

# Letters to the editor

Dear Editor

The reply in *SALB* to my article, 'Where is labour in water struggles?' by Mthandeki Nlapho, the general secretary of Samwu cannot go unchallenged.

I stated that "Samwu has *hardly* been active in the struggles against prepaid water meters..."

Organisations at the centre of these struggles, namely the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Coalition Against Water Privatisation (CAWP) and the Phiri Concerned Residents, will attest to this. I also attended numerous meetings of the CAWP around struggles against prepaid water meters.

In 2003 at the height of these struggles I can hardly recall seeing a Samwu representative or a solidarity press statement by them condemning police brutality and jailing of protesters in Phiri. Not even shop stewards of Johannesburg Water, the company behind the installation of these meters in Soweto, attended despite attempts to get them to do so.

Unlike the more progressive stance of the union's Western Cape region, Samwu's Gauteng region and Johannesburg branch have been hostile to social movements. Their absence from meetings was deliberate.

Nhlapho tries to depoliticise why Samwu "has not delivered on its own water policies..." To say that "it is easier to say the right things than to act on them" deflects attention from bigger reasons: Samwu's alliance, through Cosatu, with the ANC and South African Communist Party who have had hostile relations with social movements.

The ruling party they are in an alliance with is responsible for policies which have resulted in the commercialisation and commodification of water. It was this

alliance with the ANC which compromised Samwu and Cosatu's fight against the iGoli 2002 plan out of which emerged Johannesburg Water and the commercialisation of water.

In 2003 I interviewed Johannesburg Water shop stewards who made it clear that Samwu and Cosatu did little to stop this plan. It is refreshing to see Nhlapho himself point out the contradictions in which this alliance has placed Samwu and Cosatu.

Where are the documents Nhlapho asserts I was given? I only have the interview response of Samwu's Jeff Rudin with whom I differ because, unlike him, I live in Johannesburg.

A few articles or letters to newspapers is good but cannot substitute for active solidarity. Had Samwu got seriously involved in struggles in Phiri the outcome could have been different. Their absence laid the basis for rolling out meters in the rest of Soweto. Samwu did nothing long after getting legal opinion about these meters. To now state that before they could act the CAWP launched its case is spurious.

The Johannesburg branch refused to attend a community workshop in Phiri to discuss the impact of these meters. The majority union whose members work at Johannesburg Water and live with the harsh realities of these meters, failed to send one representative.

Ebrahim Harvey

Dear Editor

Vishwas Satgar's response to my article on co-ops is entitled: 'The NUM co-ops are dead! Long live worker co-ops!'

Actually, not all the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) co-ops are

dead - although they have long since become independent of NUM. But given that some of these co-ops are nearly 15 years old, this is quite a track record.

But that's besides the point - my article was not particularly about the NUM co-ops, but about a widely-recognised set of challenges that typically confront worker co-ops. So when Satgar argues at length that the NUM experience should not be seen as a "pinnacle" of co-op experience - who is he arguing with? The article never suggested this was the case - valuable as the lessons from NUM still are. Yet despite all the sound and fury of his response he never actually addresses the issues the article raised.

COPAC's own research shows that 77% of worker co-ops in Gauteng have never paid wages to their members, and that 71% have never paid out any form of 'surplus' either. For those co-op members who are earning nothing, this cannot be called 'decent work'. This state of affairs undermines rather than strengthens the case for co-ops as a viable alternative to traditional forms of work organisation.

What's the solution? My article argued for a re-think of current co-op development strategies. At present, worker co-ops are being promoted as a way to create jobs, without taking into account that building new forms of work organisation can be a long, slow and challenging process. It's certainly no quick fix for unemployment. If we want to build strong worker co-ops, we need to put more emphasis on the quality of jobs being created, rather than the quantity. Satgar can disagree - but does he have to do it so unpleasantly?

