

# Overlapping leadership in alliance partners

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SNUKI ZIKALALA, ANC/SACTU journalist, argues that trade union leaders should not 'wear two hats'. He draws on his experience as a SACTU member and as a student and journalist in Bulgaria.

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**T**he debate that is going on within COSATU's ranks about the federation's alliance with the SACP and the ANC is most welcome. It is of fundamental importance that the federation should encourage an extensive debate on this, especially on the overlapping leadership between the alliance partners. We should always avoid duplication of leadership and the concentration of powers in a few individuals. People cannot be effective having their feet in two political organisations and in the trade union federation as well.

Workers in South Africa are fortunate that the COSATU federation was formed during the era of perestroika and glasnost. This enabled the federation to lay a sound basis for democracy for South African workers. COSATU has its own internal democracy. Workers have confidence in the leadership and, when they do not, they are in the position to call it to order and accountability.

Decisions are not taken from 'above' and implemented 'on behalf of' the workers. COSATU members are fully involved in the policy making of the federation. It is only through debates and thorough discussions of all issues that we can reach a common conclusion. The leadership should always take its people with it. Workers must always be involved in their union activities and they must know everything about their union or federation.

## Learning from others people's mistakes

Those of us who have studied in 'socialist' countries know that system very well. We have witnessed with our own eyes how trade unions in 'socialist' countries are simply conveyer belts for the communist parties. It is one thing to read the theory but quite another to observe its implementation and the manipulation of people's minds. Some of us witnessed the disintegration of the party and how its influence declined when it was no longer possible to deliver the goods - food rather than slogans.

We would be committing a political crime if we allow our trade unions to commit the same mistakes which were committed by the trade unions in the 'socialist' countries'. We have to learn from other people's mistakes, especially the Soviets.

In the 'socialist' countries, the basic material resources of production - that is the means of production, land, minerals, transport - were publicly owned since they were nationalised by the party. In actual fact, however, the right to command them belonged to the Communist Party Politburo and Central Committee, and to sectoral ministers and committees whose members were appointed by the Politburo.

The state, on behalf of the people, determined within five year and annual plans, what goods and deliveries were to be made by individ-

ual enterprises. The state was the guarantor that everything produced in keeping with its plans was of 'social' and 'consumer' value. Workers were not fully involved in planning and decision making regarding the economy of



the country, as declared in the propaganda material. They were only paid for their labour inputs and not for the results of their performances.

Leaders of the trade union federation were appointed by the party, and the trade union newspapers were fully under

the control of the party.

Union dues were compulsory and workers had no right to belong to alternative unions.

Progressive mankind hails Michael Gorbachev, leader of the USSR, for ending that authoritarian 'command' system. It is falling like a pack of cards. There is now tolerance of dissenting voices and workers are in a position to discuss and debate the issues that affect their lives.

Some republics, too, for the first time in 50 years, are publicly questioning their incorporation into the Soviet Union. This is because they were not consulted in the first place, and their opinions were suppressed.

We don't have to copy what the 'socialist' countries were doing. They have realised that they committed a lot of mistakes, hence workers don't have confidence in them. They were putting party politics before trade unionism. That is why socialism has not yet come into being. People eat food and not party politics.

## Evaluating our own history

In this era of perestroika and glasnost, we have to evaluate our history and make objective and constructive criticisms. As Karl Marx says "We must always be critical of history." We don't have to fear openness and to point out mistakes and failures.

