

The break away from Ceppwawu

What really happened

The former Wits regional secretary of the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (Ceppwawu) John Apollis gave a personal account in the previous Labour Bulletin of the split in the union. The **Ceppwawu secretariat** responds to Apollis' claims of a 'political purge' and argues that the events surrounding the breakaway originated from a failure of a group of individuals to adhere to the fundamental principles of organisational discipline.

This article attempts to give a true account of what moved the National Executive Committee (NEC) of Ceppwawu to take the decision it took in May 2003 and is a direct response to the article 'Ceppwawu's Night of the Long Knives', *Labour Bulletin* 28(3), June 2004. It will be found that Ceppwawu did not embark on a political purge as alluded to but was merely dealing with individuals whom did not want to adhere to the fundamental principles of organisational discipline. When dealing with this matter it will be important to look at the processes that ultimately led to the dismissals and expulsions of some leaders in the Wits region.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the launch of Ceppwawu in February 1999 a number of resolutions were adopted that would guide the new union until its 1st national congress. Part of the resolutions adopted was a political resolution calling for the strengthening of the tri-partite alliance. Resolutions adopted by any congress of Ceppwawu can only be amended or recalled at the next congress and Ceppwawu leaders and its members are required by the constitution and the operations manual of the union to undertake all endeavours to implement adopted resolutions. The only time when there are general reflections on the resolutions is when preparation is underway for the next congress and this normally happens the year preceding the congress.

THE BUILD UP TO THE 1ST NATIONAL CONGRESS

In the build up to the 1st national congress, all the regions reflected on the resolutions as well as constitutional amendments. The Wits

region as part of their regional political resolutions called for the breaking of the alliance and that Ceppwawu must call upon Cosatu not to support the ANC in the 2004 general elections.

The region was unable to secure the support of other regions at the congress and it resolved that Ceppwawu should call for the strengthening of the alliance as well as to call upon Cosatu to support the ANC during the 2004 general elections.

It must be noted that this congress was held in August 2002 and all regions were tasked to go back to their respective areas and to report the outcome of congress and to effectively work towards the implementation of congress resolutions.

THE NOVEMBER 2002 NEC MEETING

During the November 2002 NEC the Wits Region presented a document calling for a workers' referendum on the alliance and 2004 elections. This document called for the testing of workers' support for the alliance as well as to test workers' views whether we must support the ANC or not during the 2004 general elections.

The NEC, after analysing the document, felt that it was clear that the Wits regional leadership had done nothing towards implementing the 1st national congress political resolution, i.e. to build and strengthen the alliance and to mobilise members to vote for the ANC in the 2004 elections.

This was evident as the congress took place in August 2002 and three months thereafter the same region that called for the break of the alliance (and failed to convince other regions) came back, albeit in a different format and again called for the break of the alliance.



The NEC, in light of the situation it was confronted with, decided that the National Office Bearers (NOBs) must go to the Wits region and explain the congress resolution on the alliance and the call to vote for the ANC during the 2004 elections to all locals because the regional leadership was unable to do so. It must be noted that the NEC never decided that there must be an investigation as to the origins of the paper calling for a workers' referendum.

The assumption that the Wits leadership was unable to explain the resolution was based on their persistent call for the break in the alliance even after the Congress adopted a resolution that was different to their belief.

It must be noted that after their suspension and subsequent dismissals and expulsions it was found that there was not a mass support for the call as they have indicated. To the contrary, during the re-launch of the locals in the region, the majority of our shop stewards were not even aware of the call for a referendum.

We therefore concluded that the call for

a workers' referendum was part of the broad political agenda of its author and had nothing to do with closing the widening gap between union members and their leadership as alluded to in the article. We will elaborate more on the political agenda later.

THE MAY 2003 NEC

The National Office Bearers Committee (NOBC) reported to the May 2003 NEC that they were unable to implement the November 2002 NEC decision, i.e. to visit locals in the Wits region and explain the political resolution adopted by the 1st national congress. The reason forwarded was that the region felt that it would be cost effective to address a regional shop stewards council and that by wanting to address locals individually on the matter of the referendum, is an attempt to sow division amongst workers and shop stewards in the region.

