

# **Contestations over knowledge production or ideological bullying?: A response to Legassick on the workers' movement**

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*The key characteristic of the vast amount of literature on the South African workers' movement in the post-1973 period is the denial that the class and national struggles were closely intertwined. This denial is underpinned by a strong 'anti-nationalist current' which dismisses the national liberation struggle as 'populist and nationalist' and therefore antithetical to socialism. This article cautions against uncritical endorsement of these views. It argues that they are the work of partisan and intolerant commentators who have dominated the South African academy since the 1970s and who have a tendency to suppress all versions of labour history which highlight these linkages in favour of those which portray national liberation and socialism as antinomies. The article also points out that these commentators use history to mobilise support for their rigidly held ideological positions and to wage current political struggles under the pretext of advancing objective academic arguments.*

The previous edition of this journal, a Special Issue entitled 'Making histories' which was co-edited by Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, features an article by Martin Legassick. In this article, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement in the 1970s: The South African Democracy Education Trust and post-apartheid patriotic history',<sup>1</sup> Legassick accuses me, along with Bernard Magubane and Sifiso Ndlovu, of at least six serious (academic) crimes. The first is that we have succumbed to prevailing power relations rather than challenged them in our quest to uncover the history of the workers' movement during the 1970s. The second is that we have inflated the role of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in forging working class unity during the 1970s. Here we are charged with having 'invented a totally false chronology for the process of trade union unity' by transposing the debates of the 1980s into the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The third is that we have completely 'failed to grasp' the 'theory of permanent revolution which applies to all "Third World" countries' and instead favoured the theory of colonialism of a special type (CST), which advances the notion of the national demo-

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1 M Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement in the 1970s: The South African Democracy Education Trust and post-apartheid history' in C. Rassool and L. Witz, 'Making histories', Special Issue, *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 34, Nov. 2008: 240-266.

2 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 265.

cratic revolution as a required stage preceding a proletarian, socialist revolution.<sup>3</sup> The fourth is that we have either ignored or falsified evidence that contradicts our desperate bid to produce accounts which feed into the ruling party's mythology in order to enhance our 'unspecified' careers.<sup>4</sup> The fifth is that we contested their views on the workers' movement because it raised issues of the political independence of the working class from nationalist orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup> The sixth is that Ndlovu and I have consequently taken an ahistorical step backwards which ignores the evidence and work of previous historians.<sup>6</sup>

Magubane, Ndlovu and I are therefore portrayed as post-apartheid rightwing mavericks – sundry peddlers of 'patriotic history' who have sheepishly bowed to pressure from the ANC leadership of the 2000s in our anxious bid to act as its 'organic intellectuals'.<sup>7</sup> The article suggests to me that Legassick is mobilising the academic community to find us guilty as charged. Fortunately for Magubane, as a retired professor he has nothing to lose.

Legassick is, of course, most welcome to write a critique of the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) project. It is his approach to this task that is unfortunate. Instead of attempting to provide a balanced assessment of the project's aims and objectives, its challenges, weaknesses and accomplishments, he has seemingly chosen to organise an anti-SADET campaign. The intense hostility towards SADET in his article comes as no surprise. I once asked him why he had got involved in the project in the first place if he harboured such negative feelings towards the members of its Board of Trustees. His answer was that he had his own political agenda.<sup>8</sup>

This is indeed the essence of my argument in this article, elaborated most explicitly in the concluding section. The article begins by explaining the long history of Legassick's hostility to our work on the project. It shows that Ndlovu and I fell out of favour with him years before we produced the allegedly 'useless draft chapter' which he mentions in his paper.<sup>9</sup> I then attempt to provide an overview of SACTU activities in southern Africa and beyond during the 1970s and 1980s in order to support and document our arguments about the history of SACTU. I then briefly mention the activities of the key, London-based SACTU Internal Committee, formed in 1984, which carried out very similar work to that in the Frontline States from 1984 to 1990.<sup>10</sup> I have devoted a few pages to an examination of the role of SACTU in the trade union unity talks which preceded the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985. I end the article with a brief discussion of why I think Legassick attacks us.

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3 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 263.

4 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 257-8, 260-1.

5 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 241.

6 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 266.

7 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 266.

8 Author's informal discussion with Martin Legassick after a SADET authors' meeting (attended by Barry Feinberg), SADET Offices, Nedbank Building, Corner of Andries and Church Streets, Pretoria, 2001.

9 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 251-254.

10 I elaborate on the activities of the latter in volume four of the SADET project. See J. Sithole, 'The South African Congress of Trade Unions and labour struggles in the 1980s', SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Volume 4: 1980-1990 (Pretoria: UNISA Press, forthcoming [2010]): chapter 18.

## The origins of the conflict with Legassick

In order to understand the tone and arguments of Legassick's article, it is necessary to go back some five or six years. I was drawn into the SADET project at a meeting held at John Daniel's office at the then University of Durban-Westville some time in 2001. From the outset, I submitted proposals of what I intended to contribute to each volume as they were being planned. There was never a time when I was told what to research or what to write about. I chose to contribute a chapter on the transition to the ANC underground and armed struggles for volume one of *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* because I had access to many KwaZulu-Natal-based veterans of the ANC, SACTU and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). I became one of the authors of the chapter on the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns through sheer luck: I was asked to read and make editorial comments on Moses Ralinala's chapter because I had conducted interviews with two veterans of the Wankie operation, Cletus Mzimela and Justice Gizenga Mpanza. I contributed more than twenty pages of new material to the chapter and subsequently received a phone call from Bernard Magubane, the project leader, inviting me to become the second author of the chapter.

I had initially proposed to contribute two chapters to volume two. The first was to be on the ANC underground in Natal during the 1970s, the second on the formation of the KwaZulu bantustan during the same decade. I spent several weeks at the ANC Archives at the University of Fort Hare, at the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape and in the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand. This rekindled my long-standing interest in labour history. When I enrolled for an Honours degree in History at the University of Natal in the early 1990s I had intended to conduct research on the 1973 Durban strikes. My interest in labour history stemmed partly from the fact that I had been a factory worker in Pinetown for two years after matriculating in 1980. It was Dr Tim Nuttall who persuaded me to choose a different research topic.

One of the stories which fascinated me in the files at the Mayibuye Centre was that dealing with SACTU's conflicts with Rob Petersen, Martin Legassick, Paula Ensor, David Hemson and Peter Collins. These conflicts led to their suspension from the ANC and their eventual expulsion in 1985. I subsequently organised interviews with Legassick, Ensor and Petersen to explore this history. I conducted interviews with them during the first week of September 2003. Late the following year I submitted a proposal to write a chapter on SACTU for volume two and invited Sifiso Ndlovu, who at the time served as the main SADET researcher, to co-author it with me. Sifiso had already acquired a wealth of archival material. As was often the case, chapter proposals were circulated among the participants in the SADET project.

