

'Workers of the mind'

Bulletin: When was SADTU formed?

Madisha: SADTU was officially launched in 1990. The formation goes back to the unity talks in 1988 in which the exiled ANC and COSATU comrades like Sydney Mufamadi and Jay Naidoo played a part. Those people ensured that more than 15 organisations which were structured around racial lines came together. Before the formation of SADTU the apartheid system did not allow teachers of different racial backgrounds to come together. A number of organisations stayed out and that is why today some organisations are still outside SADTU.

Bulletin: How many members do you have and who are they?

Madisha: SADTU has 220 000 members from 10 000 in 1990. The members are teachers in the formal education sector: primary and secondary schools and colleges of education. We have a few lecturers from the universities

Bulletin: You have organised about two thirds of all public school teachers and the rest are in other unions. What is your organising strategy now?

Madisha: We have two rival organisations, the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa

Etienne Vlok and Rugaya Rees interview SADTU president Willie Madisha.

(NAPTOSA) with 66 000 members and SA Onderwysersunie (SAOU) with 35 000. Although we have more than 70% of teachers in the country we still believe the other 30% has to come inside SADTU. Those teachers who remain outside SADTU even if they are organised by the other organisations, remain unorganised. We must get each and every teacher in the formal education sector into our ranks.

We have identified strategies we could use. Before 1994 we organised teachers on the basis of our political commitment and direction. With the advent of democracy the majority of teachers are now no longer looking at ideologies and philosophies. They have begun to say "Let us look into the other areas". On the basis of that we established our investment wing. We must begin to deal with the kind of problems teachers face. The majority of teachers, for instance, have outstanding debt.

We have therefore said "Let us look into ways of addressing that debt". Secondly, we have asked what makes NAPTOSA and SAOU survive. We realise they do things that we are not doing, for example the professional development of

teachers. We have a big department which deals with development but our members do not feel that kind of thing. We have therefore said "Let us identify the things our members want and avail resources to train them". In that way we believe we will be able to remove the carpet from under the organisational feet of the other organisations

Bulletin: SADTU has more professional members than a typical COSATU industrial union. How does the union fit into COSATU?

Madisha: The history of the country has made sure that teachers do not see themselves as workers. This makes it difficult to organise them. We have to attack that kind of a thing. For instance we took a lot of time to convince them to come into COSATU. Whenever I have addressed them I indicated to them "look you are workers". Some of us have said to them they are workers of the mind

Also, workers win battles by striking to challenge the employer. But in the past teachers considered their own pay before going into mass action. We have begun to turn that around. Last year teachers were at the forefront of the public sector battle. Teachers now see themselves as part of the working class and COSATU. Unlike conventional trade unions, teachers came to the union movement late. We still have to learn all the tactics that the traditional unions have used.

It is also difficult because the communities have not accepted that teachers are workers. How many people cry foul when teachers strike? In 1998 when SADTU went out to defend the retrenchment of 48 000 temporary teachers, our communities did not support us. Also, in COSATU's strike action on 10 May we had letters from the Minister of

Education and the community saying teachers must not go on strike. They attempt to divorce teachers from the broader working class