It would be of great value if the younger generation had the history of the ANC/

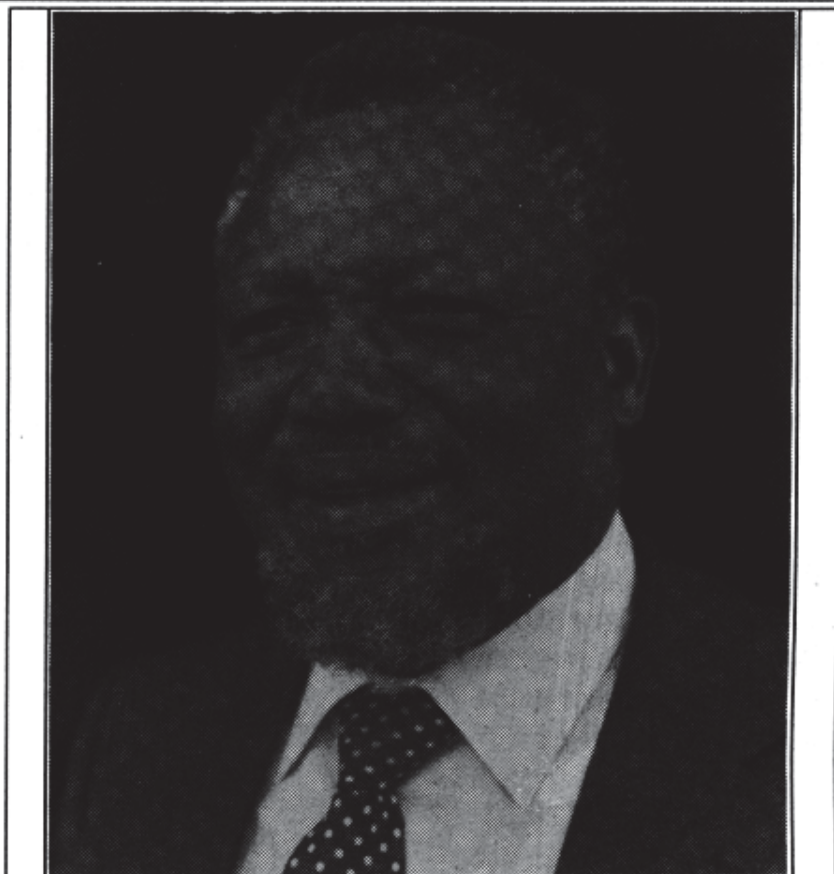


SACP/SACTU alliance. This was an alliance which was formed in 1955 on a solid foundation and leaders of this alliance, to this day, are in the forefront of our struggle. The alliance united all progressive forces which were fighting against the racist regime. Its activities were well known until 1960 when political organisations were banned.

Because of the nature of our struggle it was very difficult to know of this alliance and how it co-ordinated its activities. Members of this alliance were forced to work under absolute secrecy. One hopes that the ANC/SACP/SACTU leadership will one day give their archives to the historians.

As a member of both the ANC and SACTU, I was able to observe a number of weaknesses in this alliance. Too much power was concentrated on a few individuals. For example, the last President of SACTU was also Deputy Treasurer General of the ANC. Most of his time was taken up with the financial administration of the ANC.

Our Secretary General was a member of the NEC of the ANC and also a member of the PMC (Politico-Military-Committee). These two leaders were not able to attend to problems of both the ANC and SACTU in the way that they would have liked to. They were overworked and had very little time to read or update themselves on contemporary problems.



*John Nkademeng - as general secretary of SACTU and NEC member of the ANC, he was "overworked" and therefore unable to "attend to problems of both.... in the way (he) would have liked to".*

*Photo: Benny Gool/Afrapix*

They were not kept abreast about developments by their advisers (if they had any). This is not a personal attack at all. Leaders have to read a lot and be well informed so that they can take rational decisions.

The involvement of one leader in many political committees makes him become ineffective and results in duplication of work. It also brings about disharmony within the ranks of the union or federation, because decisions which are taken at the NEC of the ANC will also be implemented by members of the trade union federation. This therefore brings into question the independence of

the federation/SACTU.

The ongoing debate on the alliance is a healthy one and I think that we should keep it in that spirit. Criticising what one has observed does not mean that one is against the alliance. We have to be made aware of our shortcomings.

### **Differences between trade unions and political parties**

Workers should know the difference between the role of the trade union movement and political parties. We must not take people for granted, assuming that they know everything. Slogans bring only temporary victories but information and



education permanent ones.

A trade union movement is an organisation of workers irrespective of their political affiliation. Its main aim is to fight for the social needs of workers. It takes care of workers' problems whether they are working conditions, better wages, pensions, education, health and safety, housing etc.

A trade union movement deals with workers' problems at the work place. It deals directly with the employer and is independent of him. It is also important that it should be independent of the government and of any political organisation.

**'Workers should know the difference between the role of the trade union movement and political parties.'**

A political party, on the other hand, acts through the institutions of the state and local authority. It is involved in parliamentary politics.

The ANC at the moment is a liberation movement. For the past 30 years it has been operating under illegal conditions, hence its structures were undemocratic. Because of conspiracy, it had to appoint its middle cadres, and some of its leaders were also not democratically elected.

It is only now that the ANC is democratising its

structures, and the process of moving from illegality to legality is no child's play. Up to today the ANC has not reached the target of one million membership.

The SACP is a Marxist-Leninist party. Its political programme is completely different from that of the ANC. It wants to build a classless society where there is no exploitation of man by man. This is a party that has been working under illegal conditions for the past forty years. Like all other communist parties it was under Stalinist hegemony. Its cadres had no notion of mass democracy and were indoctrinated on Stalin's command administration system.

Before perestroika, it ad-



*Lenin's notion of trade unions as a 'transmission belt' was practised by unionists in the Soviet Union - even Soviet union officials (above) admit that this led to workers becoming disillusioned with existing unions*

*Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin*

hered to the Leninist concept of a "transmission belt" relationship between party and trade unions, although it is an undeniable fact that some leaders of the party have been in the forefront of both trade union and political organisations.

They have played a very important role in our struggle, if we underplay their undemocratic ways of doing things. The communist party, like the ANC, is still building its structures.

The whole political climate is going to change when the ANC becomes a party. This will have to happen when we start the process of constitutional negotiations. The ANC, the SACP and COSATU are all calling for a Constituent Assembly. This means that the ANC, as well as the SACP, will have to have their own candidates for the assembly.

