the one hand by intransigent employers like Dunlop, on the other, it is faced with an acute militancy from its rank and file. All over Natal, the mood of workers has changed creating a volatile situation, or as one organiser put it: '... 1973 type conditions without the explosion like the Durban strikes...' It is these pressures that make Mawu's relationship to Dunlop unthinkable without the real actors of this conflict: Dunlop's workers.

In the main, Dunlop's workers are second-generation urban residents with Section 10 rights. Despite this, many have active links with Natal's (KwaZulu's) countryside. A sprinkling of coloured and Indian workers are clustered in the more skilled jobs. One of the main features of the African labour force at Dunlop is its stability: the average years of service per worker approximates 14. There are a substantial number who have worked more than 25 (in one case, 37) years with the company. In many other industrial contexts this could mean unambiguously a high level of job satisfaction. Such an assumption in the context of Durban's industrialisation would make little sense. Part of the explanation has to do with the structure of Natal's labour market. Natal's industry relies on 'cheap labour' for its clothing, textile and food sectors, which are dominant. Dunlop, together with a few other chemical, metal and motor firms pay relatively high wages. In this way they attract workers with few other alternatives. But in all these 'high' paying factories, wages are lower than the national average. For instance, Natal Dunlop pays 40.2% less than other rubber and tyre manufacturers in South Africa. This is seen by Dunlop as a 'competitive' price for labour.

Furthermore, most workers are employed to work shifts as machine or process operators in a modern labour process

which combines sophisticated chemical, moulding, mechanical and trimming operations. All these processes are highly rationalised and interconnected, based on a system of mass production. Consequently, work is an unending drive towards high production targets, 'scores'.

Productivity and efficiency have been the twin imperatives at Dunlop. Workers do not see all this as either fulfilling or satisfying: in the mill department work is seen to be heavy and dangerous, and elsewhere exhausting. In most scientific literature on work one finds that internationally the highest incidence of absenteeism and labour turnover is in such industries. The high stability of working life at Dunlop is accounted for by workers as consisting of the fear of alternatives:

'You stay at Dunlop because it is slightly better with the wage than most of the others. This doesn't mean that Dunlop pays well.' More than that, Dunlop workers state unequivocally that compared to the profits they make for the company, their wages are minimal. What was rather remarkable in the interviews conducted with workers was the degree of 'low trust' between workers and management. Given the lengthy service records of many of Dunlop's employees this 'low trust' has a historical and a contemporary dimension. Both experiences have cemented overtime a tradition of mistrust and a grumbling acquiescence to managerial authority. Both memory and contemporary experience are important to explain why such a degree of polarisation and a trial of strength of such proportion could develop in the Sydney Road factory. ■

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Focus on Fosatu

Between 13 and 15 April 1979, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) held its Inaugural Congress in Hammanskraal, and became the first federation of predominantly unregistered trade unions to operate openly in South Africa since the suppression of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) in the mid-1960s, and the self-liquidation of the Federation of Free African Trade Unions (Fofatusa) in 1965. This article examines the genesis of Fosatu, the policies to which it is committed and the repercussions of its formation on the South African trade union scene. It does so in the hope of dispelling a number of misapprehensions about the nature and objectives of Fosatu, and begins by examining the context out of which it emerged, wrote **Phil Bonner**. This article is an extract from a longer piece which was published in Volume 5, Number 1, 1979.

Since the decline of Sactu and Fofatusa in the mid-1960s, no national coordinating bodies for unregistered trade unions inside of South Africa have emerged. Indeed, for a time, even the survival of individual African trade unions was in doubt in the climate of repression that characterised those years. Only from 1970 did things begin to change. In that year the Urban Training Project (UTP) was founded in Johannesburg by officials from the defunct African Affairs section of Tucsa, which had been shut down after Trade Union Council of South Africa (Tucsa) had closed its doors to African trade unions. Its aim was to establish an educational body which would publicise the existing rights of African workers under current labour legislation, and which would

assist Africans who wished to form a trade union or any other kind of workers' organisation.

As events in other parts of the country were to confirm, the time was ripe for African unionisation. Inflation was racing ahead; wages were not keeping pace; and a spate of industrial confrontations took place, beginning with the Public Utility Transport Corporation (Putco) drivers' strike of June 1972, after which most of the UTP unions were formed. The Urban Training Project (UTP) it should be stressed was not a worker or a worker-controlled organisation. According to its constitution the Project itself was 'at no time (to) become (either) a trade union or a trade union coordinating body nor shall it control a trade union or other workers organisation'.

Yet with money being pumped through it from the outside to assist existing and new African worker organisations, and its own practice of employing organisers and taking leases on behalf of affiliated bodies, it inevitably in practice assumed some of these roles. So too, more formally did the Black Consultative.

Formed at the end 1973 this comprised by 1975 the National Union of Clothing Workers; Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union; Building Construction and Allied Workers Union; Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union; Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union; Glass and Allied Workers Union; Engineering and Allied Workers Union; Transport and Allied Workers Union; South African Chemical Workers Union; Laundry, Dry Cleaning and Dye

Workers Association; Textile Workers Union, and had as its object the coordinated expression of views on matters of common interest for the affiliated African unions in the Transvaal. Precisely what that involved however is far from apparent, lacking any coercive sanction other than expulsion, it seemed reluctant to use even that. Thus it could even condone the affiliation of the National Union of Clothing Workers to Tuca, something apparently anathema to the rest of the Consultative members, all of which contrasts strangely with the capacity of the UTP which expelled Drake Coka and more recently other trade union bodies for activities of which it did not approve.

Meanwhile events in Durban were taking a similar turn. In May 1972 a General Factory Workers Benefit Fund was formed with the assistance of various registered unions in Durban based at Bolton Hall. Its objectives were to provide basis for worker organisations in Natal through making workers aware of their rights (via, inter alia, its paper *Isisebenzi*) and making representations to the Wage Board for new unskilled worker determinations. In addition, had the longer term aim of using the benefit fund as a stepping stone to trade unionism proper, hiving off sections of its members into industrial unions when sufficient membership in that particular sector had been achieved. As in Johannesburg, though on a far grander scale, the strikes in 1972-73 (first the Dock Strike of July 1972, and then the general wave of strikes which affected virtually all sectors of industry in Durban in January 1973) greatly accelerated this process, precipitating the formation of unions much earlier than might otherwise have been the case. In the aftermath of the strikes upwards of 500 workers crowded into the Fund's Bolton Hall premises each Saturday morning applying for

membership, and sufficient strength in various sectors was rapidly attained.

As a result the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu) was formed in April 1973, followed by the National Union of Textile Workers a few months after that. By this stage the need for a coordinating body was becoming urgently felt to govern the rate of formation of new unions and to ensure energies were not continually being redirected into newer and newer unionisation without allowing a process of consolidation to take place. As a result, the Trade Union Advisory and Coordinating Council (TUACC) was formed in October 1973, to which two new unions, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union and the Transport and General Workers Union ultimately affiliated. TUACC's constitution, which initially allowed a place for B. Dladla a Zulu government representative, was overhauled once again early in 1974 in response to the bannings of trade union officials earlier that year, which made the consolidation of existing unions all the more urgent, and in response to the textile strikes shortly before that, where the Department of Community Development of the KwaZulu government assisted the union in negotiations with the employers, and so highlighted the need for a worker-controlled coordinating body which could liaise with other organisations.

Nevertheless, the structure of the Council remained largely the same. From the beginning it committed itself to open unions, nationally organised according to industrial sectors, and based on strong factory-floor organisation and to a strong coordinating body which comprised at each level of a majority of worker representatives, which decided policy for the affiliates and controlled the resources they jointly pooled. All of which has a bearing on the shape that Fosatu has ultimately assumed.

Finally, again in the Transvaal, the Industrial Aid Society was formed in 1974, to assist workers with their complaints and advise on factory organisation. This body, together with the Transvaal branch of Mawu, joined the Council of Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand (CIWW) towards the end of 1976. The council was founded to coordinate the activities of these two bodies and other unions who might wish to affiliate, or who might be formed. From its inception it worked closely with the Durban-based TUACC.

So by the end of 1973 both Natal and the Transvaal had their coordinating bodies for unregistered trade unions. The Eastern and Western Cape lacked even this limited degree of coordination. In the Western Cape only two bodies catered for African workers, the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU), which by 1976 had 600 members (mostly outside of the Peninsula), and the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau, formed in 1972 with a membership of 5,000 by 1976 - between whom existed only tenuous links. In the Eastern Cape even less progress in this direction had been made, with only the AFCW showing the flag. Why was this so? In the Western Cape a number of particular conditions applied.

Firstly, African workers represented a small fraction of the workforce, accounting for only 15% in 1975. Secondly, after the intensification of influx control regulations in 1966 an increasing proportion of this population was migrant as opposed to settled, which encouraged mobility of workers between different sectors of industry, (in contrast to the Witwatersrand, apparently where the call-in card system is widely used) and led the Province Workers Advice Bureau to set up a structure of workers irrespective of industrial sector. A coordinating body was

thus to an extent redundant since in the Advice Bureau's eyes they represented one themselves. However, there were several other reasons for the relative absence of separate African unions, which in turn would require a coordinating mechanism, which applied equally to the Eastern and Western Cape.

These relate to the conservative stance of most of the mixed race or coloured registered unions, who were in many cases affiliated to Tucsa. Bankrupt in policy and bureaucratic in structure these often neglected to organise even the unskilled worker eligible for membership in registered unions (i.e. coloured workers), let alone African workers who were not. As for encouraging African unionisation, they were either too frightened of the possibility of government reprisals, or too concerned about the possibility of being swamped to help in the organisation of unregistered unions in their respective fields. As a result, the organisations best placed to initiate the organisation of African workers did nothing. The situation did not materially change even after the decision of Tucsa to promote the formation of parallel unions and to accept affiliation of unregistered unions in 1972 and 1973. Most affiliates paid only lip service to this deal, allegedly, so some have argued, to direct international funds and recognition away from the embryonic independent African trade union movement into its own hands. As a result, the unregistered movement as a whole remained sceptical even after Tucsa's intentions, only six unregistered African trade unions affiliated to Tucsa, and parallel unionisation by Tucsa affiliates proceeded at the proverbial snail's space.

Only one registered union significantly deviated from this pattern and this was the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa (Numarwosa). This union had

removed its previous executive in 1968/9 and from the early 1970s had started looking for a wider cooperation with African workers. The United Automobile Workers Union (UAW) was formed as an unregistered union; the idea of a National Metalworkers Workers Federation was actively pursued and at more or the same time cooperation with the UTP group of unions was also promoted. Talks were held between the two bodies; and two organisers were sent down from the Transvaal (one from Engineering and Allied Workers Union and one from the UTP) who shared Numarwosa offices in Port Elizabeth. This was in 1975. By 1977 a split had already begun to open up.

The EAWU and the UTP organisers refused to accept Numarwosa's organisational regime (i.e. being at factories certain times, meeting collectively on Mondays to assess progress and if necessary to hand out reprimands) nor would they accept the idea of a regional group and close regional coordination. Cooperation was accordingly ruptured and the two organisers moved to different premises. In Pretoria and Durban, on the other hand, a measure of cooperation was maintained with UAW officials sharing UTP union offices, which was only terminated in March 1979.

The situation prior to the Tucsa Conference of September 1975 was therefore as follows. Relations between Numarwosa and UTP were coming under strain in Port Elizabeth, but were cordial between UAW and UTP in Pretoria and Durban. The UTP unions (for certain of them) had branches in the Transvaal as well as Port Elizabeth and Durban and TUACC had a branch of Mawu in the Transvaal (which occasioned bitter recriminations from the Consultative), and was considering extending a branch of its Chemical Union. Finally, AFCWU held aloof

from all as to large extent did the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau in the Western Cape. The prospects for cooperation were thus not particularly bright. Unions were either remote to each other, or, where they were not, as in Port Elizabeth and the Transvaal, bitter fights either had or were on the point of breaking out.

It was against this inauspicious background that the first initiatives towards a National Federation were made. In September 1976 Numarwosa attended an annual conference of Tucsa at which many of its inner contradictions were laid bare. The National Union of Furniture and Allied Workers of South Africa and the Boilermakers withdrew because they construed even Tucsa's lukewarm attitude towards African unions as a threat to their members' positions. Numarwosa for part found that the attitude of the registered coloured unions remaining within Tucsa's ranks almost as inflexible were almost thrown out of the congress when they sponsored a motion that Tucsa affiliates should deregister and admit African workers. This experience proved to be more or less the last straw. Numarwosa was already dissatisfied with Tucsa's bureaucratic structure and its inability to promote worker cooperation at a regional level. In December 1976 they therefore decided to disaffiliate from Tucsa and almost immediately began sounding out the idea of an alternative federation of like-minded registered and unregistered unions.

The UTP lent its support, TUACC and CIWU professed themselves keen, and in the Western Cape the Food and Canning Workers Union, the Breweries and Goldsmiths Unions, and the Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union (which removed its executive in 1972 after a grass roots campaign, and had let its affiliations to Tucsa lapse) also expressed preliminary

interest. With this the raw material of a national federation had been brought together. It remained to be seen whether there was sufficient identity of interest and approach for it to be fused. The date set for this exercise was 23 March 1977, when the various interested parties agreed to meet in Johannesburg.

Present at this first preliminary meeting were eleven Consultative Committee Unions (engineering, sweet and food, chemical, transport, glass, laundry and dry cleaning, paper and wood, building, clothing, textile, commercial distributive); the TUACC unions and CIWW (metal, textile, transport and general, chemical, furniture and the IAS); Numarwosa and UAW; and the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau. Despite or because of this impressive list of participants, disagreements almost immediately began to emerge. Even before proceedings had been opened the Consultative Committee had distributed a mimeographed resolution which welcomed the idea of a federation, but then went on to detail a whole series of objections to it. These were that:

1. Most of the unions have very weak membership and therefore they need to strengthen it first.
2. Some Unions have acted in such a way that they have lost the trust and respect of the Committee. For instance, the Metal and Allied Workers Union deliberately and knowingly established a counter union in the reef thereby fostering a split or competition and confusion in an area where a union was in existence already.
3. The Committee has been informed (informally) of the dismissal of the national secretary of the United Automobile Union with shock. The Committee views this action as a weapon used in order to get some people into power and absolute control of the union.

'With these points in mind,' the resolution went on, it would not be possible to work with organisations which did not have the trust and respect of the Committee. We respect deeply the freedom and advancement of black leadership without any strings attached. We feel strongly that the black man should not be confused further than he is at the moment by creating bodies that are aimed at dividing him further and further...

The Committee cannot perceive how in the present situation it can agree to the formation of a National Federation if it is not sure whether its unions participate fully and democratically without becoming stooges to a few number of individuals.'

It concluded with an ultimatum. The Consultative Committee would consider closer cooperation 'if TUACC and the auto unions came to a decision that their way of operating should be amended to suit the needs of the Consultative Committee'.

With this resolution tabled the first general meeting of the federation got off to a start. Suspicions were aired about coloured trade unions, there was opposition to the participation of service organisations which allowed positions to whites, and the Consultative Committee gave every indication of wanting to reject the federation out of hand.

Passions were further inflamed when it was learnt that the chemical union associated with TUACC was considering establishing a branch on the Reef. Nevertheless, after some angry exchanges, the Consultative Committee reversed its position, and TUACC put its position which was that there should be worker control of any potential federation at all levels, and that only a tight federation was desirable which would pool resources and decide on important issues of policy, both of which were already the practise of TUACC.

