Acknowledgements

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Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I, on behalf of the 260 000 teachers and education personnel, present this publication of the SADTU history booklet. After much planning, consultations, deliberations and meetings, we are delighted at the realisation of the union’s history that is directed by the teachers who founded this grand organisation.

The sustenance of the apartheid system was embedded in education, and hence the struggle against the regime has always been led by teacher mobilization and resistance. This struggle saw the birth of SADTU in 1990. This year, the union celebrates 24 years of its existence. Within this period, SADTU has done much to transform the education system in South Africa and improve the working conditions for teachers. Whilst the union has made fundamental progress in redressing the past imbalances, it remains confronted with the challenge to take forward the struggle for equal and quality education.

The history of teachers’ trade unionism has been documented widely; however, it has not been recorded in the manner in which this book does. It is a must read, that is recommended to everyone interested in the story of teachers’ role in the front line of apartheid resistance and its essential defeat.

I do not remember reading about SADTU in this fashion. The story of the union is told from the teachers’ perspective. It will change the narrow perspectives about the teachers’ struggle. Hence, it is then our responsibility to transmit our South African past to the young generation and ensure that this history is taught as a compulsory subject in schools. This will enable the youth to appreciate where we come from as a nation.

Mugwena Maluleke
General Secretary

Preface

This book describes the historical roots of teachers’ struggle in South Africa, and goes on to illuminate key issues and factors linked to the apartheid education and political system, which led to the formation of SADTU. While many publications have been written about SADTU, this booklet pays particular attention to the voices of the founders and members of the union. It has given SADTU veterans and the younger generation of teachers an unprecedented opportunity to tell their story. This publication is the first part of a two-part series on SADTU’s history, which will precede a more detailed book publication in the near future. The research process went through different stages, beginning with the establishment of a research team that included three Professors of History, a post-doctoral fellow, and a researcher who is one of the authors of this booklet. The research team conceptualized the study and assisted the researcher to design the research plan. The project enjoyed the full support of SADTU officials who opened doors for the researcher to visit the union’s provincial offices nationwide. One of the authors reviewed literature that documents SADTU’s past. He also conducted interviews with SADTU veterans in the various provinces, whose visionary leadership and commitment led to the founding of the union. At the same time, SADTU documents were collected, ranging from minutes of meetings to organizational reports, to develop a SADTU archival collection that would form part of the Wits Historical Papers.
Introduction

The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) is a product of the liberation struggle, as well as prolonged and difficult negotiations involving both the newly emergent teacher unions and the established race-based teacher associations which amalgamated into a single, progressive teachers’ union on 6 October 1990. This was in spite of the majority of established associations choosing not to join SADTU and establish their own federation, the National Professional Teachers Organisations of South Africa (NAPTOSA) in 1991. The birth of SADTU saw thousands of teachers from at least eighteen organisations from all corners of South Africa, coming together to sign the union into being. This historical event has been described by teachers as, ‘the day of victory’. SADTU became the first national unitary, non-racial and nonsexist union to have been formed in South Africa. Its leadership and members have steadfastly pursued and linked its organizational objectives, as well as its education programmes, to the broader politics of the liberation struggle and the development of a democratic state. This is evidenced by the fact that SADTU leaders and members now occupy key strategic positions in government and society at large.

The history of SADTU would be incomplete without consideration of the inequality that characterized the socio-economic and political situations in South Africa, and particularly its schooling system. A review of the South African historical-political context and the nature of apartheid education, is thus undertaken to help facilitate a deeper understanding of the emergence of teachers’ politics and the forces that compelled the formation of the union. At the core of historical and complex socio-political forces that underpinned SADTU’s formation, was the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This piece of legislation divided South African society by enforcing state control over education, with the intention of protecting white privilege and power. The consequences were devastating for the African teaching force, resulting in poor qualifications and low morale, which in turn gave rise to inferior education for black African learners.

