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forget that it may be easier to start a fire than to put it out.

The fight between the militias on both sides and the violence unleashed against the unarmed population has been waged with exceptional cruelty. One reason may be that the initiative has passed from the communities on the ground to those contending for power. Another may be the low value on life placed by the security cabal in Khartoum and by those in the opposition who want power at any cost.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

I suggest a three-pronged process in the Sudan. The priority must be to complete the Naivasha peace process and change the character of the government in Khartoum. Second, whatever the level of civilian support enjoyed by militias, it would be a mistake to tarnish the communities with the sins of the particular militia they support. On the contrary, every effort should be made to neutralise or re-organise the militia and stabilise communities in Darfur through local initiatives. This means both a civic conference of all communities - both those identified as Arab and those as African - and reorganised civil defence forces of all communities. This may need to be done under the protective and supervisory umbrella of an African Union policing force.

Finally, to build on the Naivasha process by bringing into it all those previously excluded. To do so will require creating the conditions for a reorganised civil administration in Darfur.

To build confidence among all parties, but particularly among those demonised as 'Arab', we need to use the same standard for all. To make the point, let us first look at the African region. The UN estimates that some 30 to 50 000 people have been killed in Darfur and another 1.4 million or so have been made homeless. The figure for the

dead in Congo over the last few years is over 4 million. Many have died at the hands of ethnic Hema or Lendu militias. These are Janjawid-type militias known to have functioned as proxies for neighbouring states. In the northern Ugandan districts of Acholiland, over 80% of the population has been interned by the government, given substandard rations and nominal security, thus left open to gradual premeditated starvation and periodic kidnapping by another militia, the Lord's Redemption Army (LRA). When the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, flew to Khartoum recently, I was in Kampala. The comment I heard all around was: 'Why didn't he stop here? And why not in Kigali? And Kinshasa? Should we not apply the same standards to the governments in Kampala and Kigali and elsewhere as we do to the government in Khartoum, even if Kampala and Kigali are America's allies in its global 'war on terror'?

Internationally, there is the daunting example of Iraq. Before the American invasion, Iraq went through an era of UN sanctions, which were kept in place for a decade by the US and Britain. The effect of the sanctions came to light when UNICEF carried out a child mortality survey in 1999 at the initiative of Canada and Brazil. Richard Garfield, professor of Clinical International Nursing at Columbia University and chair of the Human Rights Committee of the American Public Health Association calculated 'on a conservative estimate' that there had been 300 000 'excess deaths' of children under five in Iraq during the sanctions. But the sanctions continued. Today, the US does not even count the number of Iraqi dead, and the UN has made no attempt to estimate them. Iraq is not history. It continues to bleed.

This backdrop, regional and international, should prompt us to ask at least one question: Does the label 'worst

humanitarian crisis' tell us more about Darfur or about those labelling and the politics of labelling? Are we to return to a Cold War-type era in which America's allies can commit atrocities with impunity while its adversaries are demagogically held accountable to an international standard of human rights?

Some argue that international alignment on the Darfur crisis is dictated by the political economy of oil. To the extent this is true, let us not forget that oil influences both those (such as China) who would like continued access to Sudan's oil and those (such as the US) who covet that access. But for those who do strategic thinking, the more important reason may be political. For official America, Darfur is a strategic opportunity to draw Africa into the global 'war on terror' by sharply drawing lines that demarcate 'Arab' against 'African,' just as for the crumbling regime in Khartoum this very fact presents a last opportunity to downplay its own responsibilities and call for assistance from those who oppose official America's 'war on terror'.

CONCLUSION

For the African Union, Darfur is both an opportunity and a test. The opportunity is to build on the global concern over a humanitarian disaster in Darfur to set a humanitarian standard that must be observed by all, including America's allies in Africa. And the test is to defend African sovereignty in the face of official America's global 'war on terror'. On both counts, the first priority must be to stop the war and push the peace process.

This is an edited version of an article, which appeared in the Pambazuka news. Mamdani is Herbert Lehman professor of Government and director, Institute of African Studies, at University of Columbia, New York.

A tribute to Ma Ray

A number of prominent anti-apartheid activists died over the last two months. **Terry Bell** pays tribute to former trade unionist Ray Alexander.

An era of South African trade unionism, socialism and internationalism came to an end in September with the death of Ray Alexander Simons. She was the last of a tiny group of East European Jewish émigrés who contributed so much to the growth of trade unionism in this country.

Her contribution was, by any standards, exceptional and her legacy will be seen every time workers stand up to fight for their rights. It seemed singularly appropriate that members of the Food and Allied Workers' Union (Fawu) who remembered their honorary life president on Tuesday night went on to continue their David and Goliath battle against SA Breweries.

The workers had won a labour court case against their retrenchment, but the employer refused to accept the judgment and has taken the matter on appeal. So the retrenched workers chained themselves to the gates of the brewery. Ray would have approved.

I am honored to have known her. We first met in Cape Town in 1962 when I, a young student journalist, was given a rapid induction into the history and purpose of trade unionism.

Satisfied that I had imbibed and

understood enough, I was promptly packed off in the company of 'a comrade' to address workers at a waterside canning factory at lunchtime. There was no gainsaying Ray. 'You can talk,' she said, pointing out that I also spoke Afrikaans.

I remember being incredibly nervous, but Ray had convinced me of the need for those who sell their labour to organise and unite to fight for and protect their wages and conditions. I had a duty to pass on the message. Besides, I simply did not want to let her (or the ideas) down. Somehow the two seemed to be conflated.

And so, on a day off, I was driven to the waterfront (a totally less salubrious place in those days) with a parcel of pamphlets extolling workers to join the Food & Canning Workers' Union. I don't remember what I said, but I did stand atop a green flecked formica table in an atmosphere heavy with the smell of fish and the stare of serious faces.