The SACP has to put up its own candidates, who are not members of the ANC, for the Constituent Assembly or the non-racial parliament. It can draw its membership from the labour movement. Actually that is where it belongs. The trade union movement cannot have its own candidates representing the federation but it can sponsor ANC or SACP candidates.

Having outlined the differences that exist between the alliance partners, we are therefore in a better position to have an overall picture of the relationship of the individual organisations.



**COSATU must maintain its independence**

COSATU as a federation must maintain its independence - financially *and* politically. Leaders of the federation must not hold elected office in any political organisation. If a leader of the federation gets elected in a political organisation he must resign from his official position in the trade union. You cannot serve two masters.

**'Leaders of COSATU must not hold elected office in a political organisation. If a leader of COSATU gets elected in a political organisation, he or she must resign from the trade union.'**

We cannot continue with the politics of the past. This hinders a lot of progress. Leaders won't be able to deliver the goods. They will simply transmit to the labour movement decisions which are being made at a political meeting. This does not mean that a trade union leader cannot be active in his party branch or be elected to a party congress. Views of a trade union leader can be known but he must avoid tak-

ing part where a political decision is made.

We should try to de-ideologise the labour movement. In South Africa we have a number of trade union federations: NACTU - which is aligned to the black consciousness movement, UWUSA to the Inkatha Freedom Party, and white trade unions which support the Conservative and the Nationalist parties. We also have millions of workers who are not organised. Our main task is to form a strong trade union unity.

Workers' demands are common and they have a common enemy. That is why it is important that at factory level we should not place emphasis on political affiliation. A worker, irrespective of his political membership, must get the same representation. Before the employer, workers must speak with one voice.

If a leader of a trade union movement is also a leader of a political party, it will be difficult for him to win or to represent workers from other political organisations at the plant level. Workers who don't belong to his political organisation will be prejudiced and they will band together and oppose any suggestion that comes from him, not because it is not progressive but just because it comes from a member of the ANC or SACP.

For example, the interne-cine strife that has taken the lives of more than 800

people has been blamed on supporters of Inkatha and the ANC. People who are being used by the right-wingers are workers who have a common enemy and objectives. If they were politically conscious as workers, as we always claim, they would have seen who the enemy is. Education is more important than political slogans.

At the plant level, a political activist must put his party politics aside and work for workers' unity. It does not mean that 'he who is not with you is against you'. The concept of 'there is no middle road' is very danger-

**'The concept of "no middle road" is very dangerous. It does not mean that "he who is not with you is against you".'**

ous and must be discouraged.

We don't all understand or grasp things at the same time. We differ in political understanding and must learn to tolerate different political views. Pluralism and internal democracy are the basic principles of a trade union movement.

The overlap of leadership will weaken the trade union movement, which is why some of us were happy when Cyril Ramaphosa was not co-opted onto the internal



leadership of the ANC. This would have taken much of this time and he would not have been able to attend to the NUM's problems properly, especially now when Anglo-American is retrenching mine workers. Workers need proper representation and their leaders must be well prepared with information when facing employers at the negotiating table. An employer will never agree to postpone a meeting just because a leader is attending a political meeting or is not ready because 'last night he was at a political meeting'.

Employers are interested in production and the workers in their basic social needs.

### The permanent role of trade unions

According to American sociologists, people get involved in politics 'once every five years' when they cast their vote, or at times when legislation affecting their lives is being passed.

In South Africa after we have achieved our goal of non-racial democracy, we have to uplift the living standard of our people. This can only be done by trade unions persuading the employers to use part of the surplus value for the benefit of the workers.

Worker-employer struggle is permanent whereas the political struggle is par-



*FAWU's Chris Dlamini - serving the union and the party at the same time*

*Photo: Paul Weinberg*

minimum and maximum programmes of the alliance. They must learn through the mass media about problems or progress within the alliance. We are no longer working under illegal conditions. We must teach our people democracy not auto-cracy.

Trade unions in South Africa have a mammoth task. Once their experienced leadership gets involved in party politics, they won't be able to fulfil their tasks. We will find ourselves involved in ANC, SACP, PAC, AZAPO, Inkatha and Nationalist party politics more than in

liamentary where workers go once every five years to vote either ANC, SACP, Nationalist Party or for other political parties. To date neither 'socialist' nor bourgeois governments have fully represented the interests of the working class.

### 'Pluralism and internal democracy are the basic principles of a trade union movement'

The trade union alliance with ANC/SACP must not be a paper one. Workers must be fully informed about the

the trade unions. Employers will be in a better position to exploit workers. It is not politics that uplifts or betters our living standards, but economic growth.

The overlap of leadership will also affect the independence of the trade union. Once a political party makes a mistake, the trade union or federation will be afraid to openly criticize the political party. This is what has already been happening. The federation will be compelled 'for unity's sake' to follow an unendorsed line without consulting the workers.

Let's all work for trade union unity. Individual leaders can play their political part, but this must be outside the union. They must not hold dual power. ☆