In this booklet, the compilers seek to highlight the role that teachers and SADTU have played in the struggle for equal education, as well as in the political liberation of the nation. This is important in the context of a nation taking stock of progress made after twenty years of democracy, and since SADTU’s formation in 1990. Moreover, to date, SADTU’s history has not been written from the point of view of its founding members, and the relevance of their contribution to post-apartheid South Africa. The booklet, therefore, purposefully focuses on the adverse effects of apartheid education, and the set of forces that shaped teachers’ politics and gave birth to the union. The period of review begins with the 1950s when young militant teachers protested against Bantu Education. It ends in 1994 when SADTU began to make its presence felt in the educational and political arenas of the new, democratic South Africa for which the union and its members fought for.
HISTORICAL ROOTS

The history of SADTU would be incomplete without reference to the high levels of inequality that characterised South African society, and its schooling system. SADTU is a product of deep-rooted historical forces and socio-political waves that ushered in the transformation of South African society. A significant milestone in this historical process are developments during the late 1940s and 1950s, when early opposition to apartheid manifested itself. The period between the mid and late 1950s was characterised by the African struggle against the implementation of Bantu Education. The main architect of Bantu education, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd asserted in his speech presented before the Senate of the Parliament of the Union of South Africa that, ‘where possible the various types of schools now in existence must be controlled by whites, in co-operation with bodies composed of Bantu members.’ The apartheid policy of segregation and separate development thus extended into all social spheres, including education. It divided South African society by implementing state control over education, with the intention to protect white privilege and power. The consequences were negative for the African teaching force, as it led to unequal funding for black education, resulting in inferior teacher training programmes, low salaries, poor conditions of service and under-resourced schools.

Prior to the National Party’s (NP’s) introduction of apartheid education, the African education system was administered by the Department of Native Affairs. After the NP came into power, a Commission of Inquiry headed by Dr. W. W. M. Eiselen was appointed in 1949, to transform African education. This Commission established the ‘Bantu Local Authorities’ in the reserves and white urban areas, comprising chiefs and nominated members. These bodies were established to enforce apartheid educational plans, as well as to control the labour force in the reserves. In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act was enacted. Two years later, the Bantu Education Act was promulgated in 1953. In his statement, Dr. Verwoerd proclaimed that ‘education should stand with both feet in the reserves and have its roots in the spirit and being of Bantu society.’ By 1954, the Act was amended to eradicate missionary schools and training colleges such as, Adams College, Lovedale and many other schools. Government subsidies were terminated and missionaries were offered an option to sell their schools to the government. Arguably, no single legal measure proved more traumatic in the history of black education in South Africa than the Bantu Education Act of 1953.

The roots of Black resistance to apartheid education, however, can be traced back to the political culture that was generated in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In its inception, this political culture was spearheaded by the Ethiopianist movement which was dominated by teachers and clerics who later formed the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912. The founders of the ANC were against the limited African education provided by the mission schools. They blamed the state for curtailing opportunities for Africans, and the church for forcing African Christians out of the orthodox denominations through the use of factionalist, paternalist, as well as segregationist tactics. They were of the view that mission education stifled their ambitions and hindered success, advocating instead for a comprehensive secular education that would construct ideas and attitudes to satisfy the needs of the African community. Under the auspices of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the Ethiopianists opened up independent schools, such as Bethel in Cape Town and the Wilberforce Institute in Evaton. The curriculum in those schools comprised anti-colonial content that depicted the failure of white missionary schools in meeting African needs. Thus, the AME Church stood as an exemplar of the African denominations’ position, which pursued an understanding of the connection between education and African liberation. Their cause was geared towards the notion of self-agency and upliftment amongst African communities. Such values would later shape the 1950s resistance against the Bantu education system. The Ethiopian political culture would once more be instrumental in one form or another in the 1970s and beyond, such as the ‘Black Power’ and anti-inferior education campaigns.
Following the implementation of Bantu Education, proponents for equal education began to advocate for a common syllabus. At the time, their activism was defined by multiple economic and political crises, which culminated in opposition to the state’s control of education. The state had taken charge of the education system, by removing it out of the hands of missionaries who had, for the most part until then, been responsible for educating Africans. This caused uproar amongst missionary educationists and resulted in more protests. Giving testimony to this, Harold Samuel, former executive committee member of the erstwhile Teachers Association of South Africa (TASA), describes how Archbishop Denis Hurley went to Verulam in Kwa-Zulu Natal (then ‘Natal’) to give a speech that condemned Bantu Education. According to Harold,

the Archbishop said the government is going to shut down all the missions the black missionary schools are all going to be closed. ‘They are not funding us but we are taking a vow today that we are going to keep the schools open. The schools and I want those people who are here to pledge money to say that you will keep the schools open.’

