

'I am an educator'

I was born in a fishing town called Centina Bay along the West Coast in the Western Cape. I am the youngest son in a family of nine children and was only five months into sub-A when my father passed away. His death really shaped the person I became and the choices I made. I have been married for 13 years now and have been blessed with two daughters, who form a very special part of my life. As an educator myself it goes without saying that their education is the most important thing to me.

My education

I was in Std 7 writing my exams, when Athlone where I still live, was burning in the 1976 riots. I matriculated in 1979 and went straight to the University of the Western Cape (UWC). It was 1980 when I was awoken by all the wrongs in society for the first time. I was chased by the police and I lost all my English 1 notes I had taken six months to make, when they stormed UWC. I graduated in 1983 and found a teaching job at Spes Bona Secondary School.

There was unrest in 1985 in the Western Cape and schooling stopped for three months. This was the time I realised there was actually something wrong in our society - I had not been very involved in union politics at that stage.

Union involvement

SADTU was formed in 1990 and I joined it

Johan Josias, a teacher and SADTU office bearer, speaks to Sarah Mosoetsa, Thabo Sephiri and William Matlala.

in 1991. I was elected site secretary the same year I joined and held the position until 1995. It was only in 1996 when I became the organiser for Athlone Central Branch that I started getting involved in union politics. In 1997 the duties of the organiser became that of the assistant secretary of the coastal region of Cape Town. This is the position I was re-elected into in July this year. My duties include assisting the secretary, co-ordinating COSATU's activities in the region, site visitations, disputes co-ordination and overseeing or co-ordinating workplace democracy. I also occupy a seat on the board of trustees of the Western Cape Workers' College.

Mobilising workers

Unlike workers in a factory who can mobilise very easily since they are under one roof, teachers are scattered across many sites, which are equivalent to one workplace. In the Athlone Central Branch there are 38 sites. The coastal region also has 240 sites organised into seven branches. All of these schools have to be

visited. This makes mobilising very difficult for us and is the task that I, as a site organiser, have to do. At site level, mobilisation and recruitment takes place during a site meeting or during staff meetings. At school level we hold our meetings either during intervals or after classes in the afternoon – but never during school hours.

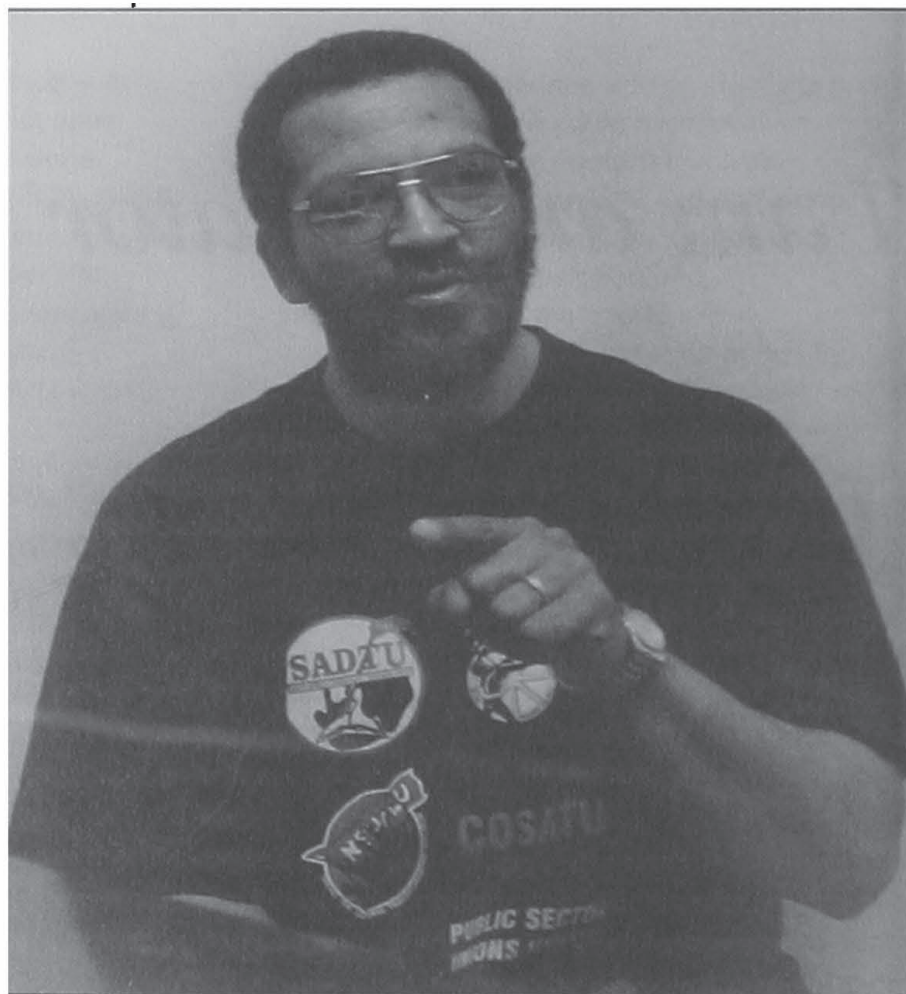
I remember there was a time when teachers were not regarded as 'workers' in terms of the factory worker and that the school was not regarded as a typical workplace. The problem of schools not being typical workplaces also affects the

