

Profile

Ronald Mofokeng, shopsteward, CWIU treasurer and COSATU national treasurer.

Treasurer of CWIU

In 1981, at the second congress of the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union, I was elected treasurer. It has only happened once that the books did not balance. The books were out by R10. It would have been easier for me to take a R10 note out of my pocket and balance the books. But I wanted to find out why they could not balance. I had to expose that to the workers and say, Look comrades, I have been with you for many years as a national treasurer, but today I could not balance with R10.

Unfortunately some treasurers may not have the required skills, but have been elected into the position because of their commitment to the working class. That is why many treasurers cannot explain certain transactions when asked to. The treasurer should be in a position to understand the financial statements, because of the policies and principles of our union.

When you talk about worker control, worker control spreads everywhere, into factories. You must control the books in order to be able to advise branch treasurers, and they should realise from you how you control those things.

From a poor family

My parents come from Bethlehem in the Orange Free State and that is where I grew up. I am from a poor family and it was very hard for my family to satisfy my needs. My father used to work in the mines. You know when you are growing up under those problems, you carry them along and you still have the feeling of how can I change the life of the family that made me grow up?

Such things start conscientising your own mind. There is nobody who is going to teach you about the politics. You start seeing these things happen-

ing and the problems coming up until you interview your own mind.

An early strike

I started working at PG Glass in Germiston in 1971. It was during those years of the liaison committees and works committees. We found that we could not get anything from them as they were part and parcel of management. I was elected chairperson of the liaison committee at PG Glass. The bread price was increased. We decided to ask management for an increment to cover the bread increase. The manager told us to leave the office and that he would pretend as though we did not talk to him.

We reported back to workers. There was anger and we decided on a stoppage. The following day, having heard about the proposed work stoppage, the manager called us back to his office. He told us that everything had been passed to the head office and the head office was looking into the matter. That was too late. The stoppage lasted for two days, until the company gave in to our demands. We got just more than the bread increase.

Then we read about a union meeting in the newspaper. It was organised by the Urban Training Project (UTP). We contacted UTP and got advice. We contacted workers at Pilkington Glass in Springs, and started organising. We hitch-hiked to the meeting in Hammanskraal.

We formed Glass and Allied Workers Union (GAWU). That carried on until late 1978 when the Consultative Committee was convened to form a federation, involving most unions across industries. We were trying to bring all unions together under one umbrella and one federation. We decided to leave UTP with other unions like

SFAWU and T&GWU and joined the federation, FOSATU.

One of the reasons for moving from UTP was the concept of worker control. At that time UTP was close to the American labour movement. The argument was that one does not have to be controlled by any outside movement.

There was a great difference between FOSATU and UTP. We used to have a lot of training in UTP, but UTP was not as active as FOSATU on the shopfloor. FOSATU was committed to building the shopstewards. We had more worker control.

In FOSATU, GAWU negotiated with Chemical Workers Industrial Union to merge.

Mandate and corruption

As far as books are concerned I think we have been doing well. I think this is because of worker control through mandates.

Even in unions which have financial problems I would not see it as corruption. I think they are missing a mandate somewhere. Immediately you do something that the workers did not mandate you to do, then that starts being seen as corruption.

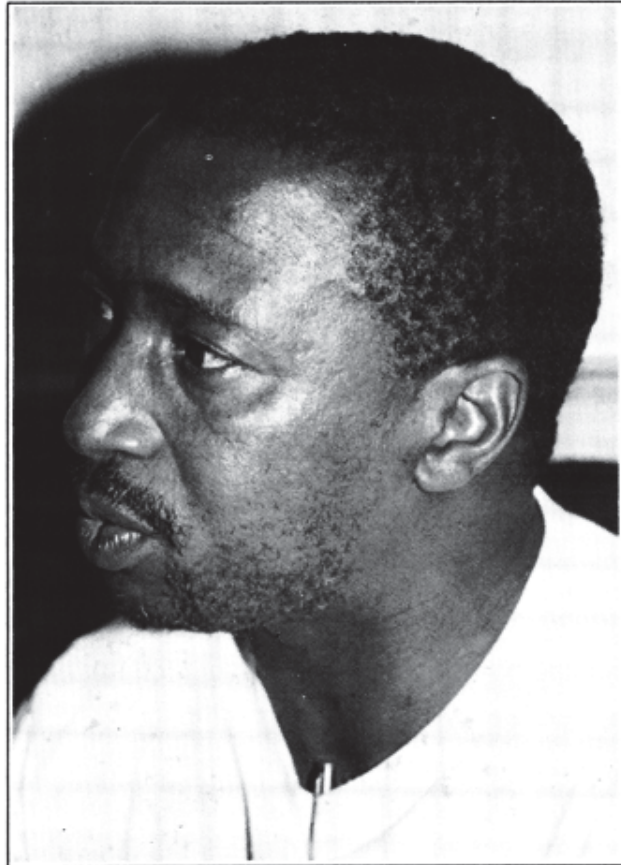
I do not have the answer as to how to overcome the problem of undermining a mandate. The problem with the structures is that they work under the pressures of political tyranny, the pressures at factories, and in our communities and other levels under this regime. You might find that you are forced to jump over and above those mandates. You do not have time, you do not have the resources to call your office bearers to come from Natal or Cape Town to deal with the problems. Those might be the root problems. It means that one has to be strict.

I was elected national treasurer of COSATU last year. In COSATU office bearers work as a team, so if I get a mandate to address a meeting, I do not have to say this is not my task, that task is supposed to be Barayi's. But my first goal is to see that the accounts department is running very smoothly and fairly well. Right now the head office is running very smoothly. There is a team spirit in the accounts department and we have got comrades who qualify for the jobs and they are very committed.

Self sufficiency

At our last congress we took a resolution not to rely on foreign funding. It was informed by the importance of moving towards self-sufficiency. In COSATU we want worker control. We do not want donations and being told what to do with them. We do not want someone outside COSATU to control us.

You ask how we will get enough money? The question is, are you putting this to the workers? Are you telling the workers the problems as they are? Surely the workers are not so stupid, they under-



stand. If you address the workers, where you get your mandate, whom you are accountable to, then they will come with a solution. How about increasing our subscriptions? If you are doing it over the heads of workers, then you will not solve the problem.

Negotiations and mass action

The working class has been all along pushing towards power. So now there is a confusion about negotiations. Some believe negotiations are an alternative to be used instead of taking power. I do not see it that way. I think they go together. We negotiate, but we know our ultimate goal is: we want power.

I do not think we should cheat our minds and say that this will be done in a diplomatic manner around those tables there, and if we are beaten around the table we are doomed. The leadership can concentrate on the issue of negotiations, but we the second layer of leadership definitely should not forget our defiance campaigns. I think we should intensify our defiance campaigns. We should ask the question, how did these negotiations come about? Did we force these negotiations to come into question or was there somebody through his leniency who said, let us negotiate? I think we should analyse those things. If this was through mass activities, then we should continue with mass action until we get to the ultimate goal. This will make sure that there is accountability and there are report backs on the developments. A person calling for suspension of such actions should be questioned as to what he wants us to do. ☆