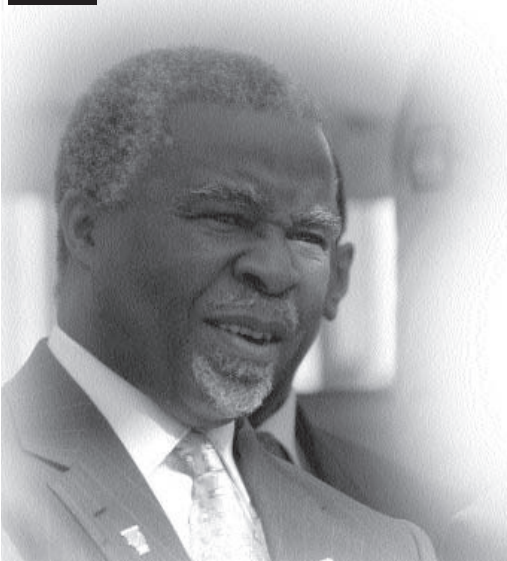


Is there a blade aimed at Mbeki?



The ANC internal power struggle continued at Cosatu's recent central committee, which became the next platform to try influencing succession to Mbeki. The **Labour Bulletin** investigates how the controversial Zuma resolution was adopted and the implications for Cosatu.

Cosatu's central Committee (CC) is the federations' highest decision-making body after the national congress, which is held every three years. The committee is empowered to develop new policy, but may not change policies adopted by the national congress. As with the ANC NGC, the committee meets between national congresses so as to provide a chance for a mid-term review. The focus of this committee was to review progress towards implementing the 2015 plan adopted in 2003 and to develop a more detailed and comprehensive industrial policy.

THE ZUMA DEBATE

After a rather low-key introduction to the meeting fireworks erupted during the debate on Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi's secretariat report which made reference to former deputy president Jacob Zuma. The secretariat report sought to explain Cosatu's position: 'It is now a matter for history that Comrade Jacob Zuma was relieved of his duties as the deputy president of South Africa following the conviction for corruption of his financial advisor, Shabir Shaik... Cosatu only supported the right of Comrade Zuma, as a matter of principle, to be treated fairly. Like all South Africans, he must be presumed innocent until proven guilty. Should he be found guilty after due process of law, Cosatu's position shall be unwavering in demanding that the law must take its course. Cosatu has and will always have a strong and principled stance against corruption. We have repeatedly urged that those found to be misusing their position of power should be punished in a manner that shows no mercy.'

'We recognise that we have not at all times succeeded in communicating our admittedly complex and nuanced position to the public. As a result, our position has been misunderstood as an unprincipled support for

corrupt leaders, blind loyalty, etc. Our concern stems from the manner in which the constitutional right to a fair trial and dignity have been trampled upon. These events smack of an orchestrated political campaign to politically discredit Comrade Zuma. In our view the following events are problematic and fuel allegations of a political conspiracy.

- He faced a hysterical trial by media driven in large part by leaks from the prosecuting authorities. This led to the widespread perception that the case aimed to eliminate him politically, rather than to address the problem of corruption.
- Instead of charging him, he was labelled guilty on a *prima facie* basis, and then effectively tried through the Shabir trial, which denied him the chance of defending himself formally. It is manifestly unfair to find a defendant guilty *in absentia*. It goes against the Freedom Charter's promise that 'all shall be equal before the law' and the Constitution's commitment that any person accused under the law shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty in a fair trial, and given the right to remain silent and to refuse to testify during court proceedings.

Having said this, we welcome the fact that Comrade Zuma will now be given the chance to give his side of the story in open court. The CEC has called on affiliates and members to donate on a voluntary basis to his legal costs and wellbeing. The ANC NGC made further pronouncements on this issue and Cosatu respects decision of that forum.'

All very reasonable but the majority of delegates at the CC were having none of it.

