

Confronting the future

looking at the past

The history of the *Labour Bulletin* is linked to the history of unionisation of the black population. The *Labour Bulletin* was established as the voice of the voiceless, an education tool for working people. It was established as the defender of rights that did not yet have any legal standing.

Give us the story!

Our comrades from the docks in both Durban and Cape Town belled the cat in 1973. They broke the 13 years of calm and silence. There was a need to spread the message of hope and toughness to ensure we carry on. The *Labour Bulletin* spread this message. Stories of workers were a source of inspiration for other workers.

When we received *Sechaba* or *Umsebenzi* under flowery covers, the *Labour Bulletin* supplemented the revolutionary message. When *Umsebenzi* said 'the enemy is on the run', the *Labour Bulletin* gave us a story about the workers on the offensive. When the *Labour Bulletin* depicted the SARIWU strike, the mineworkers gained confidence to take on the mighty Chamber of Mines. When the *Labour Bulletin* reported on these mineworkers, OK Bazaars was put on the receiving end.

What made the *Bulletin* different was that it was not sensational. It put all these struggles in perspective. In the process it

Gwede Mantashe recalls the role of the Labour Bulletin in helping to overcome the challenges of the past. He also highlights the challenges of the future.

provided shopstewards with basic working class analytical tools. Out of that process organic intellectuals emerged. This brings me to the current situation.

Worker control

In the inaugural 1985 COSATU congress we adopted a number of founding resolutions. These became the principles of COSATU. One such resolution was that of worker control. Behind this resolution was an attempt to separate the role of intellectuals and workers in the labour movement. There was a sensitive desire not to upset intellectuals - many of whom were the general secretaries and technical staff. We wanted to empower workers but not silence these intellectuals.

Some of us, as young shopstewards, gave the principle of worker control a broader meaning. We argued that we would fully achieve this principle if workers could develop to take strategic positions within the unions. As part of this

dream we encouraged each other to contribute articles to the *Labour Bulletin*. Some of those articles were not even published. Others were published as 'letters to the editor'. We were basically at school.

We never realised that this process would result in a federation entirely run by shopstewards. It was practical preparation for these shopstewards for bigger roles within the working class movement.

In 1989 the South African Communist Party (SACP) programme, 'Path to power', discussed the possibility of both the armed seizure of power and a negotiated settlement. By then we had positioned the movement to play a permanent role in a free South Africa. At the time of the 1994 elections, we were ready to deploy our leaders into the African National Congress (ANC) government without panic. We also knew that the new leaders would never emerge fully from the shadow of the existing leaders.

The infamous 'brain-drain'

In 1994 when COSATU released more than 20 activists to Parliament, there was an outcry about a 'brain-drain'. COSATU was then seen as a body without brains. We contested this by arguing that workers were taking over their own movement. Therefore it could not be described as a 'brain-drain'. It was surprising that even progressive journalists and academics bought into this theory. We must thank the *Labour Bulletin* for being a platform for that debate. That debate is now closed. The problems that unions now have are not related to the 'brain-drain'. Those problems are related to the complexity of the situation.

Unions will however never be in a perfect position. We have to ready ourselves for an ever-changing situation. Capacity building is an ongoing process. It

should continuously improve the labour movement so that it can engage capital. The *Labour Bulletin* and other ideological publications should be seen as part of this effort. With the necessary capacity we can deal with any situation, however complex.

The alliance

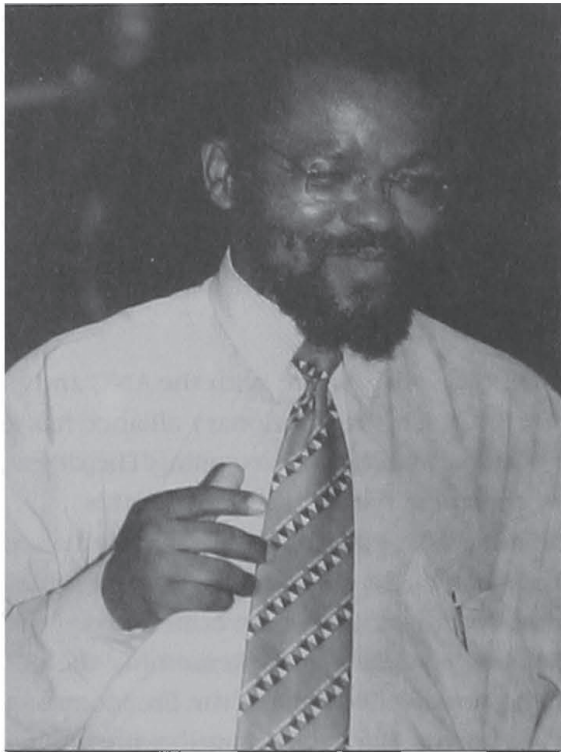
COSATU is in alliance with the ANC and the SACP. This revolutionary alliance has a good track record of struggling. The defeat of apartheid was at the hands of this alliance. Throughout the years this alliance has been criticised, even accused of selling out. But most of the time critics have swallowed their words. Remember the criticism levelled against the Freedom Charter, the Harare Declaration, the suspension of the armed struggle, and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). These give proof of the advances of our revolution. Critics end up also getting on the steam train of the revolution.

The complication is that the leading alliance partner is in power. While the ANC governs it makes compromises, with good intentions perhaps. Often working class interests are compromised, for example with the adoption of Gear. When this happens, COSATU gets opened up. The voices calling for the breaking of the alliance become more vocal. Yet we have always concluded that it is a premature suggestion.

The counter revolutionaries

Our view is that the alliance should never be seen in isolation. We must always remember that counter revolutionary forces are regrouping and pose a threat.

The formation of the United Democratic Movement was the first threat. But the most serious threat thus far has been the joining of the white parties into



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the Democratic Alliance. Our revolution remains at risk. We need to consolidate, rather than fragment the democratic forces. Our fight must take the revolution forward.

Turn it into a challenge

We must always understand the revolution as a complicated process with advances and setbacks. The revolution is not an event. When we come across setbacks, as revolutionaries we must never despair. We must always try to turn it into a challenge.

Having engaged the ANC, there is now acknowledgement that Gear was an attempt to stabilise the economy in a hostile global atmosphere. The simplest reaction says 'We told you, you were selling out.' A revolutionary approach asks: 'Can we together discuss a new start?' In the process we tilted the balance of forces in favour of the working class. In the process we disorganised the counter revolutionary forces.

Building intellectual capacity

A challenge facing the working class is its ability to develop intellectual capacity. This also means replacing lost capacity all the time. It is this realisation that led to the COSATU resolution of establishing the Chris Hani Institute. This institute will continue generating and house the intellectual capacity of the left. It should source the intellectual capacity from among our formations - be it the unions, the civic movement, progressive intellectuals and journalists or non-governmental organisations. The *Labour Bulletin* should facilitate the discussions on taking this idea forward. It should seek to be part of this institute.

An interventionist state

Our movement should continue to engage. With class interests becoming more obvious within the movement itself, let alone in society, the engagement will be hostile. The long cherished dream of building a socialist society is going to be difficult to achieve. In this transitional stage where public and private ownership coexists, public ownership should be predominant. To achieve this we need to identify the important sectors of the economy and fight for public ownership in those sectors.

We must make the biggest noise about the privatisation of state assets. Privatisation is part of the neo-liberal agenda to relegate the state to the sideline. It limits the capacity and the economic muscle of the state to intervene. Transformation will only be possible with an interventionist state.

Within the democratic movement the working class must lead. It can only lead if it is organised. I submit that the labour movement is organised and must lead. Nobody can wish us away. ★

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