As a result the eventual outcome was far more promising than could have been imagined when this meeting began. With the sole exceptions of the National Union of Clothing Workers and the Textile Workers Union it was agreed that 'a federation of unregistered and registered unions acceptable to our general membership be formed'; that a Feasibility Committee be established consisting of three Johannesburg trade unions, two from the Consultative Committee and one from the Council of Industrial Workers; two from TUACC; one from Port Elizabeth and one from Cape Town; that the Feasibility Committee should facilitate and establish lines of cooperation between unions nationally and in geographical area (the latter being obviously vital in the Transvaal), and that it should consider a draft constitution and financial structure for the proposed federation.

At this stage three areas of contention can be discerned in the debate over federation, which were to crop up repeatedly in the course of the following months. First was the idea that unregistered unions were by and large weak and it was premature to erect over this an inflated and cumbersome national coordinating structure which might become a bureaucratic monster. Second was the idea that white or coloured representation in the federation (through service bodies like the Industrial Aid Society on the one hand, and Numarwosa on the other) would 'confuse... and divide the black man,' and third was the fear that a federal structure would be imposed before differences between potential affiliates of the federation had been satisfactorily ironed out. ¹⁴

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Workers' control and democracy

Case of Fawu

In this article former general secretary **Jan Theron** argued that a tight caucus had taken over the union, employing purges and untruths to do so. This article is a shorter version of an article that was published in Volume 15, Number 3, September 1990.

Earlier this year I received a message. It was a message from workers I had helped organise at a time when organising workers into the union was an uphill battle. That union was FCWU, one of the unions which later merged to become Food and Allied Workers Union (Fawu). The message was that workers wanted me to take them back to FCWU.

I went to the workers, and listened to what they had to say. They were people we knew well, and regarded as amongst the best of the worker leadership of Cape Town. Some had played a leading role in building the Cape Town branch, after it had been defunct for some 20 years, into the largest branch of FCWU.

BOSSSES IN THE UNION

What they told me was that there were bosses in the union. People in the offices took decisions. What the workers had to say no longer counted. Their officials had been dismissed.

Now the national executive committee (NEC) had expelled worker leaders. The union head office had been quick to write to the bosses (to say they should not recognise these workers as shopstewards, and stop deducting their subs). But they had not

bothered to tell the workers who had elected them.

It was only some time later, that the head office convened a meeting of the branch. Some of the workers I spoke to had been at this meeting. This is what they told me. There were people there from the head office, and others who were not introduced. There was no discussion. Workers were told, what the NEC has decided is final. Anyone who challenges the NEC will go the same way as the expelled workers.

The bosses in the factory could see that the workers had no support from their office and were taking advantage of the division in the union. The situation in the factories was very bad. Also it seemed the head office was shifting closer to the bosses. They had moved into a new building, which it was said they had bought from Premier Group. But no one was clear where the money had come from. One of the workers showed me a copy of a letter from their manager to the union head office, agreeing to give R500 towards moving into the building.

Was it possible that workers had been misinformed, even misled? Something about how they were, more than what they said, impressed me as the truth. These were not

the proud and spirited workers I remembered. Something bad had happened to them. They were like people who have been beaten.

But they had not given up fighting. They were fighting for something they had known: for democracy. I explained my position to them. I had an agreement with the union to take unpaid leave, to write. However, after I had left the agreement had been changed. If I wanted to return to the union, I had to apply again, as though I had never worked for the union.

I advised them that it was not possible for workers to try and go back to the union as it used to be. It was also no solution to break away, and form a new union. Far better to try fight against the way things were going, from inside the union. In other words to oppose the leadership in power, all distinct from the union itself. Not because of who they are, but because of their practices.

What practices? It is to try and understand this that I decided to write about what is going on in the union. I am writing first of all for the workers in the union; not only the workers I spoke to, who can see there is something wrong, but also those who do not.



Workers listen carefully at a meeting.

While I for my own part accept that I am not able to return to the union, the workers have no alternative. At the same time I believe the workers are entitled to something better.

This is a question I have thought about a good deal, not least because I know I will be attacked for speaking out about what is going on. Precisely because I am loyal to the union, this is painful to me.

There are in general two reasons why someone loyal to the unions does not make public what is going on in the unions. First, because only people inside the organisation are able to solve the problems of the organisation. Second, so as not to give ammunition to the enemies of the union movement. I take as my point of departure that the internal democracy of organisations must at all times be respected.

However, this presupposes that there is internal democracy. And while the problems of the organisation can only be solved by the members, a union does not belong to the leadership in power. A union is a working-class organisation which exists for future generations of workers as it has for past generations.

Moreover, where the main threat to the unions is external, i.e. the bosses or the state, then it is necessary and correct that the union should be protected.

However, what I shall argue is that the main danger now is from within. It is the danger of internal corruption. A union which is organisationally corrupt is a liability for the whole progressive union movement.

In any case one cannot be giving ammunition to the enemies of the union movement, when the enemies of the union movement know all about the internal problems of a union anyway. The events that have given rise to this article are public knowledge. There have been court proceedings and press reports about them. There have been open letters, pamphlets and memoranda of various kinds. The bosses employ analysts to try to make sense of this kind of material, so as to decide what is in the situation for them.

In such a situation, a conspiracy of silence can only benefit a leadership which does not wish to be held accountable for its actions. Those who remain in the dark are usually ordinary people, like the members.

WHY SHOULD IT MATTER?

But why should it matter what is going on in Fawu? Why is it of any significance what a group of workers in the Cape Town branch are saying? So far as the national leadership is concerned, it does not seem to matter.

A press statement to *South* newspaper says it is a problem blown out of all proportion. This is also the line Allan Roberts (one of three national organisers in the union head office) takes in an article in the *Labour Bulletin* 15. 2. Thus for the fact that 'not a single factory has withdrawn from the Cape Town branch' shows that all is well. Moreover, the lack of response from the progressive community in general, seems to confirm that what has happened in Cape Town is seen not to matter.

However, the fact that there has been so little response is in itself significant. It shows a lack of concern for what is happening in organisations on the ground, which would have been unthinkable some years ago. For what is at issue is a question of unity. At a time when there is the potential of progressive political change, unity is all important. More than this, what is at issue is workers' control and democracy in the unions. The position I shall take is that there is no issue that matters more in the unions today than the changing meaning of workers' control and democracy.

ARTICLE BY ALLAN ROBERTS

What is significant is the tone adopted in the article by Allan Roberts in response to an

objective and restrained article by Di Cooper raising certain important issues. Allan Roberts launches a personal attack on the dismissed branch secretary. He states as fact, things I know to be untrue and which can be shown to be untrue.

To answer each and every misrepresentation and misstatement of fact in Allan Roberts' article would divert from the real issues. What does he say about the question of unity?

According to him, since the union's conference in September 1988 'a fairly high degree of unity has been achieved to date in that debate and discussions flow freely and decisions are reached in the NEC without any region or group of individuals feeling suppressed'. It is no coincidence that he refers to unity in the NEC as I shall show. Unity at this level is what is important for him.

What are the facts? A split in the union in the Eastern Cape and the establishment of a Campaign for Democracy in Cape Town indicate a high degree of disunity. From my own contacts with the union, I would describe the climate on the ground as one of fear.

However, it must also be said that the way he has responded is consistent in tone with some of the pamphlets that have been put out by the national leadership. In fact they all follow the same pattern. What is this pattern? The broad issues are not confronted. Instead issues are personalised, and clouded with allegations.

WHAT ARE THE BROADER ISSUES?

At a time when workers everywhere are discussing the contents of a Workers' Charter, the lesson of what has happened in the Cape Town branch is of wider significance. For workers' control and democracy is central to what a Workers' Charter is all about. But how are they to be safeguarded?

A question of unity

What do the workers I spoke to really mean, when they say they want to go back to the union they belonged to before? If we want to ignore what workers are saying, we can label them reactionary as workers who don't want progress. But it is clear that these workers don't (see what is going on now as progress.) What kind of unity is it when workers want no part of it?

Unity can be imposed from the top down or organised from the bottom up. Which way organisations choose to operate has longer term implications. It goes to shape the political culture we inhabit.

A political culture in which unity is imposed from the top down is a culture which emphasises the authority of leadership and conformity amongst the membership.

What is important is loyalty to the flag. Differences are not expressed and dissidence is dealt with by repression. It is moreover an anti-working class culture, whatever it claims or aspires to be.

On the other hand a political culture in which unity is built from the bottom up is one which emphasises organisation and the accountability of leadership. The open expression of differences is encouraged and dissidence is tolerated. What is important is loyalty to the ideas on which the organisation is based or from which it draws its legitimacy.

Workers' control and democracy

When the unions that merged to form Fawu went about building unity, each contributed in its own way towards a broader political culture. I will take the example of FCWU by way of illustration since this is mainly the tradition of workers' control and democracy that workers in the Cape Town branch come from. In 1976 FCWU was on its last legs. The general secretary had been drawing two

salary cheques for each one to which he was entitled. The administrator had misappropriated a sum of money which she was still repaying when I stopped working 12 years later. Corruption was rife throughout the union; not only in the sense of misuse of money, but in that the leadership in place in factories and branches was in it for itself. Workers had lost confidence in the union.

The problem then was how to regain workers' confidence, and rebuild the union. This was done by organising workers around the idea that the union belonged to the workers who contributed to it, and that it was the workers themselves who should decide what went on in their organisation. There was, in other words, a strong emphasis on workers' control and democracy in the union, along with financial self-sufficiency and political independence. There was further a strong emphasis on honest administration and honest leadership. Workers' control and democracy in the union was more than a slogan. It was a practice.

This explains in large part the success not only of FCWU, but the union movement it was part of, in winning over the mass of unorganised workers. For this was the principle task facing the emergent unions at the time. It was done, not only against the opposition of the bosses and state, but also against the established union movement. Workers' control and democracy was what distinguished the practice of the emergent unions from the established union movement in particular TUCSA.

On paper workers' control and democracy is safeguarded in Fawu. The first safeguard is the union's constitution. Because this is the first safeguard, it is the duty of the national office bearers, first and foremost, to 'enforce observance of the constitution.' But because no constitution can cover every

eventuality, the union adopted a number of additional policy documents.

In 1986 certain Basic Principles were adopted, amongst them workers' control and democracy. The following year a Leadership Code was adopted. In 1988 Guidelines on Administration and Finance were adopted, as well as Guidelines on Elections.

Yet the lesson of what has happened in the Cape Town branch is that unless workers' control and democracy is grounded in everyday practice, and unless there is also leadership which is committed to this practice, what is on paper is no certain safeguard.

Any leadership can claim to be building workers' control and democracy. Furthermore, where there is no workers' control and democracy, there will be no one to contradict them.

For what is at issue is fundamental to workers' control and democracy: the right of workers to elect and discipline their own leadership. The entire branch leadership was removed, and the leading official of the branch dismissed at a general meeting presided over by the national office bearers. All this was done, as I shall later explain, in obvious violation of the constitution. Moreover, the violation of the constitution was not just technical. It enabled a decision to be made which was undemocratic.

A question of power

It should come as no surprise that the national leadership of a union should disregard workers' control and democracy in the union. For only to the extent that there is workers' control and democracy are the powers of leadership constrained.

The history of Fawu since it was formed is of an ongoing power struggle. That is to say a struggle for leadership position. A reading of the Annual Reports in the period

1986- 1988 shows that this is a major cause of disunity in the union. As the workers have been saying for some time there are people who are power-hungry. They practise leadership control not workers' control. To explain why there have been these power struggles, it is necessary to look beyond the personalities involved.

Whereas at an earlier stage workers in leadership were ordinary workers drawn from production, there is nowadays a different kind of worker leadership emerging. Increasingly this is a leadership which is separated from the ordinary workers both in terms of education and its position in production. Partly this is because the composition of the membership has changed. Whereas formerly the membership was overwhelmingly made up of ordinary workers in unskilled and semi-skilled positions, there are today members in clerical and skilled positions. Partly this is because the union is now a large institution, and a position in leadership means power and influence. So the union has become attractive to a range of people who were never attracted to it before.

But there is an additional reason why there have been ongoing struggles about power. For the emphasis on workers' control and democracy gave rise to a project of building power (from below), in which the process was what was important, and the object was to prevent power being concentrated at the top. The emphasis here is on power at a local level, where there is the least separation between membership and leadership.

However, from the time of the merger there has been a faction in Fawu with a different view of power, and a different political project. For them, power is located at the top. It is an instrument to be used whichever way leadership wants. Whether power is turned to good or bad use is simply a question of whether the leadership in power is 'good' or 'bad'.

The political project this gives rise to, is for a faction to seize power. Further, it is to centralise power. The more centralised power is, the better use they will be able to make of it. Further, the relationship to membership is that of a chain of command. In this way everything is justified in the pursuit of power.

But power for whom? Leadership will always claim to act for the highest motives. They are not in it for themselves, but for the workers they represent. But what is to stop leadership from pursuing its own interests in power?

It is easy to say that when leadership no longer represents workers, the workers can elect another. But even if they have this right on paper, that does not mean they will be able to exercise it. What is to stop the leadership from abusing their power? That is, turning their power against the membership to consolidate their own position. The constitution can be disregarded. Meetings can be rigged. There are any number of ways a leadership so inclined can strengthen its hold on power. Trading on the ignorance and disorganisation of workers.

For power it is said, corrupts. What I take to be corruption in an organisation, is not simply the most obvious form of corruption, where leadership abuses its position for its own material gain. It is corruption in the broad sense, where leadership abuses a position of trust to consolidate its own hold on power. An organisation for the members becomes an organisation to further the aims of the leadership. The control the workers are supposed to have over leadership becomes the power leadership has over workers.

Workers basically have to carry out instructions and leadership resorts to ever more drastic methods to legitimate its hold on power.

Stalinism

Stalinism is a clear example of the abuse of power. How was it possible that forced labour camps, political terror and the dictatorship of a single leader in the USSR were justified in the name of socialism and the working class? Two of the political methods of Stalinism are significant here.

First, history was falsified; actual events were deliberately distorted to present leadership in the best possible light. What was true was what suited leadership, and as a result all meaning was corrupted, and the truth was literally stood on its head.

Second, there were the purges. A purge is where a leadership in power is no longer willing or able to allow political differences be expressed, or to resolve political or organisational differences democratically. Instead it deals with opposition administratively, that is, by removing it. In the time of Stalin one way of doing this was by means of show trials, where authentic leaders were accused on trumped-up charges of things they never did.

But what is the relevance of Stalinism today? Stalinism is still relevant because the political methods of Stalinism live on in the political practice of organisations.

The wholesale dismissal of Fawu officials and the expulsion of workers bears all the marks of a purge. Moreover, in their presentation of 'facts', the truth is habitually stood on its head by the present national leadership. **LB**

Jan Theron is the Coordinator of the Labour and Enterprise Policy Research Group at the University of Cape Town.

Interview with Joe Slovo

Joe Slovo speaks about building a legal, mass Communist Party, about post-apartheid South Africa, about socialism and social democracy, and about theoretical issues in Marxism. Slovo also discusses his paper 'Has Socialism Failed?' which, he says 'was written essentially for discussion within our own party and broad liberation movement, but it seems also to have provoked a lot of interest within our Southern Africa region and in Europe'. The *South African Labour Bulletin* and the magazine *New Era* interviewed Joe Slovo separately. We publish the combined interview. This article was published in Volume 14, Number 8, 1990.

Labour Bulletin: The South African Communist Party (SACP) intends emerging publicly in the coming months, and actively recruiting thousands of new members. Under such conditions would it be a vanguard party or a mass party? Would new members be selected according to rigorous criteria, or would individuals be able to apply for membership?