The NEC reminded the Wits region that the November 2002 NEC decided that the NOBC must attend locals and not a regional shop steward's council meeting and the Wits

region was part of that decision. The NEC further reminded the Wits region that they never raised objections at the November NEC around the visits to the locals and found it strange that the region would want to raise objections around the visit. They were further informed that once the NEC takes a decision the role of all members including staff is to ensure the implementation thereof.

The Wits region was then asked to withdraw their objections and to allow the NOBC to address the locals as decided at the November 2002 NEC.

The Wits NEC delegates refused to do so. Instead they told the NEC that they will not allow the NOBC to visit the locals in their region and that the meeting must do whatever they wish to do. The Wits delegation continued to refuse to change their stance after numerous requests for them to reconsider.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL DILEMMA

The NEC was faced with a serious constitutional dilemma, i.e. should they

allow a region to undermine a NEC decision, it would open the doors for any other region to defy decisions that they don't like, thus undermining the fundamental principle of democratic centralism. One of the corner stones the Ceppwawu constitution is built on. Ceppwawu comprises seven regions and if each region was allowed to refuse to implement a national structural decision the union would be reduced to anarchy.

CEPPWAWU CONSTITUTION

Section 42 (2) (o) of the union's constitution makes provision for the NEC to intervene and to take over the function of a region should it be found to act against the policies of the union. This section in our view protects the corner stone principle of democratic centralism particularly in unitary organisations like Ceppwawu.

The NEC, in the light of the refusal on the part of the Wits NEC delegation, had no other option but to invoke section 42 (2) (o) of the constitution and to take over the operation of the region. The NEC in addition to taking over the operation of the region, decided to suspend the entire Wits NEC delegation.

The NEC decided that the NOBC needed to take overall control of the region and further mandated the NOBC to appoint officials to assist them with the day-to-day administrative running of the region.

THE EVENTS FOLLOWING THE NEC DECISION

Some of the suspended leadership went to the union regional offices and called meetings with some local office bearers informing them that they were suspended because they held different political views than those of the union's national leadership. They further called upon the local leaders to continue to defy NEC decisions. They further organised marches to the union's head office and diverted shop stewards that were on route to meetings called for by the NOBC, thus blocking those shop stewards from hearing the truth. The suspended leaders never informed those leaders that the real reason for their suspension was due to the fact that they refused to implement a NEC decision.

The national leadership of the union had no other option but to call the assistance of the South African Police Services as meetings called were disrupted by an unruly crowd that converged at the venues where these meetings were held.

Today, it is clear that all along the only intention of some of the regional leaders in the Wits region was to undermine political resolutions that were decided by the national congress of the union and to create a situation where Ceppwawu would be faced with no other option but to suspend them so that they could start their own break away union. These forces do not believe in the fundamental principles of working class unity and want to enforce their ideas on others. They call leaders who do not support their views bureaucrats, forgetting that they are the ones that divide workers and by so doing weaken the collective power of workers.

FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT

It is strange that the author of the article referred to the financial challenges of Ceppwawu as financial mismanagement when he was part of the NECs that decided on how money should be spent and never objected to those decisions at those meetings. To the contrary, the overspending was as a result of the fact that the assumption of the membership of the new union was based on a wrong membership income as well as an incorrect estimation of the average subscription that would be received from members by both the former unions.

The NEC, once it established the mistake, immediately decided to introduce corrective measures to ensure that there is not a continuation of the problem. Again, the truth will not be told as it would undermine their own agenda and will thus make it difficult to divide workers.

THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE WITS REGIONAL SECRETARY

The political agenda of the ultra left as we have shown; quite clearly undermines the processes followed to ensure smooth coordination and implementation of the union resolutions and decisions. It emerges

without any doubt that we are dealing with a force hell bent on assuming power at all costs. They misjudged the extent of their influence within the union in the Wits region.

This is common to ultra-leftism, which seeks to be a sect within the revolutionary movement, but has no decency of maturing a process and is full of impatience.

We need to analyse and ponder about the allegations towards the alliance on the one hand and on the activities and conduct of these dissidents on the other hand.

We can safely characterise these divisive tendencies as led by a group of power hungry dissidents. How do we understand the concept of democracy and how we exercise it in the union? Have these forces agreed with our approach all these years? 'Democracy is a tool of the majority against the few.' The few have to influence the union and if their views are not accepted they should live with it or leave but not cause divisions and chaos as an exit strategy.