This proposal set me on an unexpected collision course with Legassick. SADET convened a meeting of participants at its offices in Pretoria to discuss draft chapters for volume two. During the trip from O.R. Tambo Airport to Pretoria on the Friday before our meeting, I encountered a very combative Martin Legassick who demanded to know why I wanted to contribute a chapter

on SACTU because, he alleged, it had never done anything for the South African working class. My trip that evening became a complete nightmare. I turned to Lungisile Ntsebeza who was sitting next to me in the hired Volkswagen kombi, which Legassick was driving, for an explanation of what I had done wrong. If my memory serves me, Ntsebeza said: 'Well, you have stepped into an ideological minefield.' This set the tone for the hostile attitude that is still event in Legassick's article published five years later.

It is not true that we later made changes to our chapter in response to Legassick's comments, or because Magubane or other Board Members pressurised us into doing so. I hold no brief for the ANC, SACP or SACTU, as Legassick insinuates. I suspect he is furious because we differed with his own interpretation of why he and his colleagues were suspended and expelled from the ANC. Unfortunately, we stand by our view.

Legassick also insinuates that Ndlovu and I sided with Magubane during their disagreements over the history of the independent trade unions. For the record, I never participated in their furious exchanges because I did not want to involve myself in conflicts between life-long friends. I chose not to respond to Legassick's many angry attacks over the phone or via e-mail which he consistently copied to hundreds of university-based recipients within South Africa and internationally before and after the publication of volume two. He knows very well that I stayed out of the earlier frictions involving Magubane and Philip Bonner during the editing of volume one. Apparently this did not please him either. He accused me of being too loyal and respectful for refusing to take sides in the series of disagreements which threatened to derail the editing of the first SADET volume. I will now turn to an overview of the SACTU activities in order to be able to talk to some of the issues that Legassick has raised in his article.

### **The regrouping and reorganisation of SACTU in exile, 1969-83**

Sifiso Ndlovu and I state unequivocally that SACTU had no organisational presence in southern Africa until 1969 when its leaders and activists regrouped and reorganised themselves. Its leaders initially met as trade unionists at two meetings in March and May of 1969.<sup>11</sup> The first was held in Lusaka, Zambia, on 2 March 1969. The second took place in between the various sessions of the Morogoro Conference in Tanzania on 2 May 1969.<sup>12</sup> The Morogoro meeting took two landmark decisions aimed at streamlining and formalising SACTU activities abroad. The first was to set up its provisional headquarters in Lusaka in Zambia and the second was to appoint its headquarters' committee consisting of Milton 'Memory' Miya and seventeen others. It appointed Mark Shope as its General Secretary and Eric Mtshali, Alven Bennie and Archie Sibeko as its other full-

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11 J. Sithole and S. Ndlovu, 'The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970-1980', in SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2 (1970-1980)* (Pretoria: UNISA, 2006): 212.

12 SADET, Mark Williams Shope (MWS) Papers, Letter from Mark Shope to the London Committee of SACTU, 9 March 1970; and Report to SACTU NEC Meeting, Lusaka, Zambia, 25-27 October 1974: 1.

time functionaries.<sup>13</sup> Mtshali was appointed Administrative Secretary and Alven Bennie as Secretary for International Affairs.<sup>14</sup>

SACTU established an Internal Committee and charged it with the responsibility to explore ways and means of re-establishing contacts in various factories within the country. It targeted SACTU stalwarts, trade unionists and ordinary workers. There is evidence of communication between Johannesburg-based trade unionists, among them Richard Takalo and Miriam Sithole, and the newly established SACTU headquarters in Lusaka as early as March 1973.<sup>15</sup> Takalo, who in the 1950s and 1960s was a trade unionist in both the metal and mining industries, was in touch with both Shope and Gilbert Hlalukana, whom he had replaced as the Transvaal Secretary of the Metal Workers' Union when Hlalukana was banned in 1961. In a reply to Shope's letter dated 6 March 1973, Takalo voiced the opinion that although SACTU itself was never banned, the state was bent on banning its leaders. He said of the SACTU organisations: 'In my view these organisations are not dead but have taken one step backward and there is nothing to stop them to take two steps forward.'<sup>16</sup>

Miriam Sithole's letter to Shope, dated 28 April 1973, reveals that she and Takalo belonged to the same SACTU underground unit in the Transvaal. Their line of communication was mainly through Botswana, where a Francistown-based person, Tsela Mangonye, served as the key contact. In this letter, written from Mangonye's place in Botswana where she had travelled in the hope of meeting Shope, she informed him that workers were demanding that SACTU re-open offices in Johannesburg.<sup>17</sup> Sithole appealed to Shope to arrange for someone from their unit to travel to Lusaka to discuss the establishment of the SACTU underground in the Transvaal with its leadership. She and Richard Takalo had worked out safer means of communication in order to prevent the security police from intercepting their correspondence.<sup>18</sup>

The SACTU leaders were fully aware that it was struggling to establish a foothold within the country for most of the 1970s. For instance, they highlighted two problem areas in their report to the extended National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of the ANC in March 1975. The first was that workers were not prepared to discuss anything which mentioned SACTU for fear of victimisation by employers and the security police. In areas where this fear was prevalent no one was prepared to work for the resurrection of SACTU structures. The second was that in other parts of the country former SACTU officials had intimated that the best thing to do would be for former SACTU activists to join the affiliates of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA). The report added that the

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13 SADET, MWS Papers, Letter from Mark Shope to the London Office of SACTU, 9 March 1970; and Interview with Alven Bennie, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, Port Elizabeth, 7 February 2005, SADET Oral History Project (OHP).

14 University of Fort Hare (UFH), ANC Lusaka Mission, Box 134, Folder 289, Letter from Moses Mabhidha to Alfred Nzo, 29 July 1975; Interview with Eric Mtshali, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, Clermont, 11 and 24 October 2001, SADET OHP; Sithole and Ndlovu, 'The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970-1980': 212-3.

15 Sithole and Ndlovu, 'The Revival of the Labour Movement': 217-8.

16 SADET, MWS Papers, Handwritten letter from Richard Takalo to Mark Shope, undated.

17 SADET, MWS Papers, Handwritten letter from Miriam Sithole to Mark Shope, 28 April 1973.

18 SADET, MWS Papers, Handwritten letter from Miriam Sithole to Mark Shope, 28 April 1973.

situation was made worse by the fact that SACTU underground operatives were very few and were thinly spread on the ground within the country.<sup>19</sup> SACTU tried to rectify the situation by setting up front unions and by infiltrating various trade unions. The former was easily accomplished when SACTU began to set up front unions from 1978 onwards. The latter remained a great challenge until the early 1980s. As a result of this the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), remained largely insulated from SACTU and its allies in the ANC, SACP and internally based Congress-aligned organisations.<sup>20</sup>

In a letter to Ray (Alexander) Simons, dated 30 June 1978, Moses Mabhida had also revealed that the SACTU presence within the country remained limited and that its influence within FOSATU was non-existent. However, he said that he hoped to facilitate its infiltration through a prominent Natal-based trade unionist and a member of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU), a FOSATU affiliate named Alpheus Mthethwa, with whom he was holding discussions to persuade him to serve as a SACTU underground operative.<sup>21</sup> Simons also reported that she was negotiating with someone named June in November 1978.<sup>22</sup> I am not suggesting that Mthethwa and June were members of the SACTU underground as I could not find any evidence to confirm or dispute this in the documents in the Simons Collection. At its January 1979 NEC meeting SACTU adopted resolutions which encouraged the infiltration of FOSATU and other existing trade unions in order to spread and entrench its influence.<sup>23</sup>