Slovo: We envisage a large party. We have to break out of the old conspiratorial mould.

We have got to make an impact in the situation, and only a political party which attracts a wide cross-section of the working class nationally, in particular, and other

sympathetic strata can carry out its role. In building an above-board SACP that will be able to earn its title of vanguard, we will certainly seek to recruit into our ranks the most dedicated, disciplined militants drawn, in particular, from the ranks of the working people. But our continued emphasis on a vanguard role, and on quality in our membership, must not stand in the way of building a relatively large SACP.

There is no doubt that people who want to join the party are welcome to make approaches. Indeed, even during the illegal period we did not simply sit back and select who to approach. It was a combination of that and initiatives

taken by individuals. In this new situation the emphasis will be to encourage all the sectors who we think have a place in the party, to actually find a home in the party. We encourage them to take initiatives to come into the party.

I wouldn't draw such a sharp distinction between a vanguard party (properly understood) and a mass party. I believe the now-legal SACP must continue to play a vanguard role in the sense that it must seek to mobilise, organise and educate working people by representing their immediate and long-term interests through all the twists and turns of the struggle.

The concept of the vanguard has been degraded in practice by two tendencies. The one is the shifting of the party's vanguard role from the working class to society as a whole. Once the party claims to be the vanguard of society at large, it's a short step to a constitutionally entrenched one-party system.

In the second place, the concept of the party's vanguard role had, in many cases, shifted away from the idea that this role must be based on a renewable mandate from a working class that is mobilised and active.

Labour Bulletin: Would you welcome a range of people on the Left, for example those holding social democratic views and those holding Trotskyist views? Would people who are of various religious faiths who hold left-wing views be welcome in the party?

Slovo: We must move away from the old label approach which dismissed people on the basis of a generalised characterisation of their politics. We've had a rather murky past in that respect, we've been a bit arrogant, we've been a little elitist, and we've been a little intolerant. We are trying to break out of that mould and I think we have gone a long way in that direction.



The late Joe Slovo was one of the SACP's greatest thinkers.

But at the same time, the party cannot just be a rag-bag of conflicting tendencies. I believe that there is a place in our party for socialists, whoever they are and whatever their background is and whatever differences they had with us in the past, as long as they accept the programme of our party, broadly speaking, and its policies. I would say that in our revolutionary practice of the recent period, we have been more tolerant of trends and tendencies which in the past we might have dismissed as counter-revolutionary.

Even internally, within the party we have to encourage a greater degree of debate, even on existing party policy. Indeed, we have to involve the broad working-class movement in the debate about

party policy and we must welcome that. Also within the party we must, I believe, tolerate a certain degree of constructive dissent.

But like any other party there has to be a degree of cohesion, otherwise it becomes impotent as a political force, I am not suggesting we just become a debating society. I am suggesting there is more scope for debate, for discussion, and for what I call constructive dissent as long as the basic party thrust is not undermined.

Labour Bulletin: Would the SACP oppose the formation of another political party claiming to be socialist?

Slovo: As for those who want to form other parties, it is up to them. Our task is to engage them

ideologically and to compete for the allegiance of the working people, but not to prevent their formation either by old style sloganising or, if it reaches the point of political power, by dictating through the constitution that our party is the only party that has the right to exist.

Labour Bulletin: Will the SACP surface its underground structures, and make its membership publicly known?

Slovo: For the moment we are not surfacing our underground structures. This is a precautionary measure in a still uncertain situation. It is a matter which we will hold under constant review. But certainly, in organisational terms, our emphasis will now be on building a mass, above-board party whose membership is not secret.

Labour Bulletin: How do the distinct tasks of the SACP and the African National Congress (ANC) play themselves out in an era of legal mass politics?

Slovo: In the unfolding situation our party's role as a vital constituent of the liberation alliance headed by the ANC, and as an independent organisation pursuing the aspirations of the working class, is becoming more crucial than ever.

The ANC will remain the overall head of the broad national liberation movement whose task in the immediate aftermath of victory will be to consolidate our liberation objectives. We need now to build an ANC of massive strength, and every party militant must help to make this a reality.

In the building of a mass-based ANC it is inevitable that some strata with their own agenda will flock into its ranks and will, consciously or otherwise seek to steer it away from its working-class bias. We should be ready for an inevitable sharpening of inter-class ideological contest in the run-up to victory and

in its immediate aftermath. This is not an argument for narrowing the base of the ANC. It is an argument for consolidating and massively extending our party and the trade union movement as independent forces and as part of the liberation alliance.

Labour Bulletin: Some left-wing critics of the liberation movement fear that the ANC seeks to develop an indigenous black bourgeoisie and to foster that so that the ownership of the economy is not solely in white hands. Trade unionists also point out that many black business-people are among the worst employers of labour. How do you see this issue?

Slovo: It is not the policy either of the SACP or the ANC, to foster a black bourgeoisie. Our policy on that question is based on the national democratic platform. Blacks have been prevented from participating in the private sector. It is consistent with our broad social vision to demand the repeal of legislation and the creation of conditions in which, during the period when there will be a private sector, blacks are not disadvantaged.

It does not follow from this that we have embarked on a deliberate policy to try to replace the white exploiters with black exploiters. In fact, if that happens, the fruits of victory will have been hijacked and the majority of people will not benefit from their sacrifices in the struggle.

Labour Bulletin: How does the SACP see the role of the trade union movement in a post-apartheid South Africa? One can foresee a number of problems for organised workers.

Firstly, SA will probably have to work hard for foreign investment. A militant, highly organised trade union movement could scare investors off - could this mean trade unions having to accept a wage freeze or other compromises?

Secondly, the economy is unlikely to be able to meet the demands of the organised workers at the same time as it provides jobs and housing for the unemployed, the squatters etc. Resources will also be diverted from the urban areas to the countryside, which may clash with the demands of organised workers. How can this problem be dealt with, and what role should the unions play?

Slovo: That depends upon the dominant nature of the post-apartheid state. If it is truly a People's State the trade unions will have to take all the factors that you mention into account. The trade union movement will be part of the new People's State and it must have a real stake in it, and feel that it is theirs.

A People's State would be dedicated to the interests of the majority, who are working people, and to moving towards a redistribution of wealth, and to social advancement generally, rather than to private profit. Under those conditions we'll obviously have to take into account many, many complexities, including the ones you mention, in order to make advance viable.

Labour Bulletin: What is the role of the Communist Party in relation to trade unions, and the working class more generally, in this new era of legal politics, and in a post-apartheid situation?

Slovo: Obviously there must be a very close link between the workers' party and the industrial organisation of the working class, the trade union movement. One does not replace the other, both are absolutely indispensable. Together they represent the working-class constituency. They represent the political and industrial power of the working class, and the political and industrial aspirations of the working-class.

So I envisage a situation in which the working-class constituency consisting of these political and industrial organs, may well continue to be part of the process of consolidating the national democratic revolution. But they will also have to look to the interests of their constituency, to ensure that they can exercise sufficient power independently in this inter-class relationship to ensure that the bias of the national democratic revolution is towards the interests of the working people, the majority.

Labour Bulletin: With Mandela's release and statements on nationalisation, a major debate has raged in the press. You have been quoted as saying that the aim of economic policy will be the redistribution of wealth, and that this does not mean that 'sectors of the economy would have to be nationalised' (*Business Day*); and also that the more important question is one of 'control, not ownership', that sectors of the economy 'have got to be taken under control which distinguish from state control'. Could you elaborate on these questions?

Slovo: We must distinguish between a legal change of ownership from private hands to the state and the process of what I called socialisation. Nationalisation in the sense of a simple change of ownership without taking steps to ensure democratic participation by the producers at all levels of economic life does not necessarily advance the socialist objective.

Socialism is a transition period, a moving from one economic reality to another.

When power is taken, the previous economic reality doesn't completely disappear. The new power can use many different mechanisms in order to begin the process of redistribution of wealth. Nationalisation is not a catch-all solution for the problem

of social ownership. Of course, in our case, there will have to be a degree of nationalisation. But as a universal formula for the whole of the economy the purely legal transfer of ownership to the state does not mean we can assure the redistribution of wealth. There has been quite a high degree of nationalisation within capitalism, and we know how the nationalised industries were used. We should try to refine our understanding of nationalisation so that its purpose and its relationship to effective popular control is emphasised. And even in relation to the transfer of legal ownership, the question as to whether it is a complete take-over, whether compensation is or isn't going to be given, will have to be determined by the reality of the correlation of forces at that moment in time.

Labour Bulletin: Mandela said these things are negotiable. Would you agree?

Slovo: Quite a number of things are negotiable, but what isn't negotiable is that the new power which takes over must be able to generate the resources to meet the imbalances of the past, the racial imbalances. It must be able to achieve effective control over the direction of the economy, for the purpose of beginning to redistribute wealth. Redistributing wealth cannot take place in the form of some big bang, it's a process which must be rooted in the actual reality.

Labour Bulletin: The path of socialist orientation of national democratic states was based on the existence of a socialist world system into which such national democracies could slot. Perestroika has laid to rest the idea of a socialist world system, stressing instead an integrated world economy. Could you comment on this, and its meaning for South Africa's future?

Slovo: Because of economic failure, the reality is that there is little left of what we used to call a world socialist economic system. Socialism has, for the moment, proved incapable of competing with the world capitalist sector, for reasons I outlined in 'Has Socialism Failed?' – essentially because of various distortions of socialism. This means that we cannot premise future advance in South Africa in the medium term on some kind of integration into a socialist world economy. It is difficult at this stage to speculate on precise policies we will need to pursue. But there are some basic principles that we must already grasp firmly.

In the first place, we will have to cultivate a spirit of self-reliance, a confidence in the necessity of finding our own way. The overwhelming dominance on a world scale of the capitalist sector presents dangers and complexities. We can neither ignore these realities, nor must we become fatalistic. We will have options and room for manoeuvre.

Our country is after all, not without many significant resources and our working people are mobilised and politically conscious. The challenge will be to safeguard the sovereignty of our people and our right to move in the right direction. If capital says: 'Right, we are no longer prepared to invest because of the social direction you are following', we can neither ignore the fact, nor can we allow it to dominate our policies.

We must also prepare to weather certain inevitable disruptions. All social transformations bring with them such disruptions. The likely hostility of sectors of capital to even moderate measures which we will have to take in order to begin the basic redistribution of wealth will contribute to these disruptions. The only way to

cope with a transitional period of dislocation is to take the people with you politically.

Labour Bulletin: The expectations which abound in youth and trade union circles about socialism seem out of touch with what will be objectively possible. What problems does this disjuncture between rhetoric and reality pose for the future?

Slovo: Mass worker support and enthusiasm for socialism is an entirely positive factor in our struggle. With the possibilities now opened up by our legalisation, the SACP will be working to extend and deepen this support.

Leaving aside ideological frills the average worker and youth militant in our country has perhaps a more profound grasp of or a socialist future than many a Marxist scholar. The working people of our country understand the basic truth that as long as a system based on private profit rules the roost substantial inroads into resolving their major concerns – housing, education, employment, healthcare, social security – will not be possible.

A national democratic victory is an essential step forward, a basis for advance, but we should not by our silences project it as the end of the road. It is crucial that we propagate a socialist perspective now – which is not to say that we can pole-vault into socialism immediately.

Labour Bulletin: ‘The Path to Power’ underplays the failures of socialism, and gives the most cursory attention to perestroika. This is redressed by ‘Has Socialism Failed?’ but the two documents do not sit happily alongside each other. Would the acceptance of the perspective in ‘Has Socialism Failed?’ not necessitate a rewriting of the party programme?

Slovo: Our party programme endorses the processes of perestroika and glasnost and notes some of the historical failures of socialism. In this sense, there is no basic contradiction in the perspective between the programme and ‘Has Socialism Failed?’

There is also convergence of viewpoint between the two documents in relation to such crucially important issues as the nature of the vanguard party and the necessary link of democracy to socialism.

But of course there are some differences in emphasis. These relate as much as anything to the fact that ‘Has Socialism Failed?’ takes on a single focused question and that it is an individual contribution. It should also be remembered that almost a year separates the publication of the two different documents and that the programme was collective endeavour based on discussions throughout our ranks over more than a year before our 7th Congress.

A lot has happened in the last 12 and 24 months, and a lot more information has come to hand. But yes, of course, our party must certainly be alive to the possibility of a revised edition of the programme. Not only because of events elsewhere, but most importantly because of the rapidly changing situation within our country.

For the moment, ‘The Path to Power’ remains an important analysis and guide to action. Its perspectives have been confirmed since its adoption last year. ^{LB}

Gavin Evans interviewed Slovo in Lusaka, Zambia for the Labour Bulletin, and New Era sent questions to Slovo.

LEADERSHIP CODE

Labour Bulletin: It is of major concern that there has been corruption and loss of funds in a number of mass organisations, trade unions, etc. How do you think these problems can be tackled, and how can corruption be controlled in a democratic South Africa?

Slovo: There should be a leadership code. It’s absolutely vital now that we get thinking about a leadership code. Conditions are going to deteriorate for some time immediately after the ANC comes to power. People are going to have to sacrifice. I think people can take a lot. I feel very strongly about this – people can accept hardship if they are convinced politically that we are moving in the right direction.

But if the leadership lives it up, if we all go back and start occupying big houses in wealthy suburbs, there is no way we can get the people to accept the sacrifices involved in laying the foundations for the future.

This is another major lesson to be derived from the events in Eastern Europe. A different style of life for the leadership is fatal. If the leadership is living as a privileged elite, you can hardly expect the broad masses of people to accept the objective necessity of transitional hardships on the way to real redistribution and transformation.

In my opinion it is imperative that our broad liberation movement begins now to develop an effective leadership code of conduct that seeks to counter any tendencies towards elitism.

Productivity

Participating to achieve control

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has just signed a path-breaking agreement on performance bonuses with the Chamber of Mines. It covers 17 gold mines. **Karl von Holdt** interviewed NUM acting general secretary **Marcel Golding** (below). This article was first published in Volume 16, Number 2, 1991.

Von Holdt: What is the significance of the new agreement?

Golding: There were four aspects to our wage negotiations on the gold mines this year. We negotiated a wage increase of around 6%. We supplemented it with the gold price bonus. The third aspect is the agreement which we've just negotiated for a performance bonus scheme. The fourth aspect of the negotiations is the social and trade union rights which we have won on the mines.

The performance bonus scheme is essentially something to augment workers' wages. It is important to have central negotiations and negotiate parameters which will set the basis for negotiations over performance and productivity at mine level.

The purpose from the union's point of view is to improve efficiency by means of the performance bonus and by means of improved training for workers. The successful implementation of this agreement will contribute to the future viability of mines, enhance conditions of work, and improve safety.

Von Holdt: You say the performance bonus is not part of the wage. But it is financial and you did get low wages this year. Doesn't this mean that in effect the performance bonus is part of your wage? Wage rates will remain low, and workers will only get a decent increase if they meet performance criteria.



Golding: It will augment existing wage increases, that is true. But the low level of wage increases were because of severe problems in the gold mining industry. The choice we had to make was whether to drive a higher increase with less employment in the industry as a real prospect - or whether we try to achieve maximum employment, and at the same time augment wages and win social rights.

Von Holdt: Although you have an agreement to protect members against retrenchment where there are productivity gains, there may be a gradual decline as management stops replacing workers who leave or retire.

Golding: You must realise our wage agreement and performance agreement form part of an overall strategic perspective which the union has on the mining industry which we put in the mining summit. The problems facing the industry have to be managed and more efficiently planned and for that reason we've called for a permanent mining commission that will try to coordinate the downscaling of the industry. Resource-based industries do decline.

