

Letters to the Bulletin

Reply to Moll on teacher unity

Comrade Editor, I note with sadness the contents of the essay by Ian Moll in the SA Labour Bulletin concerning the unity of the teacher fraternity in South Africa. We teachers in Soweto have no part of this unity, and there is no organisation of teachers to help us in the volcanic situation which is boiling in a number of schools throughout our township.

Firstly it must be noted that the so-called progressive teacher unions do not represent Soweto teachers in the unity talks. The former NEUSA, and even now PROTECO fail to meet the needs of the mass of our teachers. I myself was a member of the NEUSA Soweto branch at the launch of that organisation, but the Executive which was elected failed to come to our schools and organise us ever since then.

Secondly, it must be noted ATASA does not have a presence in the schools. Many of our fellow teachers have monies deducted monthly to fill the coffers of ATASA, but there are no organizers or pamphlets from ATASA in our schools to help with the crisis. Especially in the primary schools, most of our teachers have monies deducted but have never even seen a TUATA or ATASA constitu-

tion.

Ian Moll must not be confused by the ATASA rhetoric. Take note of the argument used by Peteni at the ATASA conference in January 1985 when for the first time the theme of the conference was "Crisis in Black Education" rather than music competitions. Mr Peteni's message to teachers was not to antagonise or confront pupils, i.e. to play safe. If one takes him literally, he was advocating that teachers should not join students, as it is precisely teachers passivity that has angered and provoked students on a number of occasions. Any kind of militant action he ruled out. At the TUATA conference, president Tauyane said that there is little that TUATA can do, but "to continue calling on the government to form one education ministry". We know where that has got them! Top places in the education bureaucracy, but little change in education. All that so-called ATASA leaders can do is to become principals and inspectors who check that we ordinary teachers do not organise our colleagues and conscientise the students. Teachers in the grass-roots can expect nothing from official teacher organisations except radical rhetoric, lack of action, and feathering their own nests. ATASA has no mandate from the mass of teachers to participate in the teacher unity talks.

I hereby appeal to COSATU to organise teachers directly in a trade union. Do not be fooled by the so-called teacher organisations which have no mandate. Only by proper accountability and mandates under the banner of COSATU can teacher unions win the struggle of teachers in our schools.....Secondary School Teacher, Johannesburg Region, D.E.T.

More on teachers

Sir, I wish to congratulate you on the recent issue of your journal, particularly its concern with issues of unity in the labour movement. I must, however, take issue with the manner in which the activities of UTASA and its President, Mr Franklin Sonn, are portrayed (see "Towards on South African teachers' union, vol.14 no.1, April 1989). Throughout his term of office as president of UTASA, Mr Sonn has been very consistent in his opposition to apartheid education. The record will show that when he went into the De Lange Commission of Inquiry, he did so in order to bring an end to segregated schooling and all other aspects of apartheid education. His opposition to the apartheid government at the time, along with that of

people like Dr Ken Hartshorne, is well documented. UTASA and the CTPA, too, have been consistent in their anti-apartheid stance. One has only to look at their conference resolutions of the 1981-82 period to see that they have shared all the goals of the "mass democratic movement" throughout the eighties. I suggest that it is not so much that UTASA has had its politics changed by "mass struggles", but rather that it has always acted progressively in recent times and fully represented the mass of its members, and that this fact has now been recognised by other opponents of apartheid education. It is not Mr Sonn who has been inconsistent, but rather the "mass democratic movement". Fortunately for teacher unity, their inconsistency has been for the better!.....For consistency and Unity, Mitchells Plain

Contributor

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