Ndlovu and I have never denied that the front unions were first formed towards the end of the 1970s, but we maintain that their formation did not mark the beginnings of the SACTU underground but rather the beginnings of SACTU's organisational influence within the country. Legassick conflates the successes and failures of the front unions with SACTU's overall work within the labour movement.<sup>24</sup> If we assess the strengths and weaknesses of the front unions separately from SACTU's overall objectives and plans, we can see that its leaders were quick to acknowledge that their initial efforts to organise within the country yielded disappointing results. It was in recognition of these weaknesses that they resolved to consolidate their administrative and operational headquarters and coordinate activities within southern Africa in the late 1970s.<sup>25</sup> This explanation is not intended to fudge the position Ndlovu and I took on the establishment of the SACTU underground, but rather to emphasise that we should not conflate issues which should be treated separately for the sake of political expediency. Furthermore, to acknowledge the weaknesses of the SACTU underground structures is not the same as denying their existence. Weak underground structures

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19 University of Cape Town, Archives and Manuscripts Department, BC1081 Simons Collection [hereafter BC1081], 4.4.15.3.1, Report on internal work of SACTU to the extended NEC meeting of the ANC, Morogoro, Tanzania, March 1975.

20 FOSATU was founded at a congress held at Hammanskraal, 14-15 April 1979. See BC1081, 4.4.15.18, Federale Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV) Project, 1980.

21 BC1081, 4.4.15.9.1/6, Letter from Moses Mabhida to Ray Simons, 30 June 1978.

22 BC1081, 4.4.15.9.1/6, Letter from Ray Simons to M. Mabhida, 16 November 1978.

23 BC1081, 4.4.15.6, Minutes of Internal Committee, Lusaka, 20 July 1979.

24 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 253-258

25 For more on this, see J. Sithole, 'The South African Congress of Trade Unions': chapter 18.

existed for several years in the Transvaal, Eastern Cape and Natal before the formation of the front unions.<sup>26</sup>

I do not think that Miriam Sithole, Richard Takalo and Mark Shope conspired to leave Shope's papers in Gertrude Shope's garage for Sifiso Ndlovu and me to 'discover' and utilise in our latest portfolios as 'ANC spin-doctors', as Legassick suggests.<sup>27</sup> Let me add that I came to know of these papers during an interview with Phiwayinkosi 'Nkosinathi' Nhleko, a former SACTU underground operative who had worked closely with Mark Shope when SACTU recruited him into the underground in the mid 1980s. Nhleko was told of the papers by Gertrude Shope, after Mark Shope's death. I then informed the SADET offices in Pretoria and they sent Sifiso Ndlovu to see the papers.<sup>28</sup> By the way, Nhleko was an active member of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). He was elected its General Secretary in 1989.<sup>29</sup>

I was not aware that the Jack and Ray Simons' papers were housed in the Manuscript and Archives Department at the University of Cape Town when Sifiso Ndlovu and I wrote our chapter of volume two of the SADET project. We consequently relied heavily on sources from the Mayibuye Centre at UWC, the ANC Archives at the University of Fort Hare and Mark Shope's collection. It was footnote 16 in the chapter by David Hemson, Martin Legassick and Nicole Ulrich which gave me an indication of their existence at UCT.<sup>30</sup> I noted with interest that there were 23 other references to sources housed in the same archives and yet there was no mention of the SACTU documents in the Simons Collection. When I paid a month-long research visit to UCT, I discovered that Legassick had in fact looked at the documents. Seemingly, he decided to ignore them because they yield evidence which contradicts his rigidly held ideological position on the workers' movement in general and on SACTU activities in particular. I therefore find it ridiculous that Legassick should cast aspersions on our use of historical evidence when the opposite seems to be true.<sup>31</sup> Using these sources, I have been able to reconstruct an alternative account of SACTU activities in the 1970s and 1980s which will probably cause more discomfort to Legassick.

### **The SACTU Internal Committee and underground activities in the 1980s**

Since its formation in 1973 SACTU had always treated its Internal Committee (SIC) as one of its premier committees. This Committee coordinated the activities of several regional SICs that were based in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Although the SIC remained active during the 1970s,

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26 Interview with Thobile Mhlhlo, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, Port Elizabeth, 6 February 2005, SADET Oral History Project (OHP); Interview with Humphrey Maxegwana, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, Port Elizabeth, 7 February 2005, SADET OHP.

27 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 261.

28 Interview with Phiwayinkosi Nkosinathi Nhleko, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, Pietermaritzburg, 1 August 2003, SADET OHP.

29 *South African Labour Bulletin (SALB)* 14, 6 (February 1990): 84-85; Interview with Nkosinathi Nhleko.

30 D. Hemson, M. Legassick and N. Ulrich, 'White activists and the revival of the workers' movement' in SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2 (1970-1980)* (Pretoria: UNISA, 2006): 248.

31 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 257-8, 260-1.

it was unable to make much impact on the trade unions which were emerging within the country in the wake of the 1973 black workers' strikes. As I indicated earlier, the SACTU vice-president, Moses Mabhida, was the first of its leaders to acknowledge this in his correspondence with Ray Simons in June 1978.<sup>32</sup> I demonstrate elsewhere that by April 1984 SACTU had established another SIC unit in London which was responsible for the whole of Western Europe.<sup>33</sup> Its work was no different from that of others. It met trade unionists from South Africa, conducted trade union education and training, set up SACTU underground units within trade unions inside the country and mobilised aboveground support from trade unions for specific unions. It was headed by Archie Sibeko and also accounted to the SIC HQ in Lusaka. Initially, it reported to Mhleli Mgwai (*nom de guerre* Mlungisi Gazi Bazani), a member of the Revolutionary Council. Thereafter it reported to Martin Sere. Mark Sweet and Xolile Majeke, during his stay in London, coordinated its activities. It set up numerous SACTU underground units within the country between 1984 and early 1990. During the six years of its existence this SIC unit submitted over 300 reports to SIC HQ on ten COSATU affiliates.<sup>34</sup>

At its January 1979 NEC meeting, SACTU ordered its SIC to gather information on the MAWU, the South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union (SARHWU), the Agricultural Workers' Union (AWU) and the Transport Workers' Union. It was asked to analyse this information under the following headings: their strength in 1979; the scope of their activities; their politics, leadership and state of political consciousness; the contacts that SACTU had in these organisations and among the workers in these sectors of the economy; and the prospects of developing further contacts where they existed, or starting new ones where none existed. It had to determine and advise the NEC whether such contacts or organisations could form a base for planning large-scale SACTU-led organisational activities. It also resolved to infiltrate the largest of the newly formed trade union federations, FOSATU.<sup>35</sup>

The SACTU leaders were the first to acknowledge that the union's influence within the country's labour movement was still limited by the early 1980s. Ray Simons attributed this failure to establish a meaningful presence within the country's labour movement to two inherent weaknesses within the newly created front unions. The first was their tendency to form general workers' unions.<sup>36</sup> These general unions placed more power and influence in the hands of officials rather than the industrial unions, which allowed for greater worker control. The second tendency was regionalism and unhealthy competition for members. The front unions competed for workers with one another. Ray Simons said their approach

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32 BC1081, 4.4.15.9.1/6, Letter from M. Mabhida to Ray Simons, 30 June 1978.