Representatives from the SA Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu), National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (Numsa) immediately began to question the position previously adopted by the federation. The arguments put forward included:

- There was clearly a political agenda behind the Zuma investigation and pending trial with allegations of corruption being used to discredit him and end his political career. Why was it that other corruption scandals were not being investigated such as the Oilgate saga and the whole arms deal?
 - In terms of the legitimacy of the judiciary and Cosatu's previous position that Zuma should have his day in court, a counter argument was presented that capitalism breeds corruption and therefore, how can you take a comrade and subject him to an untransformed judicial system where he will be sentenced. This argument presupposes that the democracy in place is a bourgeoisie democracy, which is not acceptable.
 - A number of delegates indicated that whilst Zuma is not viewed to be a 'man of the left', he is seen to be closer to workers. There is general suspicion around President Thabo Mbeki and his relationship with capital and whether capital would ultimately support an amendment to the Constitution to allow for a third term of office.
- These deliberations led to the adoption of a resolution, which stated:
- we call on the president to review the decision to relieve Zuma of his responsibilities as deputy president;
 - we call for the withdrawal of all charges against Zuma as it is clear that he will not get a fair trial. In that context Cosatu would start a petition campaign to call on the president to ensure a withdrawal of charges;
 - if the case goes ahead then Cosatu demands a fair hearing and a full bench to hear the case. Whenever Zuma appears in court, 'our people will demonstrate en masse';
 - we call on all affiliate members and public to contribute to the fund set up to fund the legal costs of Zuma's trial;
 - we engage the alliance in the context of the NGC decision on this matter in order to find a political solution and avoid divisions that could result from this saga.
- The expanded resolution raises a number of

interesting points such as the claim that a danger exists that neo-liberals may use the state apparatus to turn the revolution in an offensive against the true cadres of the revolution. This raises interesting questions as to who the 'neo-liberals' are and who has such power to use 'their control over key components of state machinery'?

One of the key pointers to the way in which Cosatu would like to handle the Zuma saga is 'not in a narrow legal fashion' but 'handled politically through our organisations and the alliance'. This approach is very similar to how unions deal with their own internal problems such as corruption, one delegate argued. In such cases, people close ranks and the matter is dealt with quietly within structures. It could well be argued that the ANC might have handled the Zuma case in a less high profile manner.

Ironically, the one Cosatu affiliate which has taken an active stand against corruption, the SA Municipal and Allied Workers Union (Samwu) spoke out against the resolution adopted. The union argued that the federation needed to deal with principle issues such as those around corruption instead of focusing on an individual. This raises questions about the federation's commitment to deal with corruption in its own ranks. During discussion on union investment companies, one delegate sought to raise claims of corruption in his union but was effectively silenced.

Once the Zuma resolution had been leaked to the media, Cosatu leadership sought to explain the reasons for its adoption, which they stressed, had been pushed by the mass of their members and not by the leadership. This explanation does not fully explain the change in position from the one adopted at the CEC held prior to the CC. Does the CC decision reflect that there is more democracy in a larger forum, with more rank file participation, to a small structure such as the CEC? This raises questions around whether union leaders go



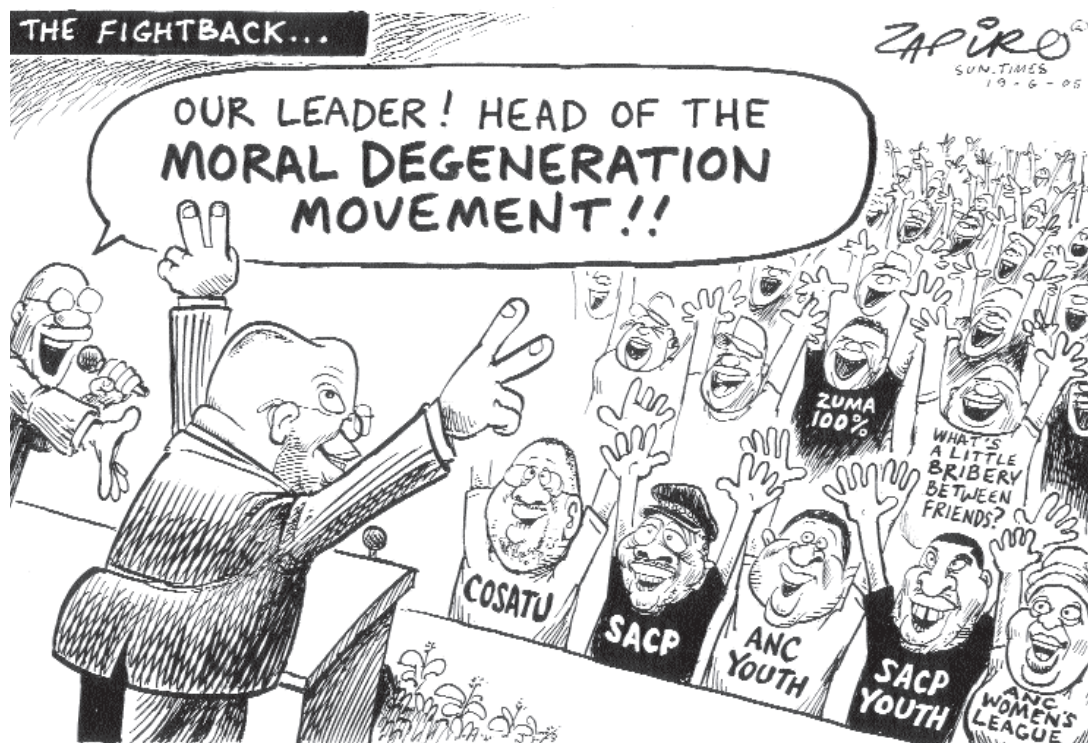
into CEC meetings with proper mandates from members? (A similar sentiment was expressed following the ANC NGC – a revolt from the grassroots). Whether this resolution emerged from workers on the ground or from leaders of unions such as Sadtu, Num and the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) a number of unanswered questions remain. What are some of the underlying dynamics at play, aside from the so-called motivations presented above? Is it about closing ranks to protect 'your own'? Is this an attempt to stem the tide of the neo-liberal agenda? Is this about waging a war against Mbeki and settling the succession issue? Or is this a last stand by the so-called left on the grounds that 'if Zuma goes we are next'?