Teachers’ opposition to Bantu Education

Opposition to Bantu Education emerged from a wide spectrum of society, including political organisations, academics, teachers’ associations and unions, as well as some non-government
1990
THE YEAR WE GOT IT TOGETHER

TASA News takes a look back at the events and people that made 1990 a special year for TASA and teachers throughout the country. The year started slowly, then shortly after the Easter recess, teachers started shifting gear.
Teachers’ opposition to Bantu Education

Opposition to Bantu Education emerged from a wide spectrum of society, including political organisations, academics, teachers’ associations and unions, as well as some non-government organisations. Among African academics, Dr. D.G. S. Mthimmkulu, a leading African educationist, who testified during the Eisleben Commission stated that, ‘Africans were not prepared to accept laws, policies and institutions that sought to relegate them into a perpetual position of subordination in the land of their birth.’ The anti-Bantu Education proponents called for the integration of African education under one, democratic, non-racial structure. Bantu Education was perceived as having characteristics of domination that included conquest, divide and rule, manipulation and cultural invasion. This line of criticism understandably became emotionally-charged and politicised.

The 1950s marked the tradition of resistance and militancy that was spearheaded by teachers, many of whom belonged to the African nationalists’ movement. Associations, such as the Transvaal Teachers’ Association (TATA) and the Cape African Teachers’ Association (CATA) actively opposed Bantu Education. According to Vilardo (1996), non-collaboration persisted as a resistance strategy of teachers through much of the 1950’s, with TATA and other regional African teachers’ organizations calling for a boycott of school committees and other Bantu Education structures. While teachers were the first to actively oppose Bantu Education, the ANC soon followed when at its annual conference in December 1954, it called for an indefinite boycott of schools (Vilardo, 1996). The resistance campaigns of teachers, parents and students ultimately failed, however, because of disorganization and state repression, and ended in 1960, when the ANC was banned. From then till the 1980s, the radical stance of the old teachers’ associations was quashed and they adopted a more

"ON BEHALF OF THE ANC, I AM DELIGHTED TO EXPRESS OUR HONOR FOR BEING ASSOCIATED WITH THIS LAUNCHING CONGRESS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC TEACHERS UNION. THIS HAS BEEN EAGERLY AWAITED BY US, AND IT REPRESENTS A QUANTUM LEAP FOR THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT, AND FOR THE STRUGGLE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR."

NELSON MANDELA
conservative approach in dealing with the authorities, which led to perceptions of a 'sweetheart unions' of the government. However, their historical role should not be underestimated - they laid the foundation on which much subsequent political condemnation of Bantu Education had been built. Pledging solidarity with teachers' associations, organisations, such as the South African Communist Party (SACP), represented by Moses Kotane, voiced their dissatisfaction with the Eiselen Commission. The ANC, besides advocating for a schools' boycott made unsuccessful attempts to establish alternative schools. This was opposed by two dominant teachers' organisations of the Cape Province, the Cape African Teachers Union (CATU) and Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA). They called for children to stay in schools, arguing that the ANC's stayaway campaign was detrimental to African children. In the Cape, the introduction of Bantu Education intensified radicalism within the Cape African Teachers Association (CATA). Teachers from CATA pledged solidarity with the All African Convention (AAC) and the Unity Movement. When Bantu Education was implemented, CATA actively opposed the establishment of school committees. At the same time, the association conducted propaganda campaigns among the local peasantry on the effects of 'Bantu Education', 'Bantu Authorities' and 'Land Rehabilitation'. In the Transkei region, chiefs were given extraordinary powers to control school committees and boards. Many of them were illiterate with no formal education. As a result, CATA raised the concern that education, 'a highly specialised field,' was been administered by uneducated chiefs.

In the same vein, the National African Teachers Union (NATU) based in Natal, was hostile to Bantu Education and called for the improvement of material conditions under which African teachers worked. In Transvaal, the rise of ANC Youth League (ANCYL), began to have a fundamental effect in changing teacher politics. During this period, a number of young teachers such as AP Mda, David Bopape, Oliver Tambo, Zephania Mthopeng, Eskia Mphahlele, Isaac Matlare, Ellen Khuzwayo, Moses Kekane and many others joined the teaching profession, and together they contributed to the activism of the period. The political action of these teachers, which had preceded anti-Bantu Education campaigns, most notably, David Bopape and AP Mda, had earlier been intensified by the teachers' wage campaign that culminated into a mass demonstration in 1944. During that campaign, marchers carried placards featuring slogans such as, 'Hungry teachers can’t teach hungry children', 'We want education not Native Education', and 'We want free and compulsory education.' The march was victorious as it influenced the government to raise teachers' salaries and to appoint a commission to look into teachers grievances. In 1951, the Transvaal African Teachers Association (TATA), under the young leadership of Mthopeng and Mphahlele embarked on a concerted campaign against the Eiselen Report on Bantu Education. TATA used clandestine pamphlets such as, The Voice and Education for Change, through which 'we succeeded in influencing the teachers to such an extent that in 1952, at the TATA conference in Witbank [we] passed the resolution rejecting Bantu Education in toto.' This led to the dismissal of three executive members of TATA namely, Eskia Mphahlele, Isaac Matlare and Zeph Mthopeng. After this campaign, many teachers who were identified as troublesome were dismissed by the government. As a result, the Department of Bantu Education experienced mass resignations from teachers. Among them, was Oliver Tambo who left St Peters to join the legal fraternity. However, the dismissal of teachers many of whom were parents, as well as breadwinners, had negative socio-economic consequences for their nuclear and extended families.

