

# Leadership of a special type

## NUM at Vaal Reefs

In the previous two *Bulletins* **Dunbar Moodie** described how ungovernability swept through Vaal Reefs shafts 8 and 9 with the coming of the National Union of Mineworkers. In this mobilisation Lira Setona, an influential charismatic leader, conflicted with union strategy leading to the dismissal of 14 000 miners. Here Moodie describes the pastoral leadership of the NUM and the lessons learnt on both sides.

**T**he National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) needed a special style of leadership to ride the tide of racial resentment and to hold a steady course on the mines. Charles Mapeshoane, who was eventually chief shaft steward at Vaal Reefs West, gave a clear statement of the sources of NUM policy and the moral resources upon which the shaft stewards drew in recruiting union leadership.

In an interview, he started by referring to divisions among Basotho workers and then moved on quickly to the question of human dignity. 'In the mines, before the coming of the union,' he said, 'people tended to congregate depending on their classes, educated, traditional etcetera, although they all spoke Sesotho. But when the union came, then people realised that now you have to move from up or down, meet a person where he is. The union was there to point out, to persuade people to understand that regardless of your education, you are a human being, belong to the human being class, you are the same as other people, you shouldn't regard yourself as the best person... [In recruiting shaft stewards] you would look for someone who was able to speak

clearly and simply to ordinary people and who cared about them and treated them with respect. You would also look for people who were not subservient to management... I was very careful to talk to those who respect themselves and also respect others and who taught the workers respect.'

For all the fierceness of his opposition to management, and the managers to whom I spoke remembered Mapeshoane's fierceness, his stress on mutual respect has a different emphasis than Lira Setona's (see *SALB 33.4*) charisma.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Michel Foucault proposed that we analyse power not only in its repressive aspects but also as formative, creating consent from individuals on whom it works.

Foucault often spoke of a 'pastoral' style of leadership? I wish to argue that this style of leadership characterised Cyril Ramaphosa's (general secretary NUM) leadership style.

### PASTORAL-STYLE LEADERSHIP

In the first place, the pastoral leader does not dominate. Instead, he

gathers his followers together, guides and leads them. This is the power that seeks to do good, beneficent power, directing the conduct of its followers, and bringing them together as individuals in a mutual relationship of responsibility.

For the pastoral leader, wielding power is a duty, pursued with zeal, devotion and endless application, offering care to others but denying it to oneself. Leadership is defined not as an honour but rather as a burden and effort. The leader puts himself out for, acts, works and watches over all his followers - and each of them as well. He acts not like a judge but a healer. Followers are expected to work on their own behaviour, to obey, but willingly so, because the aim is their own salvation. In a word, redemption.

Marcel Golding, who joined Ramaphosa as deputy general secretary, talked about how important it was for the union to deliver in redemptive as well in practical terms. The union led by producing new 'selves' (in Foucault's terms), forming trade unionists.

This involved intense educational work on the meaning of unionism and productive leadership with

tactical skills. It was crucially important to listen to what the workers themselves had to say. Golding told me: 'Never, ever, just take the liberty of deciding for them. They must decide what to do on their own and I think that was one of the good things we learned. That mine-workers were not fools. They knew what they wanted despite [low] levels of education.'

In a very real sense the proceedings of NUM meetings were redemptive in their own right. NUM members would often meet at a community centre in Soweto. Golding said that in the early days 'it was always whole night meetings'. The union could not afford overnight accommodation: 'The buses would pull in [and] there'd be strong, strong regional songs, etcetera. We'd go into the meeting. We'd have about 400 people in a meeting, no tables, just chairs, the Basotho workers in their blankets - it was bloody cold in the winter. So we'd sit there. The smoke, a cloud of

smoke would hang in the meeting, and we'd sort of discuss serious business, we'd take decisions. There used to be everyone sort of falling asleep and then someone would jump up and sing a song and... everyone up again! And then we'd sort of sit and debate again and, you know, fall asleep again. You'd shake them and it would go on again... Even congresses we used to hold like that - whole night, over the weekend.'

Workers would toyi-toyi through the compounds on their return, passing on some of the collective effervescence to their fellows who had remained at home.

Union meetings in the compounds took on similar characteristics. Management minutes are full of failed efforts by hostel managers to control 'singing and dancing in the hostels'. Violence and the threat of violence, ungovernability, always lurked at the edges of union organising on the mines in those early days. In a situation where men had felt so

powerless for so many years, the discovery of their potential power was both heady and terrifying. Pastoral power was originally formed, as Foucault put it, 'against a sort of intoxication of religious behavior' that required pastoral order.