implementation of some clauses in the LRA, like workplace forums. Our boss – the person we are supposed to negotiate with – is not inside the school. The principal is only a manager and not the employer and thus we cannot negotiate with him or her.

'I promised my students that I would always make sure they are never disadvantaged in my absence.'

Jy bring nie jou kant nie

Discipline is the one big problem we have in our schools with regard to teachers and SADTU has re-affirmed its commitment to the culture of teaching and learning at its



national congress last year. A declaration of disciplinary action was adopted to deal with teachers who come to school drunk or who just don't do their work. It remains the responsibility of the site representative to address such problems using the outlined procedures for disciplinary action against members. Late-coming and loafing and any action which can be detrimental to the union are not allowed. If teachers 'nte bulle kant bring nte' (that is they don't do their work), they will be disciplined.

Education vs workers' rights

It is not an easy thing to balance workers' rights and the right to an education, but teachers must make sure they place the education of their students first on any agenda. My position in SADTU often

requires me to attend meetings and congresses and therefore be absent from school. It is for this reason that I always take some time to prepare work for both my grade 11 and 12 students, to make sure they have work to do in my absence, even though I know that not much work can be done in my absence – but I have no other option. My students fully understand the dilemma I am in because I made it known to them that I am a union official and that from time to time I will be away. But I promised them that I will always make sure they are never disadvantaged in my absence. Because above all I am an educator.

Empty stomach

SADTU recognises that if you educate a child you educate parents as well. We still reject the 7,3% increase in the public sector by government and we ask parents to understand that no worker can deliver on an empty stomach. You certainly can't vote on an empty stomach either. But strike action still comes as a last resort to SADTU. This is what we would like parents to understand for our struggle to survive.

People's history

Curriculum restructuring and outcome based education has been underway for some time now to make education more *relevant and contemporary to our society and needs*. I have already started introducing my learners to labour studies – our people's history of worker struggle – to give them insight on what is happening around them.

Schooling under trees

Inequalities and imbalances in education is a matter that SADTU has been fighting since its inception. High on its agenda has always been redress and redistribution. Sadly the state has failed to deliver, especially for township schools. Subsidies

have been drastically reduced – especially in 1998. In some provinces schooling takes place under trees and the state does not take full responsibility. Spes Bona is located between two townships that can hardly keep body and soul together. Hence we have cut down on the prescribed school uniform to make it easy for parents. The state is further dragging its feet in addressing the issue of the under-qualified mass of teachers. But SADTU has pledged itself to the further training and re-training of teachers.

'I have already started introducing my learners to labour studies...'

Adult education

The policy of SADTU on adult education is that full-time teachers should not take extra afternoon classes. Up until 1997 I was teaching Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), but I decided to leave it simply because full-time teachers are no longer allowed to take extra teaching jobs at the expense of the many unemployed teachers. Some teachers still take up extra teaching – I cannot blame them because they do not earn enough money to feed their families.

Future

I see myself leaving my teaching post and taking up union work on a full-time basis because unlike SADTU's president, and other elected union officials who are seconded, I am not. This means that if the president has to leave for a few days or weeks because of his commitment to the union, another educator has already replaced him or her on a contractual basis. Unfortunately the same can't be said for me hence I may have to leave teaching. ★