And I remember my arm being grabbed to get me to flee because 'management' was coming. It was a rather dramatic introduction to trade unionism, but the lessons never left me.

This was because Ray's arguments were so clear. Anyone who believed in fairness and justice simply had to accept them. That was her strength and was why she was so instrumental in building the union, which eventually, through amalgamation and much strife, is now Fawu.

She was also instrumental in helping to build trade union awareness across a wide field and this planted the seeds that grew into many of the unions of today. That was her greatest ability: she could organise and convince others of the need to be organised to fight for and protect basic rights.

We had our political differences. Like so many of her generation who had invested so much hope in the Russian revolution of 1917, she could not countenance the idea that the revolution may have been strangled in its infancy; that, poisoned by nationalism, it could have become the mirror image of the very system it had so briefly overthrown.

But unlike so many later adherents to the concept of socialism in one country and who lauded the supposed moral and economic superiority of the former Soviet Union, she never allowed this to interfere with the work of uniting workers as workers. And she was a devout adherent to debate within the workers' movement.

At a trade union level, Ray was never sectarian, and she held firmly to trade union principles. As such, her views were often in direct conflict with some of the policies of unions in which she played so great a role. For example, she fiercely opposed trade union investment companies. 'Trade unions should remember what their role is,' she chided.

Well into her eighties, as honorary Fawu president, she conducted a vociferous campaign against corruption in the union and pointedly criticised the government's policy of privatisation.

This was the woman who devoted 75 years of an activist life to the labour movement and who convinced me that the basic building blocks of a future society based on justice and equity lie within the organised working class.

Hamba Kakuhle Ma Ray. Your legacy lives on.

This is an edited version of an article, which appeared in Bell's column Inside Labour in the Business Report

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Socialist and trade unionist

This is an edited version of an interview carried in the *Labour Bulletin* on her return to SA in 1990.

Ray Alexander first came to South Africa on 6 November 1929. She had attended illegal study groups and been an active member of the International Organisation to Help Revolutionaries' in Latvia since she was 15. Her mother, fearing for her safety, sent her to South Africa, where they heard the Communist Party was legal. Ray was very disappointed the day after she arrived because there were no October Revolution celebrations on 7 November. She couldn't understand why this was so, especially in a country where the Party was legal. After 30 years of pioneering work in trade union organisation, in particular the Food and Canning Workers Union, the Communist Party and the Federation of South African Women, amongst others, Alexander and her husband, Jack Simons, left South Africa in 1965. She continued her close involvement with the liberation movement in exile, and when she returned to her adopted country had this to say.

COSATU: AN IMPRESSIVE GIANT

It is very great to be back. The one thing that I'm very impressed with is the great formation of Cosatu. As soon as Cosatu was established I called it a great giant in an article in the *African Communist*. I'm particularly impressed with the large number of women trade union officials. Of course the women will say there are not enough, but... you know they say Rome wasn't built in one day.

I'll say it time and again, that without Cosatu, that without this big organisation and the strikes that Cosatu carried over the years, this breakthrough which Nelson Mandela is talking about would not have taken place. It is the working class and what they are doing that affects the economy of the country.

NEW SITUATION FILLED WITH HOPE

I'm very confident. When comrades were expressing fears about Jack and me I said, 'No - it's a new situation.' And the more I see it the more I believe it. Things can't go back, we can only push them forward. So I have great confidence.

Our movement is not what it was when we left 25 years ago. When we left comrades were afraid to say goodbye to us. Even if I saw people on the street and I wanted to say goodbye, they would turn their heads away. We are coming back to a new situation altogether.

SACTU'S ROLE IN COSATU'S FORMATION

We made a big input in the formation of Cosatu. Because you know there were problems with the formation of Cosatu and the other unions, and we worked very hard on these. We met comrades in Lusaka, Gaborone, and Harare pleading with them to be an all-embracing Cosatu. There were all kinds of leanings - ultra left, and a bit of reactionary. Racism was entering in it. And we had to iron it out. So I'm not saying that Cosatu is a Sactu formation, but Sactu made a big input. And to my mind now the Sactu comrades must come and work in Cosatu unions, and help to make them stronger...

There are still plenty of workers to be organised. Not only the farmworkers but also the large numbers of workers that are not in the unions yet. So we have a big job to do to organise the unorganised. To organise the unemployed and to fight for jobs.

BLUFFED ABOUT SOCIALISM

When the new situation in Eastern Europe broke out it was a great shock to me personally. I have been in the movement for a long, long time, 60 years. And I defended the Soviet Union at all times, and Eastern Europe. And when I came out of exile I went to Czechoslovakia, the GDR, the Soviet

Union, Hungary, Romania and to Bulgaria. I haven't been to Yugoslavia.

Therefore the news that broke, well it made me very unhappy. I felt in a way that I was bluffed. Many times I had arguments in our house. My own children would say: 'Mummy, this is what we hear is happening in the socialist countries.' And I would tell them what I have seen. But I had not seen what other people had seen. Because I was put in a posh hotel. I was going from one meeting to another meeting. I went to factories, but I've never really been in the homes of people, except in Hungary.

WORKERS STILL STRIKING FOR CLOAK ROOMS

I read in the *Moscow News* one day that the bus workers in Moscow went on strike. They were striking for a cloakroom or a rest room in their area where they knock off. When I read it I said to a Soviet comrade: 'You mean to tell me that your workers must strike for it in 1989, when our workers in Cape Town struck and won it in 1932!'

So altogether it was a big shock to me. I have been told perestroika will bring about greater improvements in the economy. But I didn't know that their economy is in a bad way. Remember, the Soviet Union has been helping us a great deal. Food and clothing. They were and are great supporters of our movement.