Von Holdt: You see productivity and efficiency increases as being one part of managing the crisis?

Golding: Any industry has to undergo transformation and change. That's the only constant factor you have in society - change, innovation and development. There are two ways we can respond. We can either stand by while the process takes place, or we can become centrally involved in the management of the transition. Our union wants to be a central player and will fight to be a central player in the management of transition, so that we can improve the conditions of employment, extend

the life of the mines, and improve social conditions generally.

In our industry, firstly you are dealing with natural resources; secondly, you are dealing with the backbone of the economy; and thirdly, it has immense social impact if it is decimated in a piecemeal way. The employers want to leave it entirely to the market to determine, and we want to put in place instruments and processes which could combat the effect of the market. We believe the market has to be managed in a way which is beneficial to the working people. It's not beneficial left to its own devices.

The decisions of how to manage the enterprise and to achieve enterprise objectives - we're not going to leave those decisions to management to decide on their own. Because when they decide on their own they have one motive only, and that is profit. We are saying there are other stakeholders, including workers and their families, and communities which live nearby.

The nature of competing enterprises is that they have to contain costs and wastage. In the mining industry it's not necessarily workers who've been wasting - it's employers who have been wasting through mismanagement, excessive abuses, and their lifestyles. When they need to cut costs they say the first thing to go is labour. We say no, the first to go are some of your excesses. To us it's not a problem to have efficient enterprises. It's important, but not at our cost.

Von Holdt: How are you going to be able to use the agreement to contest the broader issues of productivity?

Golding: I think there is scope. The agreement states that criteria for measuring performance must be 'fully discussed'. Immediately we begin to engage management the perspectives of our union are

put on the agenda. Secondly, the agreement states that training is critical. It is not only workers who require training, but management themselves, because a new culture needs to permeate the mines. We're going to be challenging prerogatives, challenging abuses. If they raise the issue of containing costs, we'll say yes, but why are you replacing Mercedes Benzes every two years? Why is the health and safety record going down? Why is management being negligent there? Why do workers still live in hostels? Because people can only be productive if they're educated and trained and developed, if the conditions under which they live are acceptable, if their work environment is acceptable. That will be a constant struggle.

The agreement opens up retrenchment for contestation. If there is a collapse of the gold price we can understand retrenchments may be necessary. But even then there should be exhaustive negotiations to seek alternatives. But when they reorganise the production process and say they need to retrench five workers, we say hold on. Production levels have gone up, targets have gone up - these workers must be trained for other jobs.

For us the struggle for greater control over the production process is starting with participation. It is the first stage. To achieve greater control requires training, skills, development. It requires that you understand the technology, management, markets, geology and the requirements of the industry.

Von Holdt: What criteria will the union put forward for measuring collective performance?

Golding: It's a very new area for us, whereas management has been doing it all the time. We're going to have to start working out how to influence targets. But at the same

time you've got to consider other issues like health and safety. Look, it's uncharted territory for us.

Von Holdt: Will this agreement change the relation between management and labour?

Golding: It gives us the scope to argue that the behaviour of a local manager is absolutely unacceptable - he's racist, abuses workers, shouts at them. Collective performance will be brought down if the attitudes of some managements remain the same. So you've got to start changing their attitudes. The same could be said of workers. Management can complain that our workers are always loafing, and argue that if we're going to achieve certain things we need to work together.

This doesn't mean that the interests of management and labour have suddenly converged - they do have separate interests. Or that supervisors and workers have the same interests - they do have separate interests. But there are common interests. You have a common interest in the life of the mine. I suppose you have a common objective in achieving a greater surplus, and struggles that will involve conflicts over how best to achieve it, whether safety is catered for, or whether there's no training or whatever. Once you achieve that surplus there's a struggle over how it gets divided. That's critical.

We obviously remain committed to our perspective - which is control of the economic system and social arrangements. We will continue to fight for radical transformation.

Von Holdt: While broad principles and rules of the agreement have been established in centralised negotiations, it depends on the ability of your workers and organisers to bargain over issues like performance and productivity

at each mine. Do they have the capacity and skill? If they don't you will lose any initiative you have gained.

Golding: Absolutely. We do believe we have the capacity. NUM head office will provide a lot of back-up. For example, where management makes proposals they will be forwarded to head office and analysed here.

We plan meetings in the regions to discuss the agreement with our leadership. There will also be training programmes for our shop stewards, and we hope to get time off for this.

Von Holdt: Does the agreement apply to all mines belonging to the mining houses which are party to it? In other words, a mine cannot decide not to participate - the agreement forces all mines to begin discussing performance with the union?

Golding: Right, it applies to those mines where NUM has recognition, except Harmony Gold Mine, where we negotiated a profit-sharing scheme.

Von Holdt: One of the principles enshrined in the agreement is worker and union participation. What does this mean?

Golding: We are now talking about one of the most critical areas itself, the workplace, and participation in decisions made at the workplace. We are firing the first shots in beginning to challenge managerial prerogative in the production process. We've already challenged managerial prerogative on dismissals and other abuses. But I think through this we are beginning to challenge management's prerogative in decision-making over what they believed was their exclusive right - setting targets, setting the production plan.

I wouldn't say we've achieved that, because to do so you need great insight into the management of resources, you need the technical expertise. But as we develop the capacity of workers, I believe we could reach that stage. The agreement arms workers with an instrument to say you must talk to us. By engaging with employers you begin to understand their psychology and perspective, to test your own views against the realities which they put on the table. Not everything an employer says is necessarily wrong. You've got to assess it. So you participate in order to achieve control. It's a process.

Von Holdt: From what you say, you don't believe you have been forced by an unfavourable situation in the industry to accept participation. You are using the crisis - which face management too - to force them to open new space for you.

Golding: To be quite frank, most of the principles in the agreement are our principles: employment guarantees, health and safety, disclosure of information, worker participation, training, equitable sharing of bonuses. Never before have the employers agreed to these things. Never! I don't think this is on their terms. We've turned the concept around, so that it is something that makes sense for us to battle on, rather than to ignore. It's the first shot - we'll revisit it later when our capacity improves.

Whether we like it or not they're going to change the production process. They're going to do that. They've done it. What we're saying is we're not going to be a whining chorus and moan on the side. We're going to say, hold on - these are our interests; our concerns, our rights. We see these principles in the agreement as our rights in the production process.

Von Holdt: Currently employers are arguing that unions will have to agree to wage restraint and productivity increases to get the economy going. Management is hailing the Ergo agreement, the auto sector settlement and the NUM Chamber agreement as breakthroughs, that at last unions are abandoning, confrontation and accepting cooperation. Are they right?

Golding: I think it's a false dichotomy to suggest that when we reach agreements we are pliable, and when we don't we are being confrontationalist. Our settlement this year was a recognition of the constraints in the mining industry. But the other aspects which we won - the social rights - were a major advance which in my opinion places our organisation in a better position to defend the rights of workers in the long term.

For us it was not a case of being persuaded to accept productivity - we've actually gone on the offensive and changed the perspective on productivity by having these principles accepted - principles which I don't think are part of the employers' vocabulary when it comes to production.

They have always operated on the basis of authoritarian management, with the assumption that it is their unilateral right to determine targets and not to disclose information. They have been forced, through the struggle of workers, to deal with us properly and coherently. Changes have not taken place because of employer benevolence. Bitter struggles have been fought to reach this stage, and the casualty list of victims and worker martyrs is high.

On the coal mines we reached a wage agreement which was 12-17% - that wasn't wage restraint. There we're not involved in a productivity drive with management. Our position is based

on realism, on the circumstances which face the organisation and the defence of workers' rights and the organisation itself.

Von Holdt: But if it's so good why don't you take it onto the coal mines?

Golding: We will have to consider this. But we would only do it in the context of an acceptable national wage level - which would have to be substantially higher than at present. The coal industry can afford this.

Von Holdt: How do you see the significance of this kind of agreement more broadly?

Golding: We've got them to accept that productivity cannot be undertaken without a rigorous perspective of managing transition.

It's not a question of unions all of a sudden being realistic. One must understand that unions have gone through different phases of organisational development. The first phase was to build unions' strength and capacity, and they had different priorities and different concerns. It's not a case of employers always having been realistic. In fact, employers have lagged behind in creative industrial relations perspectives and solutions for many years. It's been the unions on the offensive changing that. To say the unions have suddenly become concerned about production is rubbish.

Von Holdt: What will the effect of the performance bonus be on NUM's wage policy and on centralised bargaining?

Golding: It doesn't affect that in any way. Firstly, the Chamber is still committed to discussing wage policy with us. We're going to try to work out a long-term vision of where we're going with wage policy. Secondly, it doesn't affect

centralised bargaining in any way. This year was an attempt at a creative solution to the problems we find in the gold-mining industry. It may be that the gold price bonus was not the right direction to go, and that we'll assess next year.

Von Holdt: It does, however, open the possibility for some workers to get decent wages, and others - whether on poor mines or poorly managed mines - will not be able to get decent wages because they cannot get the performance bonus.

Golding: That relates to our broader perspective - our campaign for a permanent mining commission is aimed at bringing some of the irrationality in the mining industry under control. We are arguing that there has got to be more efficient management of South Africa's mining resources, and the only way that can be done is through better coordination and planning.

We can either go the German route, where down-scaling seems to be managed efficiently, or we can go the British route where there's direct confrontation - where the union five years ago was 180,000 strong, and is now 50,000 and is likely to be 11,000 in three years' time. There the mines were nationalised and yet they were decimated.

We're saying nationalisation itself is not the solution. The solution is the capacity of workers' organisations to manage the necessary transition, and not to try to ignore the realities. And one critical factor is that we need a sympathetic and democratic government. That is important. We need a political regime and a political policy that is sensitive to our needs. ■

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Nationalisation, socialism and the Alliance

A number of resolutions adopted by the National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa) at its recent congress provoked enormous media interest. **Moses Mayekiso** (general secretary) explains why the union calls, unfashionably, for nationalisation without compensation, and why it wants broader unity on the Left and an end to the Congress of South African Trade Unions' (Cosatu's) alliance with the African National Congress (ANC). This article was published in Volume 17, Number 4, 1993.

Following the Numsa congress in July there was a great deal of speculation and comment in the press as to the crudeness of Numsa's economic policy and its intention to break the alliance and start a new Workers' Party.

This uninformed comment also caused a degree of confusion among rank and file members of the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP).

The NUMSA national office-bearers have therefore in the light of the controversies and national interest sparked by the resolutions at our congress decided to release a more comprehensive communique on key decisions of that congress.

NUMSA is a very strong supporter of freedom of expression and freedom of the press. In keeping with this viewpoint we decided to open our national congress in its entirety so that the media could hear first-hand what was said and why. This commitment to transparency made little impact. The media chose with isolated

exceptions, not to hear the key debates that they were so quick to comment on afterwards.

UNINFORMED MEDIA COMMENT

This is a great pity since our congress was an important expression of democratic practice. It is a tradition in NUMSA that full-time paid officials do not participate in the congress debate. This approach arises from our view that the value of a policy lies in its support, understanding and participation by worker leaders. Carefully managed congresses may please the media but they don't reflect workers' views.

The debates were robust, reflective of an active membership in a democratic union. All manner of issues were discussed and those that were 'hot' ended in votes. The general secretary's report was also debated and amended. This gives an extensive background to many decisions in congress but has received scant attention from the media.

The conference itself was a culmination of six months of preparation. In the process resolutions

were discussed on the factory floor, in local general councils, in regional councils, and finally in the national congress. There were 780 delegates in congress representing 11 regions, and covering the whole of South Africa. In our assessment a significant majority of the delegates would be supporters or members of the ANC and SACP; many of them in fact being local office bearers of these organisations.

The congress discussed a range of resolutions and adopted detailed policy positions on industry restructuring and a reconstruction accord. These documents are every bit as important to South Africa's future as the issues which the media concentrated on. We make the above points to alert our society to the dangers of superficial analysis and reporting. Those reading the media reports or at least most of them, would be badly misinformed about Numsa as an organisation.

Now is the time to increase the kind of knowledge and understanding about different views held by organisations. If we are going to meaningfully interact we need to do



Moses Mayekiso: In support of nationalisation.

so on the basis of knowledge, not ideological distortion. The full text of the resolutions, general secretary's report and minutes of debate are available from Numsa. However, we wish to briefly address certain key areas.

Numsa has endorsed the idea of a reconstruction accord. The accord is seen both as our perspective on the transition and the basis of our support for the ANC in the coming elections. Two qualifications should be mentioned.

Firstly, the construction accord was supported on condition 'that the ANC achieves in the constitutional negotiations a bottom line of a strong and democratic unitary state based on majority rule without any minority veto.'

Secondly, that two important issues need to be part of the reconstruction programme; the need for land redistribution and nationalisation of the leading heights of the economy. The land question is central for redistribution and housing provision, as well as for the development of policies that would protect our natural resources.

WHY NATIONALISE?

Controversy has emerged on the question of nationalisation – particularly our emphasis that it should be without compensation and

should focus on the leading heights of the economy.

These are no doubt newsworthy items, but isolated from other issues this focus is also a distortion. Nonetheless, some fairly basic points need to be made for a better understanding of those decisions.

These demands are not new having been stated in the Freedom Charter, and in previous Cosatu and Numsa resolutions. What was controversial was the insertion of the two words 'without compensation'. Numsa's congress had in fact debated this in 1991 but decided then to remain silent on that key issue. However, this year regions chose to raise the same issue again. After nearly three hours of debate the matter was put to the vote and adopted by the relatively narrow margin of 455 to 312 votes.

The debate on the merits and demerits of nationalisation had largely subsided before this resolution was adopted by Numsa. This is not surprising given the total onslaught mounted by the majority of the media. However, nationalisation has been and will remain a necessary and legitimate instrument of economic policy. We need to remind white South Africa that they were not slow in nationalising to achieve similar objectives that we now say are central to the eradication of apartheid's socio-economic legacy.

NEED FOR AN ACTIVE STATE

What in essence is being addressed is the size, character and function of the public sector.

That this is a very necessary and important debate is now widely conceded. The state must and will play a role in socio-economic reconstruction.

The question of land is complex and emotive in South Africa. There can be no doubt that both urban and rural development require land reform if they are to succeed and be equitable. How can anyone possibly consider a situation where existing white landowners are allowed to profit from the need to use the land for development to meet the needs of the majority?

Racist legislation and forceful confiscation form the basis of existing land ownership patterns. It is immoral that as we now try and address the consequences of racism landowners should enjoy a second round of benefit in the form of a rent emerging from development. People may not agree with the proposal but it is a perfectly legitimate demand from those that have been dispossessed.

The prevailing complacency around development is dangerous. If existing landowners were to become wealthy at the expense of those who have suffered it could create massive political pressures. Land reform is essential and the nationalisation of land could well be the most effective means of achieving this.

The resolution on nationalisation also maintained that this should be done without compensation. This was a hotly debated issue in the congress.

UNITY OF THE LEFT

The need to build political unity on the Left was another important consideration at the congress.

The resolution adopted, recommended that 'Cosatu should now look at strengthening and uniting the working class inside and outside the factories; in urban and rural areas'. It reiterated our 1991 call for a 'conference on socialism' as well

as a 'conference of civil society'.

The dramatic events of the fall of 'actually existing socialism' in Eastern Europe need to be soberly looked at by the Left in the country. To date only the SACP and to a limited extent the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) and the International Socialists of South Africa (ISSA) have done some reflection on the crisis of existing socialism. Yet this issue has implications for everyone not least Cosatu which is committed to socialism and the ANC with its anti-imperialist traditions.