### DISMISSALS DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

Despite set-backs, especially after the massive three-week-long 1987 strike, the story of the NUM is a success story. Under Ramaphosa's leadership the NUM became a formidable trade union. Its millenarian tendencies were always curbed by its commitment to organisation and negotiation. Pastoral leadership skills, commitment and hard work were required to reign in millenarian tendencies in the union. Without its redemptive appeal, with all the risks of ungovernability, however, the union would have failed to achieve its goal of restoring dignity to black miners.



*Cyril Ramaphosa had a pastoral style of leadership.*



*William Matlala*

*Marcel Golding, then deputy general secretary talked of the union delivering in redemptive as well as practical terms.*

On 29 April 1985, Ramaphosa met with the Vaal Reefs management team to discuss the mass dismissals of 14 000 workers (see *SALB* 33.4). Lira Setona was gone. On 1 May Ramaphosa reported to the acting regional general manager, that the NUM shaft stewards now unanimously agreed 'to do everything in their power to get the situation at Vaal Reefs back to normal as soon as possible.' He requested permission for the NUM 'to hold meetings at every shaft to communicate this decision... to members with a view of getting full agreement amongst members'

It must have seemed that the union had been decisively defeated on Vaal Reefs and management was forcing Ramaphosa to eat humble pie. That was what all the local union members I interviewed told me. They had learnt a lesson, they said. Henceforth, they always tried to persuade workers to accept compromises short of mass dismissal. Two years later, when Anglo-American began to implement mass dismissals during the third week of the 1987 strike, Ramaphosa conceded defeat. (Anglo's mass dismissals were carefully orchestrated in 1987. It dismissed workers from the least profitable shafts first. Managers remembered that process as much less traumatic than the 1985 dismissals. They too had learnt their lessons.)

What local unionists did not know, however, were the long-term effects of the 1985 dismissals on gold production at Vaal Reefs. Vaal Reefs Shaft 8 was the milk cow of Anglo-American's operations, perhaps its most productive shaft. Each week after the dismissals was costing the corporation more than two-thirds of a ton of refined gold. At the then gold price of \$325 an ounce, it amounted to lost income of roughly \$15-million a week. Andries Schoombe, the production manager

told me: 'At number 8 [in the early 1980s], I was producing three tons of gold a bloody month - 320 or 330 thousand tons of reef a month. There's nothing in this country that's ever done that and there will never be a single unit producing that sort of tonnage again.'

In the end, nearly every worker was taken back minus the 'troublemakers'. Taking back experienced workers was only a beginning, however. They came back in dribs and drabs and even when they did return, it was difficult to get immediate results. Dave Hodgson, production manager at Shaft 9, explained: 'When people came back they were not necessarily put back in the job they'd previously been doing... You know, the teams work together, they understand each other. At one stage there was a decision that we must just recruit people. I spoke out against that because in reality number 8 was an incredible machine doing 43 000 sq. metres a month, more than any shaft today. They were efficient in terms of operations and getting the actual material down the shaft and getting the people up and down - you're talking 7 000 people a day going down the shaft. That's logistics. You can't just train 7 000 people to go down a strange shaft and mine 40 000 metres a month.'

Mike Smith, who was manager of the South division, talked of the difficulties: 'Getting guys to leave the mine was the easy part. The difficult part was trying to put Humpty Dumpty together again. I never want to do that again. The stope crews were made up of guys from different parts of the world. It was a logistics nightmare. Within three months that shaft was back to stoping output. What happened then was, because they'd been off now for two months, everybody [meaning top management] said, "Right, no

development. Put everybody in the stopes'

The intent in this case was to demonstrate to the union that mass dismissals had had no effect on the profitability of the mine, but the technical costs were substantial. Mike Smith continued: 'So we didn't do any development for most of 1985. Then came the 1987 strike. That's what caused the [production] slump at number 8 shaft. We just ran out of development. But those were deliberate instructions'

The whole point of deep-level gold mining in South Africa is to use current revenue to cover development costs, which are very high. Development, which is unproductive, also opens up the mining of payable ore as miners go along. Cutting back on development after the 1985 dismissals meant that shaft 8 didn't really get back on track until the late 1990s, if ever. The shaft certainly paid dearly for the 1985 mass dismissals.

The union may have learnt a lesson, but so did management. Mass dismissals were no simple solution to union militancy on technically sophisticated large modern mines. While other mining houses continued to use mass dismissals, Anglo was always very careful. The price paid at Vaal Reefs South was simply too high and the corporation continued to pay it for many years. It was a long road to a negotiated order with union participation on the South African gold mines, but it began with the lessons of the 1985 mass dismissals. Lira Setona did not die entirely in vain. LB

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