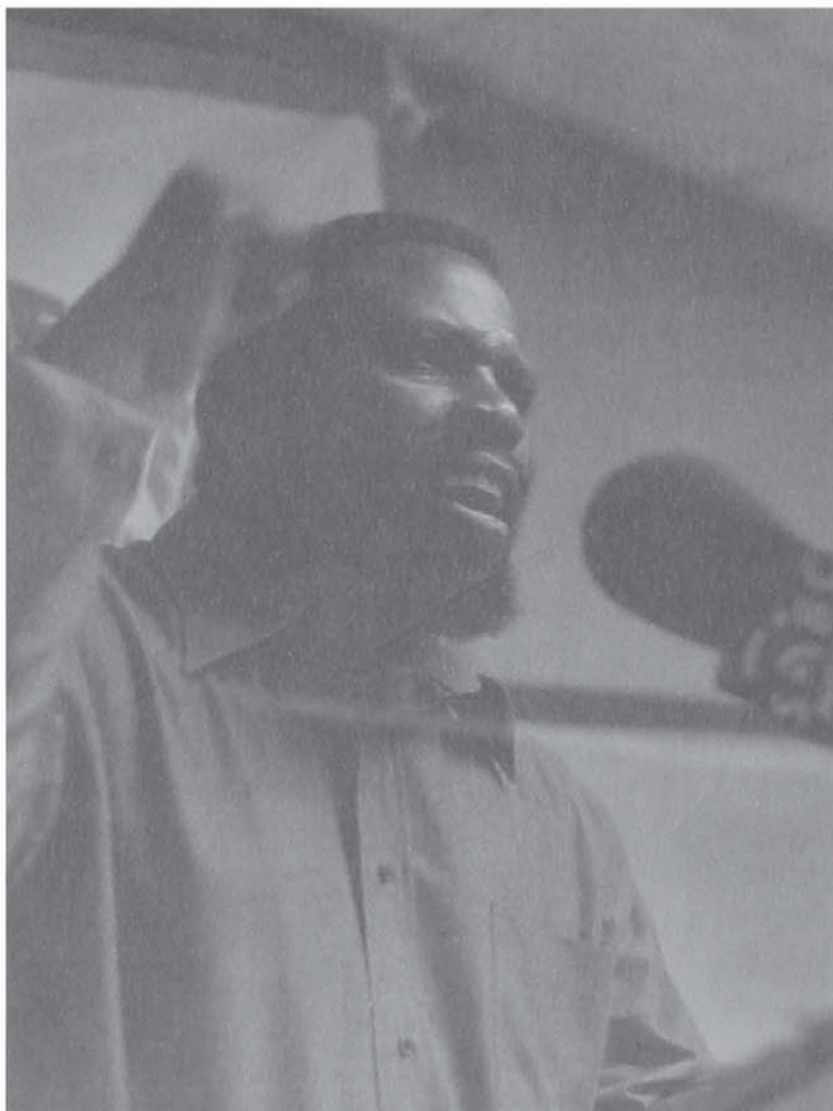
Bulletin: How is SADTU staffed and what structures do you have?

Madisha: The highest structure is the national congress followed by the national general council, the national executive committee and the national office bearers. In the provinces and regions you have the same thing. At the branches you have AGMs, then branch executive committees and sitesteward councils. At the school level you have site committees consisting of the site chairperson, the site secretary and the organiser.

We are well staffed with a number of departments at the national office. The eight office bearers are here full-time. There are a number of departments such as the national administrator, organising, gender, sports, arts and culture and education. Under the latter we have the research department and sub-departments dealing with early childhood development, higher education and curriculum development. We have the sports, arts and culture department because SADTU organises where there are children practising those things.

Bulletin: You have many women members but they are not represented in the leadership. Why is this?

Madisha: Perhaps Stalin is the problem. At the COSATU gender conference I took them back to the history of the Soviet Union. When Lenin came into power women were given almost everything. What we are fighting for today was given to those women around 1919: abortion, legalised prostitution, divorce. If a women



'Workers win battles by striking'

could not identify one man as the father of her child a number of men she pointed out would be forced to pay maintenance. These rights were given to women by the turn of the century until 1936 when Stalin came in. That legacy has affected us as well.

More than 60% of SADTU members are women but only one of the eight national officers is a woman. We have said we must attack this kind of a problem. Firstly, let us look at equipping women so that within a short period of time they can take over the leadership. We have a policy that in each and every workshop about 50% must be women. Every region and branch knows that. As we go to the COSATU congress we will be arguing that women

must not only be given positions in terms of quotas but we must increase the levels of capacity-building.

Bulletin: *What is SADTU's response to the education crisis?*

Madisa: The present government and all of us in the tripartite alliance realise that indeed we have an education crisis. It is part and parcel of the social deficit that the country faces. Therefore SADTU saw the emergence of Curriculum 2005 as a step forward. We believed it was taking us away from Bantu education and would develop the people of our country. We are disappointed that it has not come to fruition. SADTU says it has not succeeded because, firstly, teachers were not trained to deal with it. The

department's cascading model where a few teachers were trained and those would then train all the others did not succeed. Secondly, government did not avail enough resources, for example developing the workbooks for Curriculum 2005 that every child and teacher was supposed to have.

In terms of the policy evolution and legislation, such as the South African Schools Act, I think we are far ahead. SADTU contributed to this. There is a crisis because although we have good policies and legislation there is no implementation. This is because of the lack of capacity in middle management at the Department of Education.