We need both a sober assessment of this crisis as well as the charting of a programme to take us out of this abyss. Such a process cannot be the monopoly of one organisation or individual, but must be a heterogeneous project of the entire left movement.

Numsa's congress resolved to:

- Look at new forms of organisation that will unify the working-class organisations and parties that will take forward a programme to implement socialism. This could take the form of a Working Class Party.
- Set into motion a concrete programme of action to address the needs of the unemployed and underemployed.
- Instead of simply calling conferences we want a mechanism to be put in place to monitor the decisions implemented after these two conferences. This mechanism must be based regionally and nationally.
- Implement the 1991 resolution on the unity of the Left. The Left (is) defined as those organisations with a programme reflecting the following:
 - commitment to control the means of production by the working class for the benefit of society as a whole
 - democracy
 - internationalism
 - anti-imperialism
 - non-racialism.

Anyone familiar with the South African Left will attest to the fact that it is divided. The divisions are at times ideological otherwise theoretical or on strategic questions. In Numsa we have all these left traditions within our ranks. That diversity has been a resource and has made our organisation a robust weapon in the struggle against capital. We are the living proof that diversity is healthy.

NEW FORMS OF ORGANISATION

It is within this context that we are calling for the left forces to unite. Our resolution stresses the need to look at 'new forms of organisation'. We then say that 'this could take the form of a Working Class Party'. But we are not wedded to any particular form at this stage. Possibilities include a front of left forces or one organisation. Much depends on the agreement reached with various left forces. The 'Working Class Party' is but one form.

The delegates who were mainly supporters of the SACP, felt that the SACP should play a leading role in this process together with left sections of the ANC as well as other left forces like WOSA and many independent socialists and social democrats. The essential objective of unity would be to begin to grapple with the struggle for socialism within the unfolding democratisation process; as well as the developing of socialist positions and programmes on concrete issues such as development policy, industrial efficiency, trade and so on.

This is not a call for movement by the left forces from the ANC, but as looking at the possibilities of strengthening the Left as a class force within the multiclass ANC. The struggle for the soul of the ANC is not in contradiction to the consolidation of the Left as a force.

The resolution must therefore be seen as a challenge to working-class forces in the ANC to reappraise the strategic meaning of the Alliance to seek ways of consolidating what has been achieved through the liberation movement and to relate it to the strategic goal of socialism. Our

position is therefore not backward looking but is forward looking; it is attempting to look at the challenges of the Left in the 1990s not in the 1980s.

NEW THINKING NEEDED

The present situation demands new thinking from the Left. We live in an era in which the post-1917 revolution process of transformation has to be relooked at. The unfolding democratisation process raises the question of how we will move towards socialism. Is socialism a far-away goal that awaits the storming of Pretoria? Or is it a moment in the deepening of the unfolding democratisation process?

We also need to re-examine and review the method and institutions (and their relationship) for socialism. Critically important is how we advance towards socialism. How useful in the present context is the concept of a vanguard? If it is no longer useful what should replace it and simultaneously be an effective organ?

Can a working class-biased party or movement be effective without at the same time falling into the trap of substitutionism, where activists (rather than ordinary workers) are the active element in the organisation? And what should be the role of political parties? Should it be to lead struggles by itself or should it be to focus on building organs of self-empowerment; relegating its role to an ideological and catalysing one, subordinated to this mass empowerment strategy? Should it do both and if so what should be the balance?

Can the notion of democratic centralism persist in the context of emerging plurality? Is it possible to have a cohesive organ within an uncohesive reality?

Numsa certainly does not have immediate answers to all these questions but the workers appeared to be looking for them when they resolved to 'look at new forms of organisation that will unify the working class'.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ANC

Numsa's congress also commented on the related issue of Cosatu's relationship with the ANC. It resolved that 'once an Interim Government of National Unity is established and the ANC is part of it, we should not have a formal alliance with the ANC. We should deal with the ANC as part of the government of the day through engagement in forums such as the NEF, NMC etc.'

The experience of communist countries where the trade unions were conveyor belts of the government is clear testimony that we have to rethink the basis of the alliance. We also have a long-standing tradition in Numsa and Cosatu of promoting union independence from government.

In our case, we believe that the formal status of the Alliance must end and that we should relate with the ANC as the government of the day. Ending the Alliance does not necessarily mean we will stop sharing political objectives with the ANC and the SACP. But in the pursuit of those objectives various social and political forces must have enough space and autonomy to pursue their objectives.

Just as leadership cannot be proclaimed but should be earned so a political party/movement of certain class forces should not be formalised, but must be an organic product of history. A formal alliance becomes more problematic when such formalisation acts as a barrier to the actual unity of the trade union movement both within the oppressed and across the race barriers. One of the reasons put by the NACTU-affiliated Metal & Electrical Workers Union (Mewusa) for delaying merger with Numsa is because of our alliance with the ANC and the SACP. There is still the difficult challenge of making inroads within the white working-class.

The question needs to be asked, are these objectives realisable within or outside of the Tripartite Alliance?

Another reason for ending the Alliance is that political and union organisation have different priorities and different forms of representation. Even in a working class-biased movement, imperatives of macro-economic considerations can result in policies which appear in the short term as inimical to workers resulting in a conflict of interests. In such situations, we believe autonomy will make it easier to discharge our natural duty of defending workers.

In the concrete conditions of our country what does ending the Alliance mean for the reconstruction accord? It is our view that ending a formal relationship doesn't mean an end to the relationship between the parties. But the relationship changes in two respects. Firstly, it becomes one between a movement/party and the entire organised working class, as against being a privileged relationship with Cosatu.

Secondly, the relationship becomes contingent; it is less informed by principles and more by concrete problems and issues at hand.

Will this lead to economism and what about the fight for a socialist conscious unionism? In any labour organisation the tendency towards economism and corporatism is always a possibility. But like all else in politics, it is a product of political struggles. In fact within the existing Alliance there is already developing within Cosatu, a tendency towards corporatism. Only a political battle can ensure that the tendency does not subsist. ^{LB}

Moses Mayekiso is a former Numsa general secretary.

Cosatu and the elections

Sakhela Buhlungu

reported on the pre-election interviews that he conducted all over South Africa to assess how Cosatu involved itself in the elections, and what the impact of that involvement had been on Cosatu. This article was published in Volume 18, Number 2, 1994.

BACKGROUND

In September last year Cosatu fired the first shots of the election campaign by announcing the names of 20 unionists to stand for election on an African National Congress (ANC) ticket. Since then the 1.25 million strong federation has thrown its full weight behind the ANC in what many of its members regarded as a liberation election in South Africa. Many South Africans observed the election campaign through the eyes of the mass media and election



Waiting to cast first ballot: Elderly women in a voting queue in Dithabaneng, Limpopo.

analysts who tended to focus on political leaders and major parties.

As a result the involvement and role of civil society organisations, particularly the trade unions, in these elections has been neglected. This article analyses the nature and extent of Cosatu's involvement in the ANC's election campaign and the impact thereof on the federation's organisational structures and resources. It concludes by looking at the challenges and issues facing the country's biggest and most influential union federation in the post-election period and beyond.

Debates within Cosatu on the relationship between the federation and the ANC did not start with the election campaign. In the 1980s one of the major debates in the unions was the relationship of unions to politics. At the 1987 National Congress of Cosatu an uneasy consensus was arrived at by the major tendencies within the federation when they adopted the Freedom Charter and acknowledged that unions had a role in politics and that national liberation was an important phase of the struggle towards a society free of oppression and exploitation.

The importance of this accommodation among the tendencies was twofold. Firstly, it laid the basis for what was to become the Tripartite Alliance between the Cosatu, the ANC and

the South African Communist Party (SACP). Secondly, it laid a basis for what was to become a consensus position when the federation's structures were debating whether or not to support the ANC in the elections. Thus when the time arrived for Cosatu to take a decision the key question was not whether or not to back the ANC, but how to do it in such a way that such support also benefitted Cosatu and its members. For this reason Cosatu's involvement in the election campaign was not just a matter of backing the ANC for its own sake. It was a series of different, but related interventions.

COSATU'S INTERVENTIONS

Cosatu's involvement in the 1994 elections should be viewed in terms of three separate but, related interventions, namely the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the union candidates on the ANC lists, and voter education and canvassing for an ANC victory.

RDP

It is a measure of Cosatu's influence in our country generally that the RDP has not only been adopted by the ANC and other civil society organisations as a basis for building a new future but it is also accepted by many others as the only plan at present that holds hope for reconstruction of South Africa.

The RDP is the brainchild of Cosatu. Initially it was conceived of as a pact that would be signed between the ANC and Cosatu with the objective of binding the ANC to specific agreements while the federation would undertake to deliver votes for the ANC. However, as discussion deepened it was felt that such a programme should go beyond just the ANC and Cosatu and be a unifying plan which would also include civil society and other parties and organisations. Thus the RDP formed the basis of the ANC's election manifesto and has been the basis of engaging many other forces including business in debates about the economy and the future. As an intervention the RDP offers the following opportunities to Cosatu:

- It enables Cosatu to gain maximum benefit from the Tripartite Alliance, so that the Alliance does not end with delivering votes for the ANC.
- Cosatu will seek to hold the new ANC government to the plan. It offers Cosatu members a yardstick by which to measure the ANC's performance in government.
- For these reasons the federation's influence over the new government will continue.
- Through the RDP Cosatu has managed to influence the agenda of the transition generally.

- The RDP offers Cosatu the opportunity to get government backing for its key objectives (centralised bargaining, worker rights, affirmative action etc.) as well as access to state resources (research, education and training etc.).

Candidates on ANC lists

After the announcement of the first 20 union candidates last September many more Cosatu leaders were nominated to stand as ANC candidates for regional parliaments. In regions like the Eastern Cape where new local government structures are being established Cosatu unionists formed part of the ANC lists. As early as May 1992 Cosatu was already considering this option. Cosatu's national negotiations coordinator, Jayendra Naidoo, explained at the time. 'Cosatu will not come to the elections. However, the CEC has discussed releasing people from the leadership of Cosatu to be available to stand for election to the Constituent Assembly on an ANC platform if we are approached by them.'

This option offered a number of opportunities to Cosatu and the labour movement in general:

- People trusted by workers will occupy key policy-making institutions at all levels of government.
- For the first time workers may have access to sympathetic decision-makers many of whom will feel obliged to keep the union informed about discussions in decision-making structures.
- The union nominees are better placed to understand the concerns and aspirations of workers. Many of them are the architects of the RDP.
- Union nominees come from a tradition which respects principles of accountability particularly mandates and report backs. Prominent union candidate and former Cosatu general secretary, Jay Naidoo has indicated publicly that he will seriously consider other options including resigning his seat, if the new government becomes unaccountable or if it deliberately fails to honour the RDP and worker rights.

Voter education and canvassing for an ANC victory

The decision to do voter education and to canvass voters for an ANC

victory flowed from the other elements of Cosatu's intervention discussed earlier. Apart from giving a big boost to the ANC campaign it held out a number of other opportunities to Cosatu:

- Union leadership had an opportunity to re-establish contact with membership through factory general meetings, workers' forums and other meetings. This was an important thing in itself particularly in view of the fact that leadership had publicly acknowledged the existence of a gap between leadership and rank and file.
- McVicar Dyasopu, CWIU official in Port Elizabeth admits that in 1993 their union structures were 'seriously collapsing'. He says that after the union and Cosatu embarked on the election campaign there was noticeable improvement, particularly with regard to shop stewards' attendance of locals. In Durban former Cosatu regional chairperson, now a candidate and the regional assembly, Samuel Mthethwa pointed to the establishment of a new Cosatu local in Tongaat as one of the gains the federation



Voters from Dithabaneng village in Limpopo wait to cast their ballots in the first democratic elections in 1994.

William Matlala

has made out of the campaign. Clearly therefore involvement in the campaign offered Cosatu an opportunity to recruit new members, mobilise old members and revitalise its structures.

- Cosatu and its unions are effective in defending worker rights and fighting for better wages and conditions of work on the shop floor and beyond. Cosatu has launched the biggest and most powerful campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s like the LRA campaign the anti-VAT campaign, etc. In addition to a solid track record the federation and its leadership have not been tarnished by corruption or abuse of power. During the election campaign it has cleverly used this credibility using the slogan 'Cosatu, the workers' voice. ANC the workers' choice' to win votes for the ANC. There is no doubt therefore that Cosatu has brought in many votes for the ANC.

In concluding this section on Cosatu's strategic interventions it is important to make certain general observations regarding Cosatu and the elections:

1. By getting involved in the election campaign Cosatu has been able to bring its solid track record of struggle as one of the key determinants of the election outcome. The federation has been visible before and throughout the transition period (e.g. anti-VAT general strike 1991, Chris Hani stayaways 1991) and has been instrumental in using mass action to unlock the transition process when it seemed to stall (rolling mass action 1992).
2. Of all the parties contesting the election the ANC was the only one to be supported by a strong mass-based organisation like Cosatu. This was not only a key determinant of the election result but it will make it very difficult for the ANC to sideline the federation after the elections.

This will be more so because the ANC will still need Cosatu's support over the next five years in order to succeed in implementing its plans.

3. Even if Cosatu scales down its political involvement after the election it will have put its stamp to the transition, through mass actions and by helping install an ANC government into power.
4. Cosatu has been able to devote personnel and resources to the election campaign on a large scale while still carrying on with normal union work. This is in spite of the fact that some of its affiliates have limited financial and human resources. Creativity, resourcefulness and resilience are qualities that the federation has built from experience in campaigns during the dark days of apartheid repression.
5. Finally, it is important to note here that Cosatu's decision to support the ANC was taken unanimously. No splits or major divisions have been occasioned by the decision in the federation or any of its affiliates. On the contrary the campaign has served to cement the federation, at least for the present moment. All the union officials, local and regional worker leaders and candidates interviewed were unanimous that the decision to support the ANC in this election was a wise one, 'Cosatu had no choice', said CWIU's national education officer and assistant election coordinator, Chris Bonner. 'It would have been very difficult to stand back.'

THE IMPACT OF THE ELECTIONS ON COSATU

It will take a long time before the full impact of the election on the federation can be felt and its implications fully understood. However, there are issues and trends that can be observed already. Below I attempt to analyse the impact of the election in terms of certain themes.

Members and structures

From the start of voter education activities late last year the campaign has enabled Cosatu and its affiliates to reach thousands of their members. The effect of which has been that many members have been mobilised and their interest in union activities revived, at least for the time being. The Eastern Cape seems to be the region where unions have been most successful in mobilising members around the elections. A series of workers' forums were held throughout the region. Attendance was generally very good.

According to Vo Tyibilika Cosatu's new regional secretary so successful were the forums in the region that they were beginning to raise the issue of solidarity, and he gives the Sappi strike in March as a case in point. Tyibilika says the forums were also instrumental in orchestrating mass actions to push employers to accept demands around voter education. Unionists in the region are now discussing the possibility of making the forums a permanent feature of Cosatu's organisation at industrial area level along the lines of what used to be called industrial area committees in the late 1980s.

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) national organiser, Gavin Hartford, who is based in the Eastern Cape also agrees that the election campaign has led to important improvements in union structures. He gives the example of the Numsa's Uitenhage local which had collapsed but has now been resuscitated as a result of workers' involvement in the election campaign.

Many other union leaders and officials also report some noticeable improvements in union structures. Others, like South African Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu) in Durban and Saccawu in Cape Town also claim to have recruited a number of new members as a result of mobilisation achieved. However, most unionists admit that the process of involving workers

and mobilising is a slow one. Also, as all unions were busy with voter education and campaigning, few of them have had time to assess so as to give accurate information regarding gains and achievements. The biggest gain recorded is that of Sadtu in Southern Natal which claims to have recruited about 12,000 new teachers from late last year to early in March this year.

