

# Overlapping leadership in alliance partners

The two hats issue has over the years sparked intense debate and it is clear from Copelyn's input that the debate is not dead. **Snuki Zikalala** (a master of many hats) drew on his experience as a Sactu member, a student and a journalist in Bulgaria to argue that trade union leaders should not 'wear two hats'.

**T**he debate 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 have always avoided duplication of leadership and the confrontation 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 Cosatu 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 through 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 conveyor 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, and 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 individual 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 only paid for their labour inputs and not for the results of their performances.

The party appointed leaders of the trade union federation, 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 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.

## EVALUATING OUR OWN HISTORY

In this era of perestroika and glasnost it would be of great value if the younger generation had the history of the 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 coordinated its activities. Members of this alliance were



*Trade unionists with the late Joe Slovo.*

forced to work under absolute secrecy. One hopes that the alliance 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. The involvement of one leader in many political committees makes him ineffective and results in duplication of

work. 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 UNIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES**

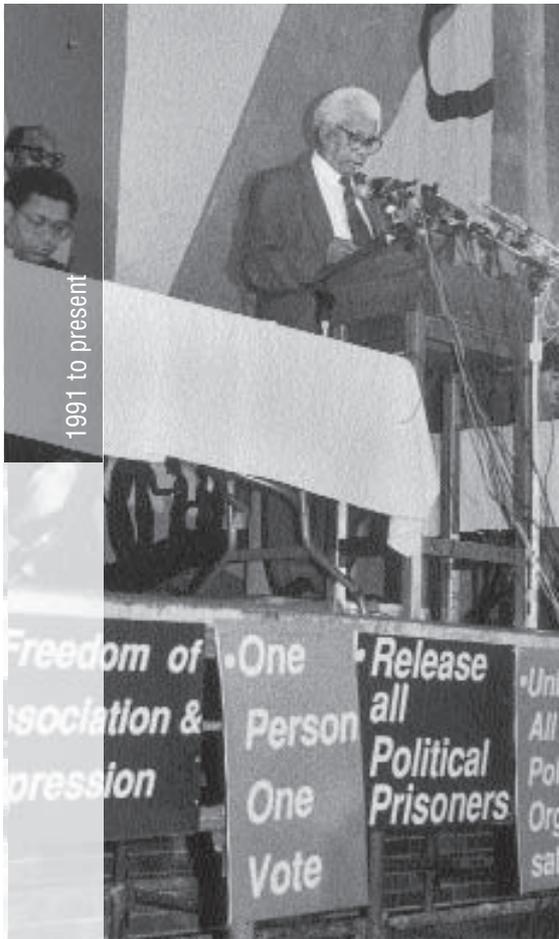
Workers should know the difference between the role of the union movement and political parties. A trade union movement is an organisation of workers irrespective of their political affiliation. Its main aim is to fight for the social needs of workers. It takes care of workers' problems whether they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

A trade union movement deals with workers' problems at the workplace. 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.

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 in the process of moving from illegality to legality.

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



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conditions for the past 40 years. Like all the 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. The communist party, like the ANC, is still building its structures.

### **COSATU MAINTAINING 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 leaders of the federation get elected in a political organisation he must resign from his official position in the trade union. You cannot serve two masters.

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 taking 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 ensure 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 affiliation above the interests of workers. 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.

### **THE PERMANENT ROLE OF UNIONS**

The alliance must not be a paper one. Workers must be fully informed about the 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 autocracy. Trade unions in South Africa have a mammoth task. Once their experienced leadership get 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 the trade unions. Employers will be in a better position to exploit workers. It is not politics that uplifts or better 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 criticise 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. 18

*In the old days Zikalala wrote extensively for the Bulletin. This is an edited version of an article, which appeared in SA Labour Bulletin 15(6).*



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