33 Sithole, 'The South African Congress of Trade Unions': chapter 18.

34 Sithole, 'The South African Congress of Trade Unions': chapter 18 and telephonic conversation between Jabulani Sithole and Mark Sweet, 10 November 2009.

35 BC1081, 4.4.15.3.4, Resolutions of SACTU NEC meeting in Dar es Salaam', January 1979.

36 These included the South African Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU) in Natal and Eastern Cape, the General Allied Workers' Union (GAWU) in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) industrial area, the National Federation of Workers (NFW) and the National Iron, Steel, Metal and Allied Workers' Union (NISMAWU) in Natal and the Western Province General Workers' Union (WPGWU) in the Western Province.



stood in sharp contradiction to SACTU policy to form industrial unions. She dismissed arguments that workers were not ready as cheap excuses by those who were opposed to industrial unions because they would ensure worker control and erode 'private' power bases.<sup>37</sup>

SACTU had abandoned the idea of forming front unions in the light of the afore-mentioned weaknesses. Its leadership consistently discouraged workers from breaking away from the existing trade unions if they were unhappy. Instead, it encouraged them to challenge the leadership and radicalise existing trade unions from within. By then, SACTU had begun to place more emphasis on infiltration and the takeover of existing trade unions rather than to set up rival breakaway labour structures.

The primacy of infiltration necessitated the development of a comprehensive plan for entering the labour movement. The SIC therefore organised its work around three key initiatives. They were infiltration, underground organisation and intelligence. In terms of these, SACTU cadres were infiltrated into the existing registered and unregistered trade unions and the state-created organs of worker control such as the Works, Liaison and Enterprise Committees. The objective was to influence policies and shift them towards the goals of socialist democracy and national liberation in the case of trade unions, whereas in the case of the Works, Liaison and Enterprise Committees the main objective was to sabotage them from within or to revitalise them in a direction away from their repressive designs.

The SICs were responsible for setting up an effective clandestine machinery through which workers could be organised and educated and through which information and propaganda material could be distributed. Underground activities necessitated considerable logistical back-up in the form of courier networks, funding of organisers, finding of safe houses, etc. The last major focus was intelligence, which entailed the collection of vital information from inside the country. Intelligence gathered could assume three forms. The first was the union or labour information relating to existing trade unions which could be used both in external campaigns and for the effective infiltration of existing labour organisations. The second was information on working conditions which included, among other things, the general nature of repressive legislation and labour disputes which could be used by internally based cadres of SACTU as well as the broader liberation movement for external campaigns internationally. The third was strategic information on armaments production, new industrial developments and foreign assistance to the apartheid regime.<sup>38</sup> In this respect the aim was to provide support to MK operatives involved in acts of sabotage.

The SACTU Internal Committees worked through trade union cells of one or more people each. These cells were made up of workers or cadres who held strategic positions within their trade unions and who were in a position to

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37 BC1081, 4.4.15.6, Ray Simons' notes made at meeting with an underground operative 'P', 2 June 1981; Moses Ndlovu confirmed that SAAWU officials raised irrelevant questions. Interview with Moses Ndlovu, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, Ashdown, 12 September 2001, SADET OHP; Interview with Samuel Kikine, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, Durban, 4 October 2001, SADET OHP.

38 BC1081, 4.4.15.6, Internal Organisation of SACTU, undated.

guide their unions, pass on information to them, and identify possible recruits. Similarly, the Works, Liaison and Enterprise Committees were infiltrated through cells made up of one or more people who held influential positions so that they too could give guidance and influence the work of these committees from within. These underground operatives were expected to pass on information about the relevant committees, and identify and pass on information about potential recruits. The organisational or education cell was often made up of a small number of cadres to organise underground work and to conduct detailed educational activities on organisations and the struggle. Propaganda cells were also made up of very small units. These units were responsible for disseminating propaganda by means of pamphlet bombs, pamphlet dumps, wall slogans, etc., which the Department of Information and Publicity (DIP) researched and produced. Logistical cells were often made up of one person who was responsible for providing courier services, safe houses and funds. These cells served as links between the external and internal cells. The intelligence cells were preferably made up of one person each. They had the special task of infiltrating particular factories or industries to gather and supply regular information on them.

I am making these points because evidence at my disposal demonstrates that the SACTU leadership never indulged in idealist positions of boycotting structures with workers. It encouraged its underground operatives to infiltrate them with the aim of undermining them from within if they were regarded as reactionary, or in order to take them over if they were deemed progressive. This renders Legassick's arguments about the question of collaboration and non-collaboration irrelevant.<sup>39</sup>

The SIC had established large networks of Internal Committees. These operated from Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, which supplied regular reports and held regular discussions with their handlers in these front areas. The Botswana network was responsible for the Transvaal and parts of the Northern Cape and North West; the Lesotho SIC operated in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Natal; the Swaziland and Mozambican networks were responsible for the eastern Transvaal, especially Witbank and various parts of Natal.<sup>40</sup> These Internal Committees held regular consultations and discussions with ordinary worker activists and members of the SACTU underground who were working in factories within the country.

The Swaziland SIC was under the leadership of Johannes 'Joe' Mkhwanazi as the Chairperson, Jabu Nyawose as the Secretary, Nhlanhla as the Deputy Secretary, and John Nkadimeng as the Treasurer towards the end of 1979.<sup>41</sup> The Botswana SIC consisted of Dan Tloome, Marius Schoon, Jeanette Schoon and John Pule in the late 1970s. The SIC leadership in Lusaka recommended that Mduduzeli Sibanyoni and Alpheus should join the Botswana SIC in order to reinforce it in 1979. Bernard Molewa, Gadfly, Stephen, Janet and Isaac had

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39 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 247-8.