In general, however, two points can be made about the effect of the campaign on membership and structures. The one is that the mobilisation achieved in the process of the campaign has not translated into large membership gains for most unions. Even the Sadtu achievement, which stands out as an exception, seems to be a result of the collapse of the homelands rather than the election campaign per se. The second is that the campaign has not had a significant positive impact on union structures in general. Cases where there have been improvements are few and far between.

Even where there have been notable improvements in structures it is still doubtful if these improvements can be sustained beyond the elections because the causes of the earlier collapse of structures have not been resolved. The enthusiasm and energy generated by the campaign may soon dissipate after the elections.

Servicing of members

There is no doubt that union activities, particularly the servicing of members, have been adversely affected by the election campaign. Every union released at least one full-time official and some shop stewards in each region and even at national level to work on elections. In addition, some unions, like PPWAWU in the Eastern Cape, instructed their officials to do some canvassing in between their normal union work. Former Cosatu Western Cape regional secretary, and candidate in the regional assembly, Jonathan Arendse, acknowledges

that unions have had to postpone 'non-essential union work' because of the elections.

Potwa's Eastern Cape regional secretary, Mxolisi Mashwabane, says his union found it difficult to cope with union work, 'The Cosatu resolution said that officials must focus on the campaign. We have been attending and addressing workers' forums. Partially day-to-day issues have not been taken up as before. For example, some hearings (of members at factories) are not attended, some management meetings are not attended and we are not being in touch as usual. It is a problem particularly in unions with few staff in big regions. It was very difficult to cope.'

Another level where gaps have appeared as a result of secondment to elections was that of shop stewards. On the shop floor it is the shop stewards who attend to the day-to-day grievances and cases of workers before union officials intervene. They are part of the servicing machinery of the union. Themba Mfeka, PPWAWU's assistant general secretary, explains the problem, 'Shop stewards are influential people in union structures. So this secondment had a negative impact in union structures.'

Unionists seconded to the election effort (ANC, Cosatu elections teams, IEC etc.) ranged from shop stewards to local organisers, administrators, regional secretaries, education officers and even general secretaries. Others who occupied similar positions are now elected reps in the various regions and at national level. Unionists see the campaign as a temporary, once-off event and believe it is a worthwhile sacrifice. However, there is no doubt that the backlogs of the last four months or so will begin to weigh down heavily on unions now that the election is over.

Leadership

The major effect of Cosatu's decision to put some of its leaders on the ANC's lists is the loss of many

union leaders. The importance of these unionists was twofold. Firstly, they were experienced, long-serving unionists many of whom have been in the labour movement for close to 20 years. In many ways they were the bearers of the traditions that have sustained their unions and the federation through dark and difficult days.

In the eyes of millions of workers and the world some, like Jay Naidoo, had become the personification of Cosatu itself. Secondly, Cosatu has lost key strategists who will be sorely missed as the labour movement grapples with mapping out a new vision that will guide it into an uncertain future.

While most unions and Cosatu regions have replaced all the departed leaders with what is known as 'second layer leadership' Salie Manie, formerly of the South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) and now ANC candidate in the Western Cape, believes that replacing a leader is not as simple as putting a person in the place of another. He believes the vacuum left by the candidates will soon be felt. He makes an example of himself. He was chairperson of Samwu in Cape Town, Samwu NEC member and national coordinator of Cosatu's economic task force. Manie says that the union (and Cosatu) will find it very difficult to find one person to fill all his previous positions. 'The union and Cosatu, invested years of education in me before I could be able to fulfil these responsibilities. So I do not think you can just take any worker and expect him/her to perform all those duties effectively within a short time.' ■

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Ceppwawu's night of the long knives

The impact of the split within the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (Ceppwawu) last year was clearly reflected in the case study published in the previous *Labour Bulletin*. **John Apolis**, one of the key union officials initially suspended, and then dismissed, from the union, gives a personal account of what happened and what he calls a 'political purge'.

It is now close to a year since the national leadership of Ceppwawu embarked on a political purge in its Witwatersrand region, the biggest region. The purge involved the suspension and subsequent dismissal of the entire regional office bearers, including the regional secretary, the dismissal of the majority of the union officials in the Wits region and the suspension of many shop stewards. Many of the suspended and dismissed shop stewards and union officials were long-standing militants in the union and Cosatu. This political purge caused hundreds of shop stewards and members to leave the union.

SUSPENSIONS

On 6 May last year the national executive committee (NEC) of Ceppwawu suspended four Wits regional office bearers (ROBs) and three NEC delegates from the Wits region. The NEC also decided that the national leadership must take over the running of the region and appointed two officials (nicknamed the 'Bush Regime') to take over the functions of the

suspended regional secretary. The main reason advanced for the suspension was that the Wits region failed to facilitate an investigation into a controversial proposal 'Call for a Workers' Referendum on the Alliance and 2004 National Elections', contained in a Wits Regional Discussion Document. The regional leadership was accused of not facilitating the visit of the national leadership to Wits Regional Locals so that the investigation could be undertaken.

The Wits region, involving hundreds of shop stewards, rejected outright any investigation into the 'Call for a Workers Referendum', saying it amounted to political intimidation and suppression of democratic voices in the union. Instead, the Wits Region demanded that the national leadership come to a regional shop steward council to hear the voice of shop stewards on the rejection of the investigation was a mandated position and for daring to put this mandate to the NEC, the regional leadership was suspended and subsequently dismissed.

BACKGROUND TO THE REFERENDUM

The call for a workers' referendum arose out of a comprehensive assessment of worker responses to the Cosatu October 2001 two-day general strike against privatisation. The Wits region and its five Local Shop Stewards Councils observed two distinct forms of response to the general strike on the part of union members.

Firstly, there were sections of union members who actively took up the 'call to arms' by Cosatu and participated in the marches on the first day of the general strikes especially in Johannesburg. This support was sparked off by the privatisation, particularly of Telkom, and the political attacks launched against Cosatu by President Thabo Mbeki. The political labelling of Cosatu leaders as ultra-leftists by the ANC president jolted the workers into active defence of the federation. In fact barely a week before the general strike there were real concerns within Cosatu that many workers might not respond to the strike call because of the low level of activity in unions. The support for the strike translated into a vote of no



John Apollis speaks at a meeting.

confidence in the ANC government.

Secondly, there were sections of union members who did not heed the strike call. Although opposed to privatisation, these workers wanted to send a political message to Cosatu through their non-participation. Many thought (and probably still think) the Tripartite Alliance is a dead weight on the ability of the federation to fight privatisation and other anti-working class ANC policies. For these workers it does not make sense to be in the same political bed as the agency that is driving privatisation.

Those sentiments were not far off the mark because, before and during the general strike, the leading lights of Cosatu were at pains to pour cold water onto the hot political feelings of workers. Statements were attributed to the federation that 'the strike is not political'; 'the strike is not directed at the ANC and the government'. These statements not only sent confusing signals to union members, they also amounted to an attempt to de-politicise a very political issue.

The proposal for a workers' referendum on the alliance and 2004 elections was, therefore, an attempt

to close the widening gap between union members and their leadership. It was mooted to ensure that the voice of union members found an echo within Ceppwawu and Cosatu, and that their voice reflected the political crossroads reached by the trade union movement.

It was hoped that through the workers' referendum Cosatu could prepare in a mass way for its upcoming national congress in September 2003. From developments over the past years the mass involvement of union members in political decisions of Cosatu has become a matter of life and death for the trade union movement. A notion has grown amongst workers that the federation is merely using them, because between elections Cosatu engages in fierce class battles with the ANC government but when the national election approaches, Cosatu is turned into the ANC's election machine.

Instead of facilitating a democratic debate on the workers' referendum, the Ceppwawu national leadership embarked on a political witch-hunt by calling for an investigation into the workers' referendum.

RESISTANCE TO THE SUSPENSION

There was concerted resistance to the suspension of the Wits regional leadership. The majority of the shop stewards in the region and the union officials (organisers and administrators) rejected the suspension. The union's national treasurer resigned in solidarity with the Wits region's rejection.

Resistance to the suspension took different forms but the main aim was to get the suspensions lifted. For instance, a committee of the majority of local chairpersons took over the running of the region in opposition to the imposed 'Bush Regime'. Union members suspended their subscriptions and marches were organised to the union head office as well as a special NEC. A major part of the resistance of the campaign was a programme of non-cooperation with the national leadership and the 'Bush Regime' so that meetings convened by them were boycotted by shop stewards causing many meetings not to function.

RESPONSE FROM NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The national leadership responded in a typical bureaucratic fashion. They told members that failure to pay membership fees would mean they were no longer union members; they called the South African Police Service (Saps) to guard meetings and even used members of the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (Popcru) for this purpose. The leadership went so far as to lock the offices and put in security guards and banned the distribution of alternative information in other regions and locals. They also instituted a defamation suit against one of the local office bearers – suing for R500,000 – and sought and failed to obtain a Labour Court interdict to prevent me from acting as a regional secretary. The national leadership ignored a Labour Court order that declared the suspension of the regional leadership unconstitutional and suspended the regional leadership for a second time. Our

struggles for democracy and freedom of expression were rubbished as that of an Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) inspired split.

AT THE HEART OF THE STRUGGLES

The Wits region was in the forefront in ensuring that Ceppwawu remained strong and vibrant. However, in most cases the region was increasingly regarded as a political problem by the national leadership. To illustrate this, the following two issues will be highlighted:

Financial mismanagement

During 2000 it became clear that the union was in a serious financial crisis that was largely due to mismanagement which allowed huge overspending. This financial crisis resulted in workers having to pay a once-off levy of R20.

The Wits region challenged this mismanagement of worker money and proposed a vote of no-confidence in the national leadership. This was rejected by the NEC in April 2001, and it was decided that the vote of no-confidence proposal should be investigated. Again the aim of the investigation was to intimidate and suppress critical views within the union. The national leadership came to a Wits Regional Shop Steward Council where they were told in very strong terms that the vote of no-confidence was a regional mandated position. They were also told not to waste union monies by conducting useless investigations.

Masibambane Unemployed Project (MUP)

In April 2002, the Wits region started an initiative to organise retrenched and dismissed members of Ceppwawu in line with a decision taken at its regional congress in 2001. This initiative formed part of an attempt to organise the unemployed and bring about unity between the employed and unemployed. The MUP together with the Wits region initiated the 'First Preference Campaign' where employers were pressurised to re-employ retrenched

workers when job opportunities arose. Many marches to companies were organised. The region also took up the pension fund surplus issue as a way of organising the union's unemployed members. This organising drive led to the formation of committees of the MUP in Tsakane, Kwathema, Katilehong and Tembisa. However, the MUP was viewed by the union leadership as a political problem and they attempted to close it down. They claimed it was a front of the APF.

INSTRUMENT OF SUPPRESSION?

More and more, the national leadership was transforming Ceppwawu into an instrument of political suppression. The national leadership went so far as to prohibit people from belonging to other organisations and speaking on behalf of these organisations. For instance, at the NEC that decided on the investigation into the workers' referendum, a resolution was passed stating that no elected leader of the union must use any public platform/organisation to articulate views contrary to the union's views. The resolution goes further and states that no region can use the service of any organisation or institution that is against the Tripartite Alliance.

The political witch hunt started well before the suspension of the regional leadership. Following the workers' referendum and the continuation of the MUP, I, as the Wits regional secretary, was accused of being 'incompatible' with the tradition, culture and views of the union. During a meeting with the union's leadership in February 2003, it was stated that 'as his immediate supervisors' the leadership had noted that the Wits region's views of the workers' referendum and MUP are not in line with the union views. They demanded to know what his role as an employee (and supervisor in the region) was in ensuring that workers and shop stewards complied with union policies. It was evident that the Ceppwawu leadership was attempting to resort to capitalist

values and measures in order to suppress democratic voices within the union.

COSATU'S ROLE

Cosatu's national leadership played a problematic role in the union's internal struggle. Without listening to both sides, the Cosatu leadership sided with the Ceppwawu bureaucracy. In fact, the shop stewards and suspended comrades of the Wits region wrote a letter to Cosatu's national and regional leadership requesting a meeting to put their side of the story. In addition, documents outlining the issues involved in the struggle were also sent to Cosatu. This one-sided support is in direct contrast with the ways in which the federation normally deals with internal union struggles. Normally, attempts are made to get all the facts and commissions set up to determine the truth. This has not been the case.

The only logical explanation for this one-sided response is that the national leadership knew the issues at stake were very important politically. Cosatu leaders know that many workers in the federation and other unions share our sentiments on the political issues in our country. It is clear the Cosatu leadership was not prepared to be seen to be allowing differing views within Ceppwawu - in particular views that were critical of the federation's political orientation.

BUREAUCRATISATION OF UNIONS

As stated above, our struggle was not about splitting the union and dividing workers. Rather our struggle was about ensuring that Ceppwawu remained militant, democratic and worker-controlled. At the centre of the internal struggle was the issue of whether people with differing political views have the freedom of expression to put forward their views within the organisation. Political allegiances were never an obstacle to worker unity. Political tolerance was one of the cornerstones of the trade union movement which flourished

over the years within the context of vigorous political differences. The bureaucratic suppression of our democratic voice, the suspension and dismissals, created disunity and the weakening of the union.

CONCLUSION

The struggle within Ceppwawu, and Cosatu's role, is a reflection of the increasing bureaucratisation and ossification of the labour movement.

For the leading bodies of the federation, the continuance of the Tripartite Alliance has become a matter of life and death for their existence as a privileged union bureaucracy. What should be recognised is that this union bureaucracy derives its social status exclusively from being a partner within the ruling bloc of the ANC. Their social and material status in society is thus dependent on them occupying a place within the ruling bloc. But to be able to occupy this place within the ruling bloc they must ensure that the labour movement is subordinated to the hegemony of the ANC government.

There has therefore developed a growing and deepening symbiosis between the union leadership and the ANC government. This symbiotic relationship is not about the politics or ideals of emancipation of the working class but about the preservation of the privileged material positions of the union bureaucracy. To a large extent it is this relationship that is driving the union leadership to become more and more intolerant of critical voices within the labour movement. Our call for a workers' referendum was a threat to this political arrangement. ■

John Apolis is the former Wits regional secretary of Ceppwawu and the current Wits regional secretary for General Industries Workers Union of South Africa.

Whither the enigmatic Cosatu

Zuma love relationship

When many thought it was necessary for Cosatu to review its enthusiastic but enigmatic support for Zuma in light of the damning Squires' judgment, we had yet another bizarre manifestation of such support. **Ebrahim Harvey** reviews the Cosatu decision to call on Mbeki to drop the charges against Zuma. This article was published in Volume 29, Number 5, 2005.

In fact the Squires judgment so seriously implicates Zuma that it has probably irreparably compromised him in the eyes of the broader public, even if he was not dismissed as deputy president of the country by President Thabo Mbeki a few months ago. That Cosatu took such a decision despite this dismissal and the charges brought against Zuma has made their continued support for him even more untenable. Earlier they demanded that if indeed the state has a case against Zuma they should charge him and bring him before a court of law. But when he was charged they wanted the charges against him to be dropped.

If they were confident of Zuma's innocence why make such a preposterous call?

However, whatever happens to Zuma cannot deflect from the troubling question mark that hangs over the inexplicably close relationship between him and Cosatu. The unswerving support Cosatu has boisterously given Zuma demands clear answers which have not been given so far, aside from ongoing and mutating conjecture, innuendo and vagueness.