As demonstrated, in the early years, radicalism that was ignited by the implementation of Bantu Education, was led by teachers associations. These associations were backed up by African nationalist organisations, African academics and missionary educationists. However, following the state crackdown on opposition from the early 1960s, teachers associations throughout the country, African, Coloured and Indian adopted a conservative professional approach in their relations with the apartheid state (see, for example, Govender, 2004) As a result, there was a political lull among teachers in the 1960s, which continued until the era of student and teacher militancy that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. The ANC had been banned, innocent demonstrators were killed in Sharpeville and many political activists, such as Nelson Mandela and his comrades were arrested. The aspirations of teachers toward a petty-bourgeois status, which had existed pre-1950, began to resurface. African teachers associations and unions united to form the African Teachers Association of South Africa (ATASA). The latter was of the view that teachers unions had no business involving themselves in politics. Joe Ndlou, a former teacher in Orlando recollects, 'these associations were just concerned with music. When we became teachers we were forced to join these associations. In most cases we joined them without being told. After your appointment, you like it or not you will sign their form and the subscription will be deducted.'

In the main, teachers' resistance can be attributed to the burden of responsibility vested in them. Working under deplorable conditions, teachers and principals were held accountable for the behaviour and decorum of students, and expected to be dedicated practitioners. A large portion of their time was spent writing memoranda, wherein they argued for increased monetary support from the education department. They had to raise funds for additional classrooms and to purchase equipment. Thus, fairness and equity became a major concern for African teachers in the 1950s. In many instances, teachers and principals straddled two worlds: maintaining a good reputation for their schools by abiding by departmental regulations, and simultaneously safeguarding their reputation in their communities through resistance and opposition to perceived injustices. Thus, South African teachers' adopted diverse tactics, shaped by social and political conditions in order to remain relevant and respected. The importance of status and self-esteem, therefore, has long-been at the core of teachers' political and professional aspirations.
Racial segregation in education

The system of Bantu Education was consistent with the trend towards racially-based forms of social control throughout South Africa. It cemented efforts aimed at implementing statutory segregation in education and extending quality public education to all white children. This initiative was in harmony with white public opinion that harboured deep-seated antagonism towards the “over-education” of Africans. It was feared that educating Africans would ultimately undermine white supremacy. Bantu education was viewed as a means of reinforcing white supremacy and ensuring the effective exploitation of African labour. Politically, it aimed to frustrate the development of a national spirit among Africans. One of the first generation of teachers that worked under Bantu Education, Harold Samuel, recollects, ‘I was a young teacher in 1952 employed by a glorified government. As an employee of this government I thought I was doing the greatest good for my country... I never saw injustice I was so myopic.’ This system of education gave birth to racially-fragmented departments of education that were unequally subsidised by the government. This fragmentation resulted in a wasteful duplication of functions that were carried out by different education departments for Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Whites. There were seventeen authorities that employed teachers. African teachers in these departments were poorly paid compared to their white counterparts. Chizana recalls that ‘In different departments of education, African teachers were paid differently. So you will find that in the Eastern Cape people will always say “our salaries are not the same as the ones from the Western Cape.” Female teachers were at the bottom of the hierarchy, and had to endure double-prejudice as their remuneration was also less than that of male colleagues in similar positions.