40 BC1081, 4.4.15.6, 'External Organisation of SACTU', undated.

41 BC1081, 4.4.15.7.3, 'Minutes of the SACTU Internal Committee meeting held in Lusaka', 20 September 1979; Interview with Kikine.

been drawn into it by the end of April 1981.<sup>42</sup> William Khanyile, Agnes Gumede and Mduduzele were some of the prominent members of the Maputo SIC.<sup>43</sup> The Lesotho SIC was up and running in the late 1970s and had grown from strength to strength by the early 1980s. It persuaded workers who were dissatisfied with the United Automobile Workers (UAW) to try to radicalise the union from within rather than break away from it. They insisted that continual breakaways from the existing unions would weaken the labour movement.<sup>44</sup>

An underground operative identified only as 'P' provided a detailed report of the activities of his underground network in a meeting with Ray Simons in June 1981. He told Simons that in his working committee of six members, each member was responsible for organising specific industrial unions. Its members were PD, TB, Gene Gugushe (alias Titus), Sidney (Mavimbela), Slumber Jayiya and Mlungisi 'Gazi' Bazani. 'P' was responsible for the railway workers, stevedores, transport and municipal workers, and TB was responsible for the motor industry. Every member of his working committee was a convener of an underground cell of three people each.<sup>45</sup> The Lesotho SIC had recruited reliable and very active workers and trade unionists. They were Boy Jacob at Wilson Rowntree, Bangumzi Sifingo at Chloride, Mphakathi September, Pamastone and Humphrey (Maxegwana). Sifingo worked as a SAAWU organiser and Maxegwana worked with Rufus Rwxu and Bangumzi Sifingo.<sup>46</sup>

There was regular contact between the Lesotho SIC and its underground operatives in Dimbaza throughout 1981.<sup>47</sup> For example, underground cadres who operated through unnamed unions in Dimbaza as well as the GAWU-linked operatives paid several visits to Lesotho for consultations during the course of the year.<sup>48</sup> These operatives were advised to work clandestinely in order to avoid alienating workers who were afraid of being associated with SACTU.<sup>49</sup> Similarly two senior Lesotho-based SACTU NEC members, Simon Makhetha and Mlungisi 'Gazi' Bazani, spent several weeks at a time in Port Elizabeth, Dimbaza, Keiskamma Hoek, Bedford, Adelaide and Grahamstown doing underground work in 1981. The Lesotho SIC had made inroads into various parts of the Ciskei such as Zwelitsha, Dimbaza, King Williams' Town, Alice and beyond by 1982. This machinery was organising in Cradock, Matatiele, Engcobo, Gumakala, Emgwali, East London, Port Elizabeth and Cradock by August 1982. Themba Nxumalo of the NFW, a Durban-based front union, worked with the Lesotho SIC.

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42 BC1081, 4.4.15.7.1, 'Report of the Botswana SIC', 25 April 1981. Please note that no last names of these SACTU members were given in the records.

43 BC1081, 4.4.15.6, Minutes of Internal Committee meeting, Lusaka, 20 September 1979; and see BC1081, 4.4.15.15.43, 'Letter from Ray Simons to SACTU Internal Committee, Maputo', 12 October 1979; 'Letter from Eli Weinberg to William Khanyile, 15 May 1980; 'Letter from Ray Simons to William Khanyile', 17 May 1980; 'Letter from Eli Weinberg to William Khanyile', 13 July 1980; 'Letter from Eli Weinberg to Agnes Gumede', 15 November 1980; Interview with Mhlahlo; Interview with Maxegwana.

44 BC1081, 4.4.15.7.5, Report on activities of the Lesotho Internal Committee, January to December 1980; Interview with Maxegwana; Interview with Mhlahlo; Interview with Mark Sweet, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, Cape Town, 9 January 2005, SADET OHP.

45 BC1081, 4.4.15.7.1, Notes Ray Simons' meeting with 'P', 2 June 1981.

46 University of the Western Cape, Mayibuye Centre, ANC Lusaka Papers, (MCH02), Box 65, Janet Love, 'Present Labour Situation in South Africa', a discussion paper presented on the 25th Anniversary of SACTU, 5 March 1981; Interview with Maxegwana.

47 University of Fort Hare, ANC SOMAFSCO, Director's Office, Box 54, Folders 5 and 6, Summary of Work Done in 1981, 21 December 1981.

The Swaziland SIC worked with GAWU in the Transvaal, which was formed at the end of 1980 when Mary Ntsike and Rita Ndzanga led a split from BAWU. Longstanding SACTU underground operatives Samson Ndou, Ephraim Shabangu, Samuel Pholoto and Sydney Mufamadi joined GAWU. Siphon Kubheka, Robert Manci and Kgalema Motlanthe were also part of the SACTU underground in the Transvaal.<sup>50</sup> I was unable to establish how the Maputo SIC operated. The SICs operating in the forward areas received and scrutinised reports regularly and passed them on to the SIC HQ in Lusaka, which in turn reported to the SACTU NEC. Internally based SACTU operatives, using their *noms de guerre*, began to submit reports to their counsellors in the forward areas regularly from the late 1970s onwards.<sup>51</sup> The SIC headquarters in Lusaka continued to receive and discuss reports of SACTU underground activities within the country until 1990. It met representatives of various trade union formations to discuss trade union work, challenges and obstacles before and after the formation of COSATU in November 1985.<sup>52</sup> It submitted regular reports to the SACTU NEC meetings during this period.<sup>53</sup>

Ndlovu and I argued that the Lusaka HQ was given a new lease of life when a group of young SACTU activists, Mark Sweet, Thobile Mhlahlo and Humphrey Maxegwana, were deployed to serve on it. Sweet, from Cape Town, had left the country via Botswana in 1980. He remained active in SACTU structures and was drawn into SIC in the mid-1980s. Mhlahlo, who was from Port Elizabeth, was instructed to leave the country via Lesotho in 1985. He was drawn into the SIC shortly thereafter. Maxegwana from East London also left the country in April 1985, and he too was integrated into the SIC headquarters soon after his arrival in Lusaka.<sup>54</sup> None of these operatives were removed from their posts as trade union operatives, as Legassick suggests.<sup>55</sup> They may have received military training at one point or another during their time as underground operatives, but this was to enable them to provide defence to workers who were already on the receiving end of attacks from the regime and its vigilantes by the 1980s.

SACTU placed great value on trade union education as one of the means of spreading its influence or of establishing some presence in the various trade unions. The August 1983 SACTU NEC meeting took a decision to establish an education programme under the auspices of its Education Department (SED) to complement the work of its Internal Committee. Its primary task was to identify lecturers within its ranks who could develop a syllabus and provide lectures to

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48 BC1081, 4.4.15.7.5, 'Report submitted to comrade SS', 3 December 1981: 3-4.

49 BC1081, Report from Comrade Rwentela, August 1982.

50 See interview with Robert Manci conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 8 March and 14 June 2001, SADET OHP; and interview with Siphon Kubheka, conducted by Snuki Zikalala, *SALB*, 17, 4 (July/August 1993): 87-88.

51 See, for example, BC1081, 4.4.15.18, 'Reports submitted by 'Morogoro' handwritten report on trade unions at home', 22 July 1976; 'Mpho' on 'the Federation of South African Trade Unions', 7 January 1978; Mpho's assessment of reports by 'Apple', February 1979; 'Theodore', February 1979; 'Peter Bakvis', February 1979; and 'Jojo', February 1979.

52 BC1081, 4.4.15.7.5, Notes on meeting held in Harare on 26 October 1985; and Notes on meeting held to dissect trade unions in the Western Cape attended by J.N., R.Z., Nick Henwood, Brian Williams, Zinzile and Johnson Mpukumpa, 15 March 1988.