Furthermore, there are probably more compelling reasons to question the integrity of Cosatu's support for Zuma. For a socialist federation that has a strong stand against corruption and for democratic accountability and transparency Cosatu's support for Zuma was and is intriguing. Nowhere have we seen a strong argument by them for such

For a socialist federation that has a strong stand against corruption and for democratic accountability and transparency Cosatu's support for Zuma was and is intriguing.

support, but perhaps most surprising was their support for him to succeed President Thabo Mbeki in 2009 even after the Squires judgment. Is there something about Zuma that we don't know or understand that can explain such support? What has he done to help Cosatu resist and repel the conscious and ongoing attempts by centrist and right-wing elements to marginalise them in the ANC alliance? Not once has he publicly supported Cosatu on economic policy, their stance on AIDS and Zimbabwe or when they were attacked as 'ultra-left' by Mbeki. That is what counts, not vague behind-the-scenes talk of support or that he is more 'open' and 'approachable' than Mbeki.

There is no tangible political policy and ideological evidence that distinguished Zuma from the rest of the neo-liberal ANC-led government to deserve Cosatu's support. Furthermore, he did not support Cosatu's fight against privatisation and retrenchments in the public sector, which resulted in them losing many thousands of jobs, members and much of their strength. Besides, his extravagant lifestyle and implicit connivance in acts of corruption with Shaik, which may have fed it, cannot be condoned by a socialist Cosatu.

What are Zuma's leftist credentials? That he was once a shop steward? This can hardly be grounds for a leftism that is little more than a populist shell. In fact it was Zuma, as head of government affairs in

parliament who harshly reined in any dissenting ANC MPs and as chairperson of the ANC's deployment committee also reined in critical voices or had them demoted.

It is time for Cosatu to unambiguously state what their support for Zuma is based on, how their socialist policies were being advanced by him, and why they want him to succeed Mbeki in 2009. For too long have they done little to explain their support for him, when there was little to justify it. We need a clear and strong explanation and not rhetoric about Zuma's popularity with the 'masses' and a conspiracy within the ANC to discredit him in order that he not succeed Mbeki as president of the country in 2009. Besides, the support

of workers does not contain impeccable logic not subject to wider public scrutiny, especially when it appears to contradict their own interests.

Cosatu and their allies must put aside facile racial and conspiracy theories behind the Squires judgment and media coverage of it and instead explain to and enlighten the public on the rationale of their support for Zuma. Instead of peddling leftist illusions about Zuma, Cosatu should build unity with social movements and thereby achieve what their relationship with Zuma cannot. Cosatu's faith in Zuma was and is dangerously misplaced. ^{LB}

Ebrahim Harvey is a political writer and former Cosatu unionist.



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Crouching comrades, hidden dialogue

Interpreting the public service strike

What is a political strike? Where did government underestimate or trip over its own feet? Why hasn't government shared relevant information with trade unions? What was the cost to society? What is the possible significance of the strike? These are some of the questions that **Ebrahim-Khalil Hassen** explored in this thoughtful article around the June public service strike. This article was published in Volume 31, Number 3, 2007.

The Chinese have a saying 'like a coiling dragon and a crouching tiger' to represent a forbidding strategic point. The saying provided the title for the martial arts classic *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The film marks a departure from the good versus bad stories in action movies, introducing philosophical reflections, challenging gender roles and ending with ambiguity. Afflicting blows in martial arts resonates with the 2007 public service strike, and sometimes the toy-toy of workers came close to the grace of martial arts.

However, it is the contest between strong unions, and a strong government that raises the possibility of an inviting, rather than the current forbidding, strategic point for public service reform. Can the strike catalyse a systemic change in relations between government and unions, which in turn improves service delivery and redistribution by the public service? Or is it simply a case of dragons spitting fire, and tigers sharpening claws?

POLITICAL STRIKE

In a year in which succession for the African National Congress (ANC) presidency dominates public

imagination, there have been attempts to link the strike to succession battles.

Some argue that the strike represents a 'push for Jacob Zuma', a reference both to support for Zuma and the initial wage demand of unions. Given a highly charged, contested but insulated process of selecting leadership in the ANC the temptation to link the strike with ANC politics is understandable. There are sections across the Tripartite Alliance that argue that 'all roads lead to Polokwane' (venue of ANC national congress). However, this grouping has failed to exert as strong an influence over the strike as has been suggested. Media reports tell that attempts to sing slogans supporting one 'candidate' were met with muted responses from workers, and unionists have been tough on propaganda advancing this or that candidate. Instead, the strike is political in the sense of unions attempting to reconfigure power relations.

The public sector has been a battleground between unions and government. This strike follows strikes in Transnet, local government, and the public service itself. Furthermore, general strikes called by the Congress of South African Trade Unions

(Cosatu) have supported its anti-privatisation stance, and jobs and poverty campaigns have targeted government and the private sector. In this sense, the strike is not unusual as it represents a wide gulf between organised workers and the state on economic policy, salaries and restructuring.

Unions have often lost these battles, captured in the unilateral implementation of wages in 1999 by the Minister of Public Service and Administration. The unilateral implementation marked a turning point in the power balance between unions and government in the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council.

Underlying the unilateral implementation was an attack on unions. The ANC released its infamous 'Briefing Notes' which argued that unions (read Cosatu) were playing a too political role, and that they were antagonistic to the democratic government. Unions however argued that there were fundamental challenges that workers and the unemployed were facing, resulting in unions developing strategies to resist what some call 'neo-liberal restructuring'.

Over the years, public service unions have recognised that power in collective bargaining has swung to the employer and they have grappled with finding conditions that will alter the power relations.

At a macro-level, there is a remarkable consensus across different union federations that workers have not done as well as they could. Workers' share of a growing economy has proven a mechanism on which to build solidarity across racial and historical divides in organised labour.

Unions in the public sector reflect the heterogeneity of identities, histories and perspectives amongst trade unions. Crudely these are unions that have roots in staff associations created under apartheid, and the so-called 'struggle unions'. Traditionally this meant that white workers belonged to one union, and black workers to another.

In previous bargaining rounds, strike action has been limited by the unwillingness of unions outside Cosatu to undertake protracted action. In the current strike, two contending forces have coalesced to build common platforms. The first is that bruising battles between government and unions has made workers battle-hardened, a key requirement to building a wider working-class identity. The second trend is that during wage negotiations there have been two strong coordinating centres amongst unions – Cosatu and the Independent Labour Caucus – which has facilitated joint action and decision-making whilst providing the different unions space to debate within their traditions.

Even under these conditions however, the ability of public service workers to mobilise has always been questioned. It was thought that public service workers would not go out for more than a day or two because they were better off than other workers, or because they lacked the harshness of the capitalist process to radicalise their consciousness. It was customary in union circles to speak of public service workers having a 'false consciousness' or to describe them

as an 'elephant that could not even trample grass'. After three weeks of strike action and high levels of unity across unions, public service workers are finally beginning to flex their muscle.

More significantly, this is a strike that has been driven from below.

In discussions with national union leaders and shop stewards, one of the difficulties in settling at a particular wage has been pressure from below. Whilst it is common in strikes for workers to overestimate their bargaining position through seeing institutions not working and the camaraderie of marching beside other workers, in this strike union leadership has underestimated the commitment of workers on the ground. This is not a romantic statement of workers being more radical than their leaders, but rather that there has been a radicalisation of public service workers. Worker leaders in communities have been at the forefront of resisting the imposition of political agendas, and scoffing at suggested settlements.

While workers have sought to sharpen contradictions, government's communication strategy marks a change from the bluster of previous strikes, with an emphasis on reaching agreement. A concerted media offensive only came after the end of the first week of the strike, possibly due to government assuming that the strike would fizzle out after two days. Moreover, due to government's unwillingness to sign essential services agreements, there might have been an assumption that service delivery would not be affected. Even when dismissal letters were issued, government advanced a balanced perspective. One explanation might be that the media missed the realities that the succession battles might affect those in power, more than workers.

MANDATES FOR CHANGE

The Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA) must recognise that public service reform will require the support of unions. The

development of the 'occupational specific dispensation' (OSD) is broadly consistent with labour proposals tabled at the Public Service Jobs Summit.

The OSD is an attempt to regrade jobs in the public service so as to attract people and retain skills in the public service. It offers an opportunity for unions to negotiate the value of jobs, and implement the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. This is important as public service workers, especially teachers and nurses, are underpaid in relation to their counterparts in the private sector, as well as the international market for their skills.

Ironically, this marks the DPSA's first significant mandate for change in grading structures since 1999. It is however a case of too little, too late as unions have not been consulted on highly developed proposals. Without a process of engagement, ideally outside bargaining chambers, the broad trajectory of public service reform cannot be developed. A shared stance is needed if public service reform is to be systemic, and to focus on using the service to break poverty.

Whilst a government and union coalition for change is an important element of implementing a reform programme, in the cut and thrust of salary negotiations it is the mandates of politicians that matters. Government's mandating committee, consisting of several ministers, did not provide the flexibility and leadership to their negotiators to continue negotiations. Consequently, there was a long delay in government revising its opening offer. This time delay of around two months provided an important space for union organisers to mobilise their constituencies. More importantly, it limited dialogue on key features of a possible settlement in areas where government had done extensive work, such as in the health sector where there are well developed proposals for grading workers, and for career progression. This showed poor leadership of negotiations and weakened government's ability to keep unions at the table.

TIMING AND VALUES

Strikes are tactical – an instrument to move an agenda. Once government had tabled a revised offer, there was significant movement. As the strike bit, government moved first from 5.3 to 6.5, then 7.25 and then to 7.5 based on mediators' proposals.

The movement over three weeks was astonishing, given the need to balance its budget, and increase social spending. A percentage increase amounted to about R1,8-billion. In addition, workers made gains through the housing subsidy which was revised upwards.

There is thus little doubt that government either underestimated the intensity of strike action, or alternatively was forced to move from the position of an inflation-linked increase only to an actual percentage increase. It raises questions on what guides government in wage negotiations. Government's bargaining strategy perceives workers as representing a narrow interest that would be uninterested in a broader reform programme. However, in a polarised society unions have a strong voice on policy issues and thus have wider social interests. Government needs to represent the values of a developmental state that both includes powerful social actors, and leads the country.

Unions also need to reflect on the values they bring to the table. Government and unions have agreed to establish the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS). It represents an important step towards creating a publicly provided medical aid. Yet, unions with an explicitly socialist position have been arguing for benefits which are placed with strictly private sector medical aid companies. Unions might have legitimate concerns on GEMS' benefits and coverage, but these are outweighed by the need to transform medical insurance from the preserve of selected private companies, to more publicly

accessible provisions. It is the task of union leaders to convince the small but vocal sections of workers to move into GEMS, rather than remain with private providers.

One area that raises ethical dilemmas is the question of essential services. Many have questioned the work ethic of essential workers who have left their jobs. It is easy to become incredulous at a nurse leaving her station where there are sick people. On the other hand, unions argue that government has failed to sign essential services agreements. This, according to unions, is a strategy for government to keep strike numbers small as most health and policing jobs are classified essential services. These are complex ethical questions including why nurses would risk dismissal as they are unprotected, according to some legal opinions. These ethical ambiguities need to be resolved through essential services agreements.

A surprising feature of the strike has been that public support has tended towards trade unions. South Africans share a sense that workers in teaching, nursing and policing should be paid more.

IMPACTS

Beyond the usual bickering over numbers of workers on strike, there are indications that the strike had major impacts. Most surprisingly, is that the usually docile ANC parliamentary caucus questioned ministers as to why they were not kept informed and castigated government for negotiating in bad faith. The inability of parliament to have a meaningful impact on the strike must raise questions around participatory governance and its ability to hold the executive accountable.

Parliament however serves as a point to record military deployments. President Mbeki indicated that 300,000 military personnel were deployed. They provided security and support services to keep public services running.

The economic impact was measured half-way into the strike at around R3-billion according to asset management companies. Moreover, there were significant disruptions to normal business operations, with at least one company indicating a disruption directly linked to the strike. However, markets were unmoved by the strike and had little impact on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. It reminds unions that even in the face of the largest strike since democracy it will take a lot more to shake capital. The wider impact of the strike on economics, is that the question of 'political uncertainty' was raised by credit agencies as a growing risk. The strike might feed into a picture of growing political uncertainty, ostensibly because we have not figured out questions around succession.

Trevor Manuel summarised the broader costs to society thus: 'You may be saving money on bandages and drugs not administered and salaries not paid but I think there are different kinds of costs that you need to be aware of in society.'

Obviously in the strike context there is an element of propaganda to tell the public about uncaring workers, but Minister Manuel is right that there are wider costs. Public services are mainly used by working-class communities. The question these communities need to ask is: 'Are there enough drugs and bandages to provide an excellent service on a normal day?' The answer in many cases is no. It is this daily reality that unions and government must address. It is this common goal of a public service that breaks poverty traps that might turn the public service strike from a forbidding strategic point, to an inviting one. ^{LB}

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Strikers, professionals and patients

Negotiating essential services on the ground

The surgical Division at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital (CHB) in Soweto signed an innovative minimum services agreement with unions before the public sector strike in June. **Karl von Holdt** gives a day-by-day account of its progress in the unit, and despite problems brings out some exciting possibilities for managing strikes in essential services. This article was published in Volume 31, Number 5, 2008.

MID-MAY 2007

A public sector strike looks increasingly likely. The Executive Committee (Exco) of the Surgical Division at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital (CHB) is meeting, and the strike is on the agenda.

Professor Martin Smith, the head of the division, reminds the meeting that the strike must be considered from the point of view of patient care, and suggests that the division should adopt an 'empty bed' policy for the strike. This means managing non-critical and non-emergency patients out of the division, closing as many beds and wards as possible and concentrating on providing essential services to patients who really need them. The aim is to avoid patients becoming victims of the battle between the employer and trade unions.

Exco endorses the 'empty bed' policy and decides to take it to the unions. It may provide the basis for an agreement on essential services. The doctors and matrons estimate how many beds to close. Normally, the Surgical Division has 752 beds in 23 wards, and there are about 410 nurses on duty. They decide

to reduce the number of patients by 30, allowing the closure of 218 beds. The remaining patients can be consolidated in 16 wards. They estimate the need for a skeleton staff of 60 of nurses to provide adequate care.

This is the proposal that Smith and the surgical matrons, Lindiwe Mzwakali, Victoria Makalima and Khaya Mbewu take to the unions. The shop stewards are enthusiastic. They want to see an agreement on essential services. However, they ask questions. How many of the nurses are hospital employees and how many are agency nurses? They oppose the use of agency nurses as they are traditionally strikebreakers, scabs, amagundwane (rats). This information is not readily available in the hospital. The matrons will have to investigate.

In the meantime, elective surgery is cancelled and nurses and doctors prepare patients for discharge, arrange medications, and explain to family members what to do.

TUESDAY 29 MAY

The strike will start on 1 June. Smith tells his management meeting that he is putting pressure

on doctors to get the patients out. He wants two wards closed by tomorrow. Mbewu says he thinks Ward 47 can be closed tomorrow. Smith asks about Ward 5. This still has 20 patients. 'Move them into the other wards and close it,' says Smith. Mzwakali reports that they are down to 554 patients.

They are close to the target of 534 patients and work through the new staff figures. On an average day the division has 251 permanent nurses and 159 agency nurses. This is a shock. It means that permanent staff is only 60% of daily needs - it is, in fact, a skeleton staff. This will create a problem for the unions. If they ban agency staff, the requirement of a 60% skeleton staff will mean that no permanent nurses can strike.