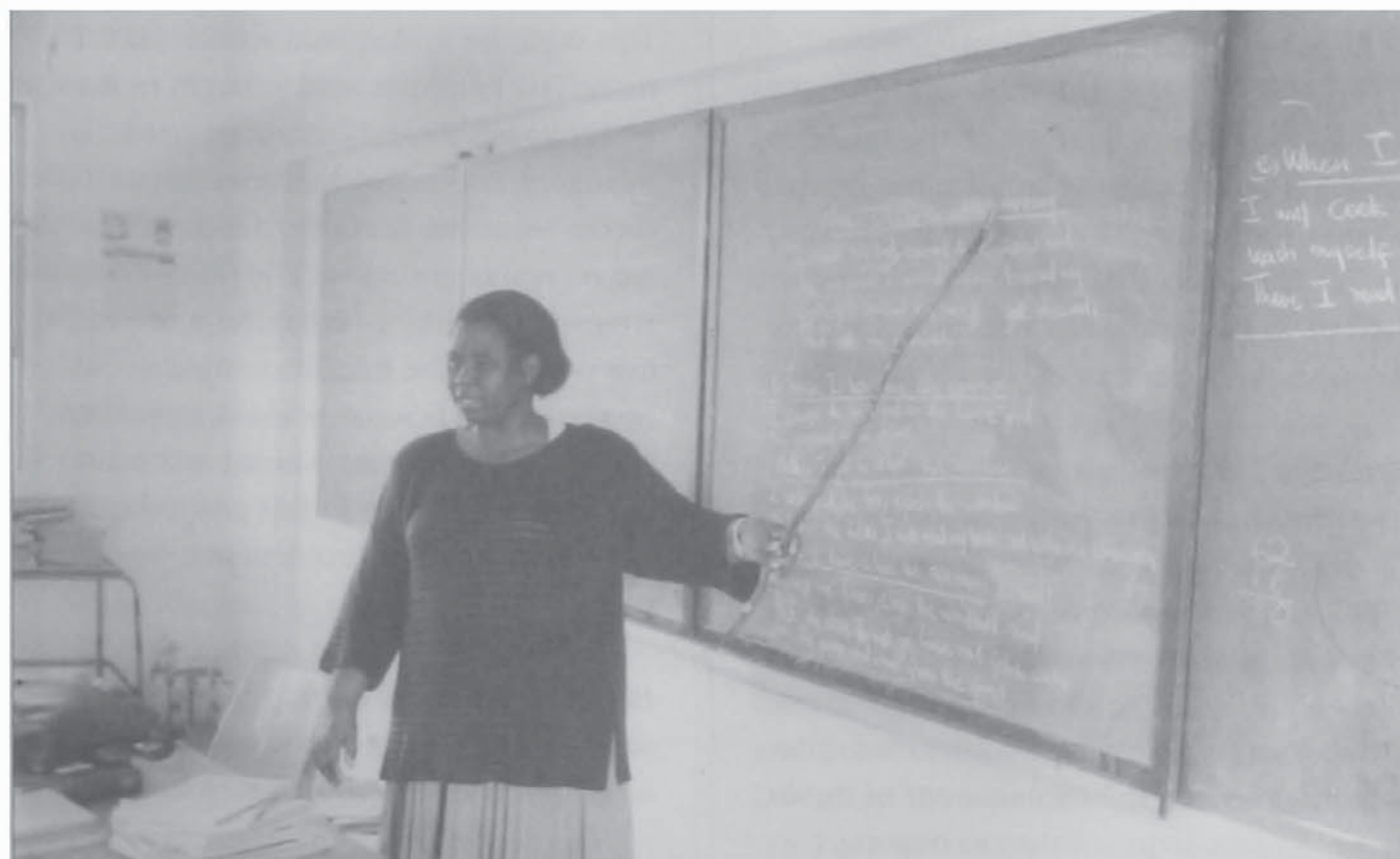
In some of the deep rural areas, and I

come from there myself, more infrastructure is needed. Last year the government spoke about 29 000 classrooms that were still needed. What constitutes a further crisis is when one teacher faces a hundred children in a classroom. In this situation you will never have proper teaching. I was a principal for some time and had only ten classrooms with more than a thousand children. As a result of that you have this matric bottleneck that is a very serious problem. It is the working class children who are suffering with the matric bottlenecks.