53 BC1081, Minutes of the SACTU Internal Committee, Roma, Lesotho, 7 December 1988.

54 Interview with Sweet; Interview with Mhlahlo; Interview with Maxegwana.

55 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 258.

SACTU underground operatives within the country on the working class struggle and its relationship with the struggle for freedom. The long-term objective was to offer these lectures to South African trade unionists and workers in general. The NEC meeting stressed the urgent need to coordinate all SACTU activities so that very clear direction and guidance could be provided to cadres operating on the ground within the country. At first Janet Love was put in charge of the Education Department. However, in September 1983, the management committee of SACTU met and decided that a separate committee, the SACTU Education Committee (SEC), should be solely responsible for the education programme. The January 1984 NEC meeting rectified this decision and Janet Love, Ray Simons and someone who is only identified as MS were appointed to the committee. The SEC held its first meeting on 22 July 1984 and Mark Shope was elected its chair.<sup>56</sup> SACTU mandated SEC to work with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to further its work. Aaron (Pemba) and Simon (Makhetha) were also assigned to the SEC.

The SEC became one of the most active SACTU committees between August 1984 and March 1990. It offered a series of lectures which Mark Shope, Eric Mtshali (alias Jack Sambo or Eric Cengwa), Makhosazana Msimang, Mzukisi Skweyiya and others presented to various groups of South African workers and trade unionists in Lusaka, Harare and Nairobi.<sup>57</sup> The trade unionists and workers that were targeted were in sectors in which SACTU wanted to consolidate its influence at first, and the sectors in which it wished to establish some foothold. The first two lectures in the series took place in Harare in Zimbabwe from 25 August to 4 September 1984.<sup>58</sup>

Whilst nowhere near the scale of the SEC activities in the frontline states, training programmes for trade union delegates who visited London and the Netherlands also took place. SACTU members, who conducted these seminars, used similar materials to those used in the Frontline States. Seminars were usually conducted at night after the 'formal trade union education classes' with their sister unions were over for the day. Usually these would start around 20h00 or 21h00 and go on until 02h00 or 03h00 in the morning. Seminars were conducted night after night, and at times over the weekends, and the venues ranged from houses in London to trade union facilities. A network of TUC affiliates would inform SACTU of the next visit and the 'night classes' would be arranged. Lecturers who ran these seminars were SACTU NEC members either from Lusaka or those based in London such as Xolile Majeke and Mark Sweet.<sup>59</sup> These seminars and workshops further cemented the relationship between SACTU and the internally based trade unions, especially the COSATU affiliates after November 1985.

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56 SADET, MWS Papers, Letter from Janet Love to Mark Shope, 23 July 1984.

57 SADET, MWS Papers, SACTU seminar lectures, 1984 to 1990.

58 Attendance register at the ZCTU/ILO Seminar for South African Trade Unionists, Harare, 25 August to 4 September 1984.

59 Telephonic conversation between Jabulani Sithole and Mark Sweet, 10 November 2009; and Sithole, 'The South African Congress of Trade Unions': chapter 18.

## SACTU and trade union unity

Legassick has accused us of over-inflating the role which SACTU played in forging working class unity in South Africa.<sup>60</sup> However, evidence we obtained from the Simons Collection at the University of Cape Town, the Director's Office of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College and the Lusaka Mission Papers at the University of Fort Hare confirms our view that SACTU was fully behind trade union unity. In a number of position papers on trade union unity which SACTU produced from 1980 onwards, there is constant reference to why working class unity was cardinal in the building of a strong workers' movement in South Africa. Prior to this, Mark Shope's overtures to Barney Dladla, Harriet Bolton and Halton Cheadle in January 1974 are an indication of SACTU's willingness to extend a hand of friendship to the emerging trade unions and to forge unity of purpose and action. In his letter to Barney Dladla he said: 'I cannot help expressing my appreciation of what you, Mrs Bolton, Halton Cheadle and others are doing for the struggle of African workers. I am very highly impressed indeed.'<sup>61</sup> One cannot deny that tempers flared up and inflammatory statements were issued which offended the independent unions. But it is preposterous to attempt to apportion all blame to SACTU, as Legassick does.<sup>62</sup>

SACTU followed the proceedings and developments at the union unity summits very closely 'not as observers, but as participants in its own right' throughout the first half of the 1980s. Its underground operatives, Sydney Mufamadi, Matthew Oliphant, Thobile Mhlahlo, Themba Nxumalo, Samuel Bhekuyise Kikine, Samson Ndou and many others, participated directly in each of the unity summits from Langa, Cape Town, in August 1981 to Athlone, Cape Town, in April 1983, and in most of the Feasibility Committee meetings from 1983 to 1985. Contrary to Legassick's claim that these labour representatives played divisive and disruptive roles,<sup>63</sup> they maintain that they were contesting ideological positions which sought to mobilise the labour movement in opposition to the liberation movement through subtle attempts to dismiss the linkages between the class and the national questions in apartheid South Africa.<sup>64</sup> There is ample evidence to show that the SACTU leadership consistently encouraged its underground operatives not only to infiltrate the existing mainstream trade unions but to go out of their way to encourage workers to join them in large numbers so that they could reorientate them from their anti-liberation movement stance towards a more accommodating position.<sup>65</sup>

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60 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 259-261.

61 MWS Papers, Mark Shope to Barney Dladla, 28 January 1974, 1 and 4; and Sithole and Ndlovu, 'The Revival of the Labour Movement': 219.

62 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 242 and 261.

63 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 259-261.

64 Interview with Thobile Mhlahlo; Interview with Matthew Oliphant and Interview with Sam Kikine.

65 UFH, ANC Lusaka, Box 120, Folder 169, SACTU's Position on Trade Union Unity Talks, 11 December 1984, 1; Interview with Thobile Mhlahlo; Interview with Matthew Oliphant. See also S. Ndlovu and J. Sithole, 'Trade union unity summits and the formation of COSATU, 1980-1990', SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Volume 4: 1980-1990: chapter 19.

SACTU persuaded its operatives to persevere and remain an integral part of the summits and Feasibility Committee meetings, especially when there were numerous incidents of mistrust between the FOSATU unions and the trade unions which had affiliated to the United Democratic Front after August 1983.<sup>66</sup> It was even willing to discipline the front unions. As I mentioned earlier, Ray Simons had criticised general unionism.<sup>67</sup> She felt that it placed more power and influence in the hands of the officials when compared with industrial unions, which guaranteed 'absolute' worker control, and that these unions were consequently thinly spread on the ground as they struggled to attract a sufficient number of workers to reconstitute themselves as industrial unions.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, SACTU lauded the formation of the Feasibility Committee and urged all democratic trade unions to unite behind it and give it all the co-operation it required. It stressed the need to observe neutrality and ensure that international affiliation was not an obstacle to unity as it would be the responsibility of the members of the envisaged federation to ensure that it did not affiliate to 'imperialist' trade union centres. It urged participating trade unions to focus on issues which united them rather than those which divided them, and insisted that the principle of unity in action under the slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all' should serve as the basis of their discussions.<sup>69</sup> In early December 1984 SACTU cautioned the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (CCAWUSA), the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA), the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), the Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU), FOSATU and the General Workers' Union (GWU) not to go ahead with the formation of the new federation without the general workers' unions, which had been forced to accept observer status despite their protests that they had not secured a mandate to sit as observers at the Johannesburg meeting on 3-4 March 1984.<sup>70</sup> SACTU took away the responsibility to facilitate the creation of industrial unions from the general unions and put it on the shoulders of the Feasibility Committee. Here again Legassick has distorted reasons for the tensions at the unity talks in 1983 and 1984<sup>71</sup> in order to drive home his partisan view which apports blame to anything that is associated with SACTU.