KEY AREAS OF DEBATE

While the Zuma saga dominated the media headlines, the CC did move on from this to engage in lengthy debates on key organisational challenges facing Cosatu, input into an industrial policy and an assessment of the implementation of the 2015 plan.

More than 20 commissions were set up during the four-day CC meeting to facilitate debate on these issues. A range of resolutions were adopted including revitalising the recruitment campaign; servicing members; organisational discipline; internal democracy and worker control; mergers and super-unions; the role of parastatals; black economic empowerment (BEE); municipal engagement and sector strategies which would form part of an overall industrial policy.

The CC also adopted a political declaration, which provided an overview of the current situation. The declaration



included issues around the jobs and the poverty campaign, engagement around an industrial policy, corruption, local government elections, social movements, the alliance and the deputy president and transformation of the judiciary. During debate on this resolution, the SA Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu) argued that if Cosatu was serious about corruption the resolution should also relate to unions particularly in relation to service providers and liquidators. The resolution on BEE was interesting in terms of its focus on outsourcing and how BEE is promoting such practices.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

While the ANC NGC revealed that all is not well within the ANC, deliberations at Cosatu's CC reveal similar trends in the federation. What then are Cosatu's challenges?

- The secretariat report and discussion in various commissions highlighted some of the organisational weaknesses of the federation. But do the federation and affiliates have a clear implementation

plan to address such weaknesses or will they merely be raised yet again in another commission, report or resolution?

- Just prior to the ANC NGC, it was reported that President Mbeki claimed that the ANC had become 'de-ideologised'. The ideological discourse of the ANC, has in recent times, become a combination of old style ANC revolutionary talk and the language of technocrats. What of Cosatu? It continues to talk the talk of socialism but is that still its orientation and is this reflected in its practices?
- Has there been a loss of moral focus within Cosatu? As one SA Communist Party official commented on the ANC: 'There are warning signs of corruption taking an irreversible hold. Is a similar problem taking hold within Cosatu not only at a leadership level but amongst shop stewards who are operating as informal brokers for insurance companies and the like. What will it take for the federation to begin to deal decisively with this issue, which it has acknowledged, could be very divisive? As a SACP member says: 'Corruption is extremely difficult to

fight in a climate of factionalism, bureaucratic intolerance, and patronage networking. Everyone starts to protect 'their own', and everyone holds an ace up their sleeves against everyone else'.

- What political path is Cosatu trying to map out? Has Cosatu sufficiently analysed the agenda of those who might be attempting to influence the federation's direction especially in how it is positioning itself in relation to Zuma?

CONCLUSION

Politics is never all that it seems. There is a danger when organisations such as Cosatu (and the SA Communist Party) become embroiled in what one would call 'shallow politics of personality'. On the surface it would appear that for Cosatu the Zuma case has become the be and end all of politics. If that is the case, where does that leave the 'left'? It is understandable that Cosatu might feel frustrated that 'nothing can be possible' until Mbeki goes or has lost faith in the ANC's ability to direct government policy. But does that mean that the federation has a new backer in Zuma?