We cannot address this crisis unless we train the teachers. There are 85 000 teachers in the country today who are underqualified - only one or two years training. We have called on the department to avail resources to train them so that we can deal with the crisis. We demand more teachers, yet the Minister of Education talks about more than 20 000 teachers that must go. This will add to the crisis. SADTU

has called on teachers to put their shoulders to the wheel to address the problems of the children of our country and promote quality public education.

The day Kader Asmal was appointed Minister of Education was a sad day for South Africa. We worked with Sibusiso Bengu, the former minister, for five years. There was proper consultation and that is why I am proud to say SADTU contributed to the evolution of legislation. It was participatory democracy in line with the demands of our alliance. That is something we are not seeing with Asmal today. He quickly calls a commission or task team and does not come to us to say "what do you think about this particular thing?" He appoints people, they finalise whatever and he goes to the media and says whatever he wants to. The majority of the things we achieved between 1994 and 1999 are being reversed. That adds to the crisis we have. What we want to see is proper consultation so we can deal with



Resources are needed for effective teaching.

this crisis What we want to see is the implementation of policies that have evolved over the past five years so that we can then take education forward. I say it was a sad day because Asmal was seen as a messiah that was going to rescue education from SADTU

We were very happy when our alliance took over the government because we spoke about the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), about free, compulsory education. This was effected under Bengu's period where the majority of the children went back to school and were given textbooks. But if you have been following the papers and Kader Asmal's speeches, he said he is going to withdraw the supply of textbooks and stationery to children. My brothers in the rural provinces, Northern Province and Eastern Cape, cannot afford these kinds of things

In January the MEC for Education in the Free State said if children fail they will not be readmitted That is a problem because people are saying "let us look at the costs of keeping children in school" without saying "let us make sure these children go through schooling because of the crisis". Working class communities are the people who are suffering. They can't afford to buy books. If you say that you are not going to give them books anymore it means you are denying them education

Bulleth: You are involved in difficult negotiations in the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) for the second year running. What do you attribute this to?

Madlisa: Last year the problem was the unwillingness of the Department of Public Service and Administration to negotiate in good faith The issue was salaries SADTU negotiated in a conventional way and

compromised four times from 10% down to 7,1%. Government simply said "no, we follow this direction" and they did. When we went on with the negotiations Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi simply said "you take it or you leave it, I am implementing".