SACTU played a role in facilitating trade union unity in sectors such as post and telecommunications and education, among others, during the second half of the 1980s. It worked with COSATU to facilitate a seminar to discuss 'teacher unity' in April 1988. The outcome of this initiative was the seminar for thirty teacher representatives which SACTU, AATO and WCOTP hosted in Harare in

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66 R. Roux, 'SACTU: An End of an Era', *SALB*, 14, 8, 1990: 48-9.

67 For more on this, see J. Foster, 'The Workers' Struggle: Where Does FOSATU Stand?' in J. Maree, ed., *The Independent Trade Unions: 1974-1984* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987): 235. See also *SALB*, 7, 8, July 1982: 67-86; and Ndlovu and Sithole, 'Trade union unity summits': chapter 19.

68 BC1081, 4.4.15.6, Ray Simons's notes made at a meeting with an underground operative identified as 'P', 2 June 1981; see also interviews with Ndlovu and Kikine.

69 UFH, ANC Archives, ANC Lusaka, Box 120, Folder 169, SACTU's Position on Trade Union Unity Talks, 11 December 1984: 2-4; and UFH, ANC Lusaka, Box 135, Box 290, 'SACTU Position Paper on Trade Union Unity, February 1985': 3-4.

70 UFH, ANC Archives, ANC Lusaka, Box 120, Folder 169, SACTU's Position on Trade Union Unity Talks, 11 December 1984: 1-2.

71 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 260.

Zimbabwe from 4 to 8 April 1988.<sup>72</sup> The Harare seminar expedited the process which culminated in the launch of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SACTU) in Johannesburg on 6 October 1990.

In August 1989 SACTU warned the members and allies of CCAWUSA that 'divisions and splits served only the interests of the enemies of the working class' and that their task was to stave off all divisions and disunity because unity was the major weapon of the working class. It urged them to rally around COSATU in its endeavours to forge unity within the trade union movement and that HARWU and the Liquor and Catering Workers' Union should solidify their forces and membership in CCAWUSA and help build a strong united national catering and commercial sector.<sup>73</sup> SACTU and COSATU had already formalised their working relationship.<sup>74</sup>

### **Ideological bullying and contestations over knowledge production**

Legassick makes his readers wait until the very end before they know his real motives for launching his vicious attack on us. He asserts that we are under pressure to be 'organic intellectuals' for the ANC leadership of the 2000s which he describes as 'an ANC leadership which has compromised with capitalism, which has promoted the rich and neglected the poor'. He adds that 'as such they hate and fear any expression of the political independence of the working class which began to manifest itself in the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. Hence their opposition to the democratic trade unions of that time.'<sup>75</sup> He then concludes:

What is reflected in a small way in the debate over this chapter is the much bigger *class* struggle now taking place within the Tripartite Alliance between the ANC leadership on the one hand and the working class organised in COSATU on the other (with the SACP increasingly divided and caught between them). There is much to be learnt from the history of the struggle for liberation which remains relevant today.<sup>76</sup>

These statements confirm the views I had on the matter the very first time Legassick expressed his hostile attitudes and feelings towards Ndlovu and myself. I strongly felt back then, and I still feel now, that he dragged us into his fights with Magubane as a mere sideshow. He seems to have regarded us as 'straw men' whom he could attack in order to advance an ideological standpoint which has long been very hostile to the leadership of the SACTU, ANC and the SACP.

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72 SADET, MWS Papers, Speech by Mark Shope, 'Political Report of the South African Congress of Trade Unions to the 14th Statutory Conference of International Federation of Teachers (FISE) and the World Teachers' Conference, Prague, Czechoslovakia, 2-7 September 1989: 1-2. UFH, ANC SOMAFCO, Director's Office, Box 54, Folder 10, Report of the Seminar on Teacher Unity in South Africa held at Kentucky Hotel, Harare, 4-8 April 1988; Interview with Mtshali.

73 UFH, ANC Sweden Mission, Box 8, Folder 57, SACTU Message to Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union (HARWU), Liquor & Catering Trades Employees' Union: 1.

74 Sithole, 'The South African Congress of Trade Unions': chapter 18.

75 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 266.

76 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 266.



Legassick accused Magubane, Ndlovu and me of failing to understand the position of the Marxist Workerist Tendency (MWT) of the ANC. He adds that the national democratic revolution can be consummated only by the working class taking power.<sup>77</sup> He denies that the MWT of the ANC rejected the notion of colonialism of a special type (CST), as we had maintained. He says it rejected the idea which the SACP deduced from it that 'national democratic revolution was a required stage preceding the proletarian, socialist revolution'. Although I hold no brief for the SACP, I often wonder whether the notion of a two-stage theory had its origins from within its ranks or whether it is an external imposition.

Despite his vehement denials that he is hostile to the national question, the CST and the ANC leadership in particular, his present and past writings confirm our charges that he has always been hostile to the CST. In the recent article he claims that 'the essential reason that Magubane et al., on behalf of the presidential project, found it necessary to contest the Hemson et al. chapter was because this chapter raised the issues of political independence of the working class from nationalist orthodoxy'.<sup>78</sup> In 1974, for example, he dismissed the characterisation of South Africa as a case of 'internal colonialism' as vague, inconsistent and unsatisfactory in explaining the origins, functions and dynamics of its twentieth-century society.<sup>79</sup> While Legassick acknowledges that the ANC is the oldest organisation with majority support in South Africa, he has consistently denigrated its leadership, which he accuses of counter-revolutionary politics.<sup>80</sup> He draws a sharp distinction between the ANC and SACP leadership, on the one hand; and the black urban and rural masses, the youth and the working class, on the other. The latter are identified as the only motive forces which were, and still are, capable of leading the struggle for revolutionary change.<sup>81</sup> In keeping with its policy of entryism, the MWT of the ANC have spent its entire existence infiltrating the ANC and COSATU with the aim of winning over the general membership and then turning it against the leadership of these organisations.

Legassick's views were echoed by and elaborated upon in the works of various, predominantly white academics.<sup>82</sup> Some of them levelled the same accusations which Legassick is now directing at us, against SACTU, the ANC and SACP. They accused the three alliance partners of ignoring the criticism of their continued use of 'internal colonialism' to analyse particular social polarities of South Africa. They added that fundamentally, 'internal colonialism' failed to come to grips with the central arguments of the revisionist scholarship of the 1970s which eloquently and powerfully demonstrated that South African

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77 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 263. 78 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 241.

79 M. Legassick, 'South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence', *Economy and Society*, 3, 3 (1974): 255.