WEDNESDAY 30 MAY

A group of men claiming to be union activists round up nurses in the Burns Unit and march them off to a meeting. No one recognises them. In the paediatric burns ICU babies are left unattended on ventilators. If a baby moves and dislodges the ventilator tube it will take three minutes to die. Even

worse, a shorter period without the tube could cause permanent brain damage. Fortunately one nurse manages to slip away from the group and come back to the ICU. In the adult ICU one of the nurses hides and stays behind. Luckily there are no crises. The norm for ICU care is one nurse per patient because of the critical nature of illness.

THURSDAY 31 MAY

Management meets with labour again. Smith raises the Burns Unit incident of last night. The shop stewards condemn violence and intimidation. They are worried about the lack of security, and insist that the CEO must ensure proper security. Management presents the staffing figures. Labour calls for a caucus.

The shop stewards return and propose that 70% of permanent nurses should remain on duty, and management should use agency nurses to close the gap. They reach agreement that 30-35% of support staff such as clerks, cleaners and porters, should remain on duty.

They also agree to form a joint Surgical Division strike committee with representatives from management and unions to monitor the agreement and solve problems. The tone of the discussion between shop stewards and management is focused, urgent, serious, with the emphasis on resolving problems. Smith and the matrons are elated.

This is a path breaking agreement, one which may serve as a template for future negotiations over essential services. But questions remain. The strike starts tomorrow. How will the agreement be implemented? How will staff decide who strikes and who remains on duty? How will the picket lines know who is on skeleton duty and who is a strikebreaker?

In the afternoon the matrons convene a meeting of ward managers and nurses with the

shop stewards. The shop stewards explain the agreement. Everyone is excited. The shop stewards shake hands with Mrs. Mzwakali.

FRIDAY 1 JUNE

Seven wards are closed as planned and patient numbers are below target. There are about 30 people on strike in the division, the first day of the strike. Morale is high. When the work pressure is low, some of the nurses go to the picket outside the administration block and join toyi-toying strikers, and then return to work.

The strike is hitting the rest of the hospital hard. The CEO calls the unions to receive a copy of the court interdict against striking in essential services, which has been faxed by the Department of Public Service and Administration to public service institutions. Staff in the medical wards and radiography are scared. The kitchen has been shut down.

Surgeons need access to emergency x-rays, but the radiography department is in another division of the hospital where there is no essential services agreement. Smith finds the shop stewards, and they go and arrange for the radiographers to take x-rays.

SUNDAY 3 JUNE

Government announces that essential service workers must be back on duty by 10 am the next day. This includes all hospital staff. It will dismiss any essential service workers still on strike at that time.

MONDAY 4 JUNE

Exco meets to assess the impact of the strike. There is a low turnout of support workers in the division, but a good turnout of permanent nurses. The agencies have been able to provide very few nurses over the weekend. Today there are only two professional nurses in the trauma ward, with seven patients on ventilators. Normally each ventilated patient requires a nurse.

Hospital management has called in the army medical corps to run the kitchen, deliver food and linen, and provide cleaning services. White administrative staff are helping deliver food. Professor Gopal points out that this could become a racial issue.

The problem with emergency x-rays keeps recurring. Radiographers are scared to walk across to casualty to do x-rays of trauma patients.

Last night Ward 6 was disturbed by people knocking on the door. Nurses received a threatening phone call earlier. Nurses panicked, turned off lights and ran into the stockroom. A patient tried to follow and fell, cutting his face. Nurses called 10 111 and the police arrived quickly. They discovered it was hospital security doing its rounds.

Dr Golub asks whether to operate on a patient who needs to go onto a ventilator afterwards, when there is a shortage of ventilators and nurses. Smith advises that if an operation will save a life, they must proceed, and then move on to solve the next problem.

It is 10 am. Strikers start toyi-toying up and down the roadways and passages between wards, pulling non-strikers out to join them. They do this at the surgical wards as well. This is their response to the government ultimatum.

There is a big crowd of strikers toyi-toying outside the administration block, filmed by the police. Shop stewards make speeches. There are several tense meetings with management. The surgical nurses return to wards.

In the corridors groups of soldiers from the medical corps are moving up and down. Two white women push a heavy food trolley. They cannot fully control it going down a ramp and a couple of metal pots fall off, spilling mince meat over the road.

THURSDAY 7 JUNE

Some nurses were assaulted on Wednesday night, one from the Surgical Division. It is very difficult to get agency nurses. Staff shortages are getting worse. Last night public services minister, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, said that they will remove picket lines from hospitals and other institutions. Today Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) general secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, addressed a rally at CHB and called on workers to shut government down.

FRIDAY 8 JUNE

The hospital is swarming with police and soldiers, now no longer just medical corps but also armed units. The police move the strikers through the gate to the street outside the hospital.

Exco is meeting when the surgical wards get intimidating phone calls: we know where you live, we know where your children go to school. The nurses panic. Exco decides that if nurses fear for their safety they must be allowed to leave. Virtually all the nurses leave. Exco makes the decision that ventilator and other critical patients must be moved into private hospitals; arrangements had been made for this by the CEO earlier in case of emergency.

Only a handful of matrons, senior nurses and doctors are left with hundreds of patients. Ventilated patients are left unattended. It is a day of crisis as they identify patients for transfer and prepare them, at the same time trying to provide minimum care for everyone else. Management has promised to provide ambulances to transfer patients, but there are delays of hours. The last of the critical patients is moved late at night. More wards are closed, and the remaining patients consolidated into open wards.

MONDAY 11 JUNE

There are notices all over the hospital listing 40 strikers who have

been dismissed. All tertiary hospitals have been instructed to dismiss 40 strikers per day, while regional hospitals must dismiss 30 strikers per day.

The agreement has collapsed, and there is no more contact with the unions as strikers have been expelled from the premises.

In Exco there is great anxiety about how to respond. There are more nurses on duty, but Cosatu has called a national strike for Wednesday. Should high priority patients be admitted, or referred elsewhere? Will there be night staff which is when intimidation is worst? 'Listen to the singing,' says a matron, 'they have just heard about the dismissals.'

There are arguments. One surgeon says the minister is right, hospitals are essential services and the unions are unethical, they don't care about the death of patients. Another replies that government has taken morality away from us, nothing has improved for poor patients in the hospital. He says you cannot blame unions for striking in essential services but not discuss the morality of ministers.

MID JUNE

The number of nurses coming to work slowly increases and stabilises. The agencies provide more nurses too. The strike is weakening. Incidents of violent intimidation continue with nurses targeted and beaten at taxi ranks. Later more support workers appear on duty. The main discussions in Exco are whether and when to transfer critical patients back from the private hospitals, and when to start elective surgery again. Gradually wards are reopened, until only seven wards are closed as at the beginning of the strike.

The strike ends on 1 July with unions winning significant concessions from the employer.

THE AFTERMATH

Some doctors and nurses say that patients died because of the strike.

Smith says it is difficult to say conclusively, because staff shortages, lack of equipment and delays take place every day under 'normal' conditions, and patients suffer the consequences. He adds that many patients they discharged early because of the strike came back after the strike with complications.

But everyone agrees that the 'empty bed' policy was effective in reducing the impact of the strike on patients. Everyone is proud of the way Exco managed the strike, and contrasts it with the poor strike management in the rest of the hospital.

Some of the clinicians and matrons feel betrayed by the unions. One senior nurse says: 'My dream was that we would show management and the rest of the health sector what could be done. The agreement allowed people working inside under difficult conditions to know that they were at one with those marching outside. Nurses did support the strike and its goals - we were only working because of professional responsibilities. In the wards we were allowing staff to go after the morning routine and join the demonstrations to show our support. But the unions failed to honour the agreement, or to meet us about the breakdown.'

A shop steward responds, 'We are like kids, trying a new thing, trying to learn. It is not as easy as you think. It was very difficult to control people.'

After long discussions, Exco concludes that, despite disappointments, negotiating the agreement was an important step forward. It could provide lessons for essential service negotiations both at CHB and more widely in future. ^{LB}

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'If you don't hear the bell, you're mince'

Asanda Benya gave a vivid account of her own experience when she mined underground in a women's team for two and half months. This article was published in Volume 33, Number 5, 2010.

My first encounter underground was exciting and scary. Exciting, because I had never been underground before and I was thrilled at this adventure. However, as days went by and going underground became a reality, it ceased to be exciting but rather became frightening.

BEFORE GOING UNDERGROUND

Underground is a world of its own. It's very hot, humid, dark, dangerous and you have to be constantly on the lookout for any kind of hazard.

Before the mine allowed me to work underground I had to undergo several tests to assess whether I was fit enough. I had to undergo a medical examination where they did a full body check and an X-ray.

After passing all the tests I had to register at Teba as a new recruit. This enabled me to get my personal protective equipment (PPE): worksuit, hard hat, gumboots, belt, socks, goggles, reflector vest, ear plugs and chevron strips to make visible my hard hat. It wasn't until this moment that slowly things started to dawn on me.

When I had to undergo a heat tolerance screening, working

underground suddenly became a reality. I had to do a rhythmic strenuous exercise to test if my body could do manual work under hot and humid conditions. I had to climb up and down a 30.5cm step for 30 minutes, with each minute consisting of 24 steps - up and down, up and down. This was a glimpse of conditions underground.

Once I passed the heat test I went for first aid training. First aid also happened to be my first experience of *fanakalo*, the mine language. I had to learn the language since most people use it to communicate with others. It was amazing for me that before I could 'speak' *fanakalo*, I was considered an outsider but soon after I 'learnt' it, I was seen as a real mineworker, so it was crucial that I learnt it fast in order to be accepted.

UNDERGROUND

The following Monday I started with the real work, I went underground. Due to the darkness underground, we all had to carry our battery and head lamps with us at all times. The battery for the lamp is pretty heavy and has to be tied around the waist.

When underground, my job title changed between being a *pikinini*

where I carried bags for women earner officials and a *malayisha* general labourer where I shovelled and loaded the ore, installed ventilation pipes, water pipes and compressed air pipes (water is used for drilling to cool down the rock and lift out the dirt and also to drink while compressed air drives and powers the drill) and cleaned drains and walk ways.

My typical day started at 3.45am and I usually left the mine residence at 4.30am and arrived at work at 5.30am. At the shaft we changed into our PPE and went to collect our head lamps and sometimes our rescue pack and caught the cage going underground at 6.20am.

Inside the cage it's dark and cold, or the walls have openings where air comes in, head lamps are usually switched off and if yours is on, people complain. There were many of us inside the cage, about 40 people in each deck. To make it inside the cage you have to push or others behind you will do that for you.

Survival of the fittest is the motto when entering the cage. Upon entering the cage, both in the mornings and afternoons, to avoid being pushed too hard, I used to target the spaces directly behind



Woman miner carries ventilation pipes.

the door. It was not as easy to be pushed when behind the door and also the wind openings were far. Close to the wall was another good spot. When entering, as women we would put our hands up the wall with our backs facing the entrance, in that way we had more strength to resist the pushing from the front.

At first when going down my ears would be blocked because of the air imbalance between the surface and underground.

In the cage there is an indescribable buzz and conversation. People usually talk about their previous day's experiences, week-end plans, their *nyatsis* (informal girlfriends), money and family issues. Mostly men participate in these conversations, women are usually quiet. Those women who try to participate are ignored and their contributions not given much regard especially if the topic is deemed manly.

When underground as soon as the cage door opened, we all pushed our way out and paced to our different working stations. The walk from the cage to the work station took about 20-30 minutes. There we took off and left our sweaters and lunch boxes.

Before leaving for our working stations, each miner was procedurally expected to visit the stope to detect gas levels at all working areas that had been blasted the night before.

The miner also briefs his team on what is to be done. At the working station we got down to work immediately because by 1.30pm we had to be done with the day's work and back to the cage waiting station.

On arriving at the stope or development we removed any remaining ore from the previous night's blasting, removed unstable rocks from the walls, cleaned the hanging and side walls to mark for drilling (prepared the face), installed support on panels (a stope where drilling takes place) and installed ventilation pipes and compressed air pipes. Thereafter, a RDO (Rock Drill Operator) drills and a miner with the help of general labourers charges up with explosives in order for it to blast in the evening.

In days when I worked on the development side, I sometimes helped install railway lines for the locomotive that collects ore, cleaned the drains to ease the water movement, and transported bags of explosives and other

material. Due to time constraints and the long distance from the store room to the working station, sometimes we each carried three bags each weighing 23.5kgs to the stopes or carried heavy roof bolts.

These tasks take a while to complete and are done in a hurry to make it on time for the cage pick ups, hence the morning rush and also, it is important that everything is done and everyone back on the surface by 4pm at the latest. This ensures that blasting is done on time and there is enough time for the air to clear of fumes and for the night shift to start.

When doing these tasks your eyes and ears always have to be attentive. Mostly this is because machines can start operating while you are inside a stope or panel but if you are attentive you can hear the warning bells and move or make a signal that it's not safe to start operating it. If you don't hear the bell, and an operator starts a machine with you inside a panel, you are as good as mince.

Also rocks make a certain sound when they are unstable or when there is going to be a seismic event, hence it is important always to listen very carefully.



Asanda Benya with a colleague during her field research when she worked underground.

On one occasion, I was almost scooped by a winch (hand-driven machine with a drum and rope to assist in pulling the ore to the tipping point) because I did not hear the bell. I was inside a stope, busy clearing the ore when a winchscraper came through and almost scooped me alive. Needless to say, after that I was chased away by the team because of the scare I gave them. After that encounter I was always careful.

THE HARD PARTS

The first weeks were not at all easy. I had to get the trust of workers. I soon learnt that taking photos before I had fully gained their trust was a big NO. This was because they thought I would expose them for working and wearing substandard PPE and this is a norm underground.

Back on the surface, we returned lamps first, then went to shower and headed back home. I stayed in single quarters with other underground mineworkers who worked in support services

whereas women mineworkers commute between their homes and shafts.

In the change rooms where we showered, I had some of my shocking experiences. Women all walked around naked, with no towels around them. This was traumatic at first but with time I got used to it. While I never managed to walk around like them, I got used to seeing them like that and it became a norm. At first women found it weird that I always had a towel around me, this made others uncomfortable around me and to some degree at first, impacted on their openness with me, but we all soon got used to each other's ways.

One of the saddest days was when one of the workers on my level died because of a fall of ground (FOG). When his body was taken out, all the workers who were waiting for it on the surface were so sad, even those that didn't know the man personally. The deceased's home boys were worse, one of them was running around and shaking like a mad man, others were somber and emotionless.

The mood at the shaft the day after his death was grave. In the cage people were quiet and underground you could almost feel and touch the sadness. On the flip side, funerals are excursions, an opportunity to explore the country, workers go in huge numbers to funerals, whether they know the person or not.

Some of the working stations were so scary to a point where in order to move, I had to crawl (stopes are narrow for safety reasons so you crawl or at best walk with head bent). Touching one rock could result in a fall of ground because some parts could not be supported, but mining had to continue. Just being in those stopes was nerve racking.

The best way to move under such places was to look at the rocks and crawl frontwards so that you could avoid the very dangerous zones and not touch where there is instability. For me this didn't work, looking at the rocks was more nerve racking to a point where I had to crawl backwards, facing down not up.

While some moments were scary, in general the whole experience was wonderful and I enjoyed most of my time working underground.

I am deeply grateful to the mine management for affording me the opportunity to work at their mine. My respect and gratitude goes out to all those men and women who work deep underground, under dangerous and unpredictable conditions, just to feed, clothe and educate their children. I'm grateful that they opened their doors and allowed me to work in their teams and imparted their knowledge to me. ¹⁸

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