There is no split in the union as the article portrays, the union still maintains its average membership as before the dissidents left. There is no, and has never been a, political purge in the union. Apollis also makes a lot of lousy assumptions in a manner implying disunity. How many shop stewards have been suspended? He can just say majority because he is lying and he knows that. The majority of Ceppwawu shop stewards are still intact and very functional. This was not a national crisis but a problem only affecting the Wits region and even caused by few individuals who abused the positions entrusted to them by workers for their own selfish ends. They shied away from the democratic platform afforded to them to hidden, clandestine and alternative information blocs that sought to divide the union. They have failed. The theory of democratic centralism is torn apart by these anarchist tendencies where there is no intention to comply with collective decisions. We can assure you that the newly established union by Apollis won't last long if he continues with this tendency.

Democratic centralism implies that members, regional and national leaders of

the organisation can table any motion for discussion at a relevant forum. Once that motion has been discussed and resolved all the members present and those bound by proxy have the responsibility to implement the decisions of the meeting even if the decision differs with their initial position and proposal. As they always say, to be in an organisation you do not have to agree with 100% of decisions or policies, some even say if you agree with 60% of decisions in an organisation you are truly influencing its cause.

The call for a workers referendum was clearly a political objective to undermine the tripartite alliance, the unitary of Cosatu and cause divisions and instability among workers. This is the political thrust of the John Apollis and his forces, they do not agree with the policies of Cosatu and its alliance partners and they use the non political discrimination clause which allows them to be members of the Ceppwawu and Cosatu to brew their small anarchic revolution.

The strike by Cosatu was not a vote of no confidence in the ANC government, but a strengthening of the workers voice in an inclusive democratic system that we all agreed to. Cosatu like the SA Communist Party and the ANC as allies still reserves their right to exist and be independent of each other. As you would note these organisation have mastered a symbiotic system to influence and be influenced by one another.

A member who does not pay his/her subscriptions will lapse and cease to be a member. There is nothing bureaucratic about this. The union can not represent people who are not its members. It has no capacity to do so and in any event it is a union of members. What is the alternative information Apollis talks about if it is against the policies of the union. The unions calls for the strengthening of the alliance, he wants alternative information against the alliance not to progress the conditions of the working class and the poor. Workers have refuted this fabrications and lies.

The ANC is not a ruling bloc but a ruling party. This is so because the ruling bloc will imply collusion of the ruling class and the



ruling party. The ruling class determines production relations in society because they are a class, only a ruling party on behalf of a class can do so. In SA we have a bourgeois democracy. We have not yet tilted property relations in favour of the working class. Hence SA monopoly capital still controls the vast capital and mineral and financial and other resources of the country. We are not blind to all these realities. This is the basis upon which the alliance has tabled legislation to redress these imbalances in property relations. These conglomerates led by Anglo American and Anglo-Vaal, Liberty Life, SANLAM, Old Mutual and the Rembrandt group are the ones Apollis and his cronies can discharge their might of anger and poisonous tendency towards, not to the union. If the old adage of Marxism prevails they will agree as Marx said: 'The dominant views in society are those of the ruling class.'

Further to label the ANC as an agency of privatisation is a pure demonstration of not understanding the political economy of a developing country and the ANC itself. We demonstrated against privatisation because of its effects on the working class and the ANC has listened. The manifesto for the 2004 elections did not endorse privatisation – we still have an opportunity to influence ANC policies.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that what Ceppwawu was faced with was a group of individuals that wanted to make sure that they drive the organization into a crisis and paralysis so that they can be seen as the 'Messiahs'.

They wanted to make sure that the political direction of Ceppwawu is based on their views even when they did not enjoy the support of majority of union members. In fact Ceppwawu today is vindicated by the mass support the ANC received from the working class during the recent elections. Today Ceppwawu leaders know the truth, i.e. that the now dismissed Wits regional leadership never had the support they claimed they had in the region and this is evident from the fact that for the first time in five years shop stewards are attending local meetings in mass and are free to participate without fear that they will be suppressed by people that wanted to force them to adopt their views.

Ceppwawu remains committed to worker unity and the historical goals of the tripartite alliance of liberating black people in general and Africans in particular from the shackles of apartheid discrimination and its legacy and to a truly united, non racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa where all people black and white can live in peace and harmony.

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