80 M. Legassick, 'The Past and Present Role of the Marxist Workerist Tendency of the ANC in the Liberation struggle in South Africa', in I. Liebenberg et al., eds., *The Long March: The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa* (Pretoria: HAUM, 1994): 173, 180-1.

81 Legassick, 'The Past and Present Role': 175-6; M. Legassick, *Towards Socialist Democracy* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007): 264 and chapter 14.

82 See for example, B. Freund, 'Some Unasked Questions on Politics: South African Slogans and Debates', *Transformation*, 1, 1986: 118-129; P. Hudson, 'The Freedom Charter and the Theory of the National Democratic Revolution', *Transformation*, 1, 1986: 6-38; and R. Fine, 'The Antinomies of Nationalism and Democracy in the South African Liberation Struggle', *Review of African Political Economy*, 45/46, 1989: 98-107.

industrialisation and creation of class society followed classic capitalist lines.<sup>83</sup> Others rejected the view that during apartheid, the national and class struggles were intertwined. The denial of these linkages was underpinned by a strong 'anti-nationalist current' which dismissed the national liberation struggle as 'populist and nationalist' in character and therefore antithetical to socialism.<sup>84</sup> Proponents of this view not only questioned the role and genuineness of the non-proletarian forces in the liberation struggle, but dismissed the quest for national liberation by the vast majority of the masses of the people of South Africa as just an aberration in a struggle for socialism. They felt that 'populism and nationalism' stood in absolute contradiction to working class politics.<sup>85</sup>

Attempts to downplay the national question gained momentum soon after the formation of the Tripartite Alliance in the early 1990s. Workerists within COSATU and other Trotskyite tendencies outside it dismissed the alliance as a sacrifice of working class interests on the altar of political expediency. Some protested that workers did not exercise control over the ANC and were thus unable to influence it politically. Others dismissed the ANC as a body of unrepentant nationalists and the SACP as Stalinists who were bound to feed on the working class.<sup>86</sup> There were numerous calls for the formation of a workers' party led by COSATU which would present a political and ideological alternative to the ANC-SACP alliance. Were these calls a Freudian slip on the part of workerists and Trotskyites who had always intended to establish the labour movement as a force in opposition to the liberation movement after the attainment of 'political' freedom? Were the beginnings of student-linked trade unionism and its workerist tendencies shortly after the 1968 uprisings in Czechoslovakia coincidental or were they instructive in hatching out possible future responses to a liberated South Africa? Surely these questions beg some answers in the light of the workerist hostility to the rise of the Tripartite Alliance in the early 1990s and Legassick's views in response to our chapter in particular and the SADET project in general.

Legassick has implied that Magubane, Sifiso Ndlovu and I ganged up against him and dismissed his arguments, evidence and interpretations about a period he was involved in as an activist during the production of volume two of the SADET project. He has repeatedly suggested that we inflated the role of SACTU to the detriment of the independent unions. I strongly deny that we deflated the role of the independent unions. Highlighting the role of SACTU in the South African labour struggle is not the same as deflating the role of the independent unions. Legassick gives an impression that we falsified the history of SACTU and ignored all evidence and works of other historians of the labour struggles. It is a complete fabrication to suggest that Ndlovu and I are hostile

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83 Freund, 'Some Unasked Questions on Politics: 119-20, 122.

84 S. Friedman, 'The Struggle within the Struggle: South African Resistance Strategies', *Transformation*, 3, 1987: 66.

85 Freund, 'Some Unasked Questions': 119. For a critique of this position, see R. Lambert, 'Trade Unions, Nationalism and the Socialist Project in South Africa', in G. Moss and I. Obery, eds., *South African Review IV* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987): 241; and R. Lambert, 'Trade Unionism and National Liberation in South Africa: Past Perspectives and Current Strategies', unpublished paper to conference on the Southern African Economy after Apartheid, University of York, 29 September -2 October 1986: 15-17.

86 For examples of these views, see *SALB*, 15, 8, 1991: 17-29.

to the trade unions which were formed in the wake of the 1973 black workers' strikes and that we participated in the suppression of his views at SADET.<sup>87</sup> He should not assume that our general respect for his work as an historian entitles him to coerce us into accepting his perspective on the history of SACTU. That we differ with the revisionist interpretation of the history of SACTU does not mean we have ignored any evidence or the work of previous historians of trade unions.

On the contrary, it is Legassick himself who is coercing us to embrace the revisionist interpretation of the history of SACTU. While I value the revisionist perspectives on the history of SACTU, I reserve the right to differ with them primarily because I understand the ideological world outlook that has informed their line of thinking, and also because the archival and oral sources I have consulted, have enabled me to present an alternative version of its history. I therefore refuse to embrace uncritically a version that is espoused by academic intellectuals who, for historical reasons just alluded to, have always considered themselves as holding the correct left line on the history of SACTU and yet they were never part of it. What I am willing to do is to capture and relate its history through the eyes and memories of ordinary working class activists who participated in the worker struggles out of necessity during the 1970s and 1980s. This does not mean I will shy away from legitimate criticism of its history.

Legassick ends his article with an arrogant reading of our quotation from Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame*. He concludes that 'Ndlovu and Sithole, however, can only be using the words as an epigraph for their chapter because they are celebrating the fact that "[H]istory loves only those who dominate her" - by which, presumably, they mean the ANC and SACTU!'<sup>88</sup> This is complete misreading of the epigraph. It is not celebratory and it has nothing to do with SACTU and the ANC. Instead, it was Legassick himself who actually inspired the epigraph rather than the ANC. I had just finished re-reading Rushdie's *Shame* when he phoned me and tried once again to badger me into accepting his highly partial version of the history of SACTU. I turned to Rushdie and found this quotation, which I used to reflect on how established scholars often abuse their power to try to suppress versions of knowledge which contradict their ideological standpoint, while selectively promoting knowledge with which they ideologically and theoretically agree. There is no doubt in my mind that this is really what lies behind Legassick's noises about the contestation over the production of knowledge.

Legassick presents himself and his mates as the only revolutionary intellectuals and repositories of revolutionary theory and practice. Anyone who differs with them is dubbed a rightwing reactionary, unrepentant nationalist or a Stalinist who should be combated.<sup>89</sup> I often wonder, though, whether they are not utopian socialists who are detracting from the Alliance's national democratic revolution by trying to impose their own rigidly held theory as the only viable

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87 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 241, 249, 257, 265 and 266.

88 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 266.

89 Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the workers' movement': 265.

alternative. Although I hold no brief for the ANC, SACTU and the SACP, I subscribe to the view that in apartheid South Africa the class and national struggles were intertwined like the many injustices they sought to redress.<sup>90</sup> Clearly, the tale of SACTU's role and contributions to the South African labour struggles will remain controversial and highly contested, especially in an academic context that remains overly dominated by highly partisan and intolerant commentators who demonise those who have the temerity to express views that differ from their own.

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90 For recent articulation of this position, see N Ramathodi, 'One revolution to solve many ills', *Sunday Times*, 8 November 2009.