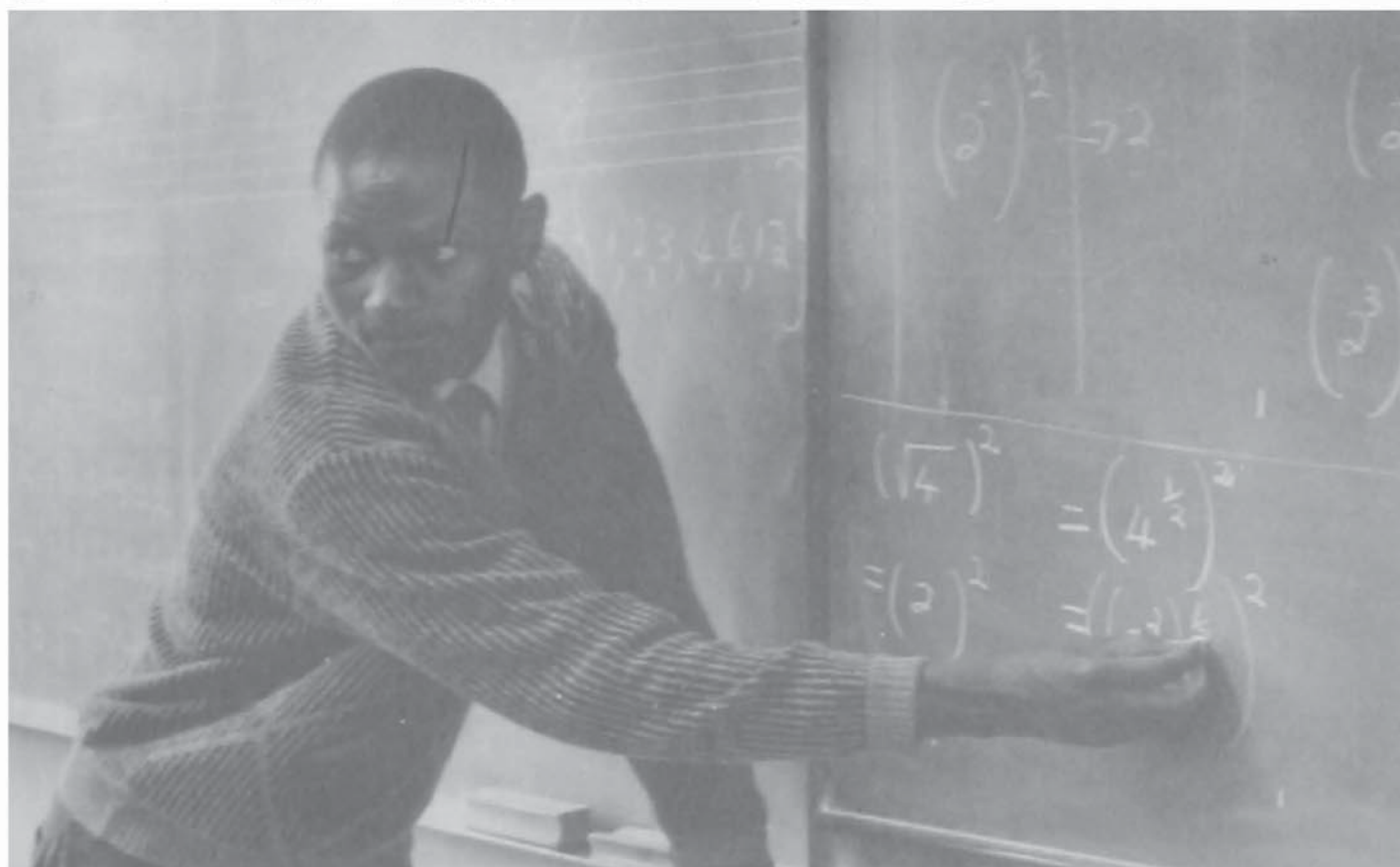
The main problem is that parliament comes up with a particular figure for increases for the public service workers even before the negotiations. Then they go to the negotiations to say "we have so much". They want you to negotiate and yet there are no negotiations Even now when they say the Minister of Finance has not determined the amount, indeed he has done that. He has spoken about 5% for raising of the benefits of the public service workers when you refer to his budget.

The negotiations last year in the PSCBC were not concluded. It is unfortunate what happened last year. It set a standard because even employers in the private sector followed the unilateral implementation model.

This year it is another kettle of fish - worse than last year. The workers demanded 10% with the lowest paid workers getting more. The employer said "take 6% or leave it". While we were still attempting to negotiate, Fraser-Moleketi announced to the media 6% as the final offer. Once again, there are no real negotiations. The 6% is something we can live with but what the workers can't live with is all the benefits being cut: housing subsidies, medical aid, leave dates and so on. Everything is being taken away. If the minister goes on in this particular way we will hit another problem like we did last year

Bulleth: Contrary to the private sector unions, SADTU negotiates with its political ally. What is the implication of this?

Madlisa: We admit that there are problems in terms of tactics. As far as the



Eighty-five thousand teachers are underqualified in South Africa

strategic objectives are concerned, as the alliance partners, we are united. We do not agree with the tactics that are being employed. One of those tactics is GEAR which determines everything such as the cuts in benefits. Government wants to curtail expenditure and not deal with the social deficit. That is exactly where the problem lies. That is the wrong tactic.

The debates in SADTU are saying why should we be in an alliance when everything gets taken away, when the RDP is put in a dustbin, when the social deficit is not addressed. The membership realises this.

As the leadership we have said perpetually that the alliance is alive, has been built on blood and therefore has to be nurtured. We have to ensure it survives because we believe that we have not yet had our revolution attained. The founding fathers of this alliance would not be happy if we begin to question that. We have to

deal with the kinds of tactical problems which are there. I mean it is an open secret that the alliance has not been meeting to tackle that.

I must emphasise that despite the alliance's existence, the leaders of the workers have to make sure that the ideals, the interests, the objectives of the workers are protected. That is why whenever we are not satisfied we will go out and challenge this kind of tactical issue. We will do this for as long as workers are being shortchanged. But then we will go on respecting the alliance.

We have therefore attempted to, painfully so, separate the alliance from the department as our employer. We have said that we are dealing with the employer in the traditional way of employer-employee and therefore the alliance is aside. The questions that we have must be dealt with in the alliance. It is difficult. The workers have reason to ask "what is happening"? ★

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