Kate Philip

Dear Editor

Greed and the insatiable desire to accumulate wealth have resulted in the exploitation of workers by our own comrades. These comrades are dragged into the bourgeois class despite their previous ideology.

Since 1994, through the deracialisation of capital and economic empowerment via BEE and the outsourcing processes, we have seen the emergence of black elites at the expense of the working class. Our comrades have used the outsourcing process for their own benefit while in the process degrading the standard of living of the working class.

BEE and other processes of empowerment could have led the way to a more socialist economic transformation where people are empowered to empower others. But instead the empowered are further empowered and many are only window dressers.

The NUM holds principles that should be shared by all within the organisation. The character of NUM

is derived from communalism. This is enshrined in our Constitution and reinforced by policies and the adoption of the Freedom Charter. Hence, our work should reinforce these attributes.

Frans Baleni, our general secretary, wrote: "The union is a collective organization of wages and salary earners who come together in order to protect and improve their standard of living. It is therefore, a class organization and is perpetually engaged in a class struggle with employers." He indicates that it is our work to constantly engage as members of the proletariat with capital and fight for working class interests.

But do we all share the same socialist values? If we share the same values, then none of us would aspire to be rich through exploiting other people or use their position in the union to accumulate wealth. Do we still have people who are anti-socialism/communism in our union? If yes, then, this organisation must redefine its character.

As members and employees of this NUM we should answer this: If the character of NUM is socialist, how do we rate? Do we have to sign capitalist deals that compromise our class struggle?

We should be honest and make the decision whether we belong or not to this organization. In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844, defining wage labour, Karl Marx said: "The worker has become a commodity, and it is a bit of luck for him if he can find a buyer. And the demand on which the life of the worker depends, depends on the whim of the rich and the capitalists."

Choose between buying comrades as cheap commodities or defending their interests - you cannot choose both. Ours is the struggle for workers and the poor.

Orapeleng Moraladi  
Regional Organiser - NUM  
Kimberley

## 9<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF THIS TOP SELLING WORK FROM ACCLAIMED LABOUR LAW AUTHOR **JOHN GROGAN**



Up to date, comprehensive and reliable

An indispensable guide through the complexities of labour law

Widely quoted in SA labour courts and arbitration proceedings

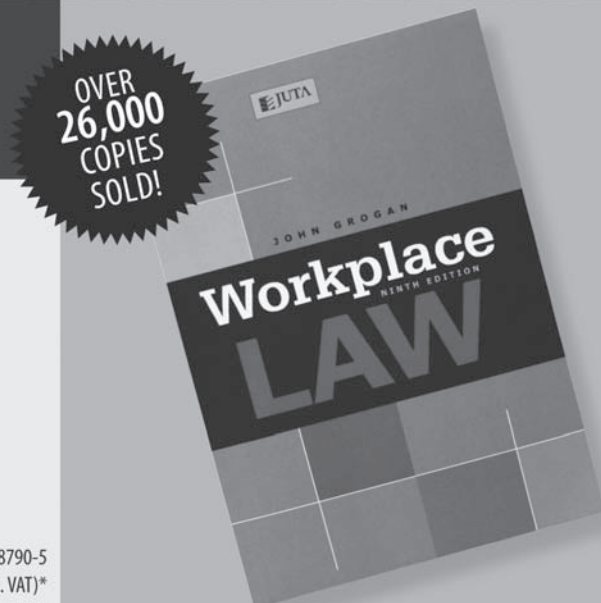
Relied on by thousands of labour law professionals



ISBN: 978-0-7021-78790-5

R425.00 (Incl. VAT)\*

\* Excl. packaging & postage



**To order contact: Juta Law Customer Services**

Tel: +27 21 763 3600, Fax: +27 21 761 5861, E-mail: [cserv@juta.co.za](mailto:cserv@juta.co.za) or visit our website for further details.

[www.jutalaw.co.za](http://www.jutalaw.co.za)

**JUTA**  
L A W