In its policy, the National Party (NP) has always argued that education for South African citizens was of equal quality. However, the pattern of resource allocation stood in stark contrast to the NP’s claims. Schools in the self-governing states that were treated as separate countries, were financed separately by the Pretoria regime. They were under the direct control of school boards and committees. School teachers and principals, as well as those parents who were considered ‘progressive’, saw the injunction of the school board system as the vehicle of a political, not an educational, policy directive. In the eyes of the government, the establishment of these boards and committees was seen as an active participation of the ‘Bantu’, not only within the educational machinery, but also in local government, in order that these institutions could be developed to reach their full social significance. No matter how problematic they were, school boards and committees were viewed by the government as inclusive modernised structures that induced community involvement in education. The committees and boards received funds from parents, and budgets allocated by the education Department. They were responsible for controlling and spending it judiciously. Inevitably, the Bantu Education boards and committees would become the targets of anti-apartheid protest actions during the height of the liberation struggle in the 1970s and 1980s.

Livingstone Vumazonke, a former teacher in Ciskei, revealed that, ‘In Ciskei, these committees were just deducting monies from teachers with an aim of bolstering state hegemony and power. Whenever there would be a big tribal meeting in the mountain of Ntabakandoda, monies would be deducted.’ In Bantustans or homelands, such as Ciskei, traditional authorities had, in effect, greater authority than government departments. They controlled and administered school funds. They also allocated land where schools could be built and the cost of these constructions was borne by the community. The government’s intention was
that schools, teachers and communities form an important means of raising funds. These school boards squeezed African communities financially. They were also responsible for investigating complaints against teachers by members of communities, parents or inspectors, and instituted whatever disciplinary action was deemed necessary, albeit subject first to the approval of the Department. Members of Bantu Education school boards were also expected to submit recommendations to the Department with regard to modifications of the syllabi in schools under their control. So, in effect, the boards functioned as a layer of the education sub-government, within the broader system of separate development.

Unlike in post-apartheid South Africa, parents and teachers had very little say in school funding or the provision of school resources, which impacted negatively on the quality of education. There were huge disparities in the provision of teacher training, subject content, guidance services and educational excursions in comparison to those for whites. Inequality was also evident in schools infrastructure and facilities, such as, libraries, laboratories, and sports grounds and other educational amenities and resources. Most learners did not have text-books because parents could not afford them. Some comparative statistics underline the disparities in the school system: in 1969, there were 810,490 white youth at school, and the total cost of their education was R241.6 million; in the same year, 2,400,000 African children were at school, at a cost of R46 million. These figures demonstrate that funding was made rather arbitrarily by a white government that was at best indifferent to the needs of African schools. In contrast, Coloured and Indian schools were better-funded, but not on par with White education. Harold Samuel, a former principal in one of the Indian schools in Natal described the situation as follows:

‘We were comparable with the whites, in fact there was a time when I thought we were even superior to the results that the whites were producing. Indian education...[it] suited [the]...state to promote Indian education because it proved to the world that state [of] affairs [in South Africa] works. So they gave...they gave money to Indians, they gave good money to Coloureds and they gave [the] best money to whites and practically nothing to the blacks [Africans]. So the money that we got was made very good use of… that is what helped to raise the Indian community.

It is clear from this testimony that unequal funding aimed to isolate Africans and eventually Coloureds and Indians from one another. One of the most significant consequences of unequal funding in African communities was the shortage of schools. Moreover, the conditions for learning and teaching at African schools were deplorable. In the words of Stanley McKenzie, ‘the issue of overcrowding was terrible! We had to teach large classes. I recall that I had a class of 65 pupils and I tried my best though it was not easy. The conditions in rural areas were worse. Schools were few, and those that were available, were far from other localities and overcrowded. Nolitha Mboniswa who completed her primary education in Transkei recollects: ‘we used to travel an hour on foot, but we have never missed a day at school whether there is rain, warm [weather], cold or snow, we would always be at school.’ In the rural ‘self-governing states,’ school buildings were rudimentary and inadequate. Zeph Mthombeni, a teacher who completed his primary education in the former Bantustan of KwaNkwa, indicates that from the then Sub A to Sub B, they were taught under a tree and during the rainy season, they would miss school as a result. All these conditions made it difficult for African children, in particular, to obtain an education which was anywhere near to that of their white counterparts.
The plight of teachers

Under apartheid, African educators were subjected to authoritarian management and administrative systems, resulting in frustrating work environments. The system of teacher appraisal, for instance, was used for administrative and control purposes. Based on the ‘inspectorate system’, it was highly bureaucratic in nature. It was not developmental, rather more punitive, in that it rewarded compliance and punished incompetent performance. Supervision was done with the view of assessing teachers’ obedience instead of improving teachers’ skills. It was oriented towards the narrow objective of improving examination results, not the improvement of learning and teaching; as such it was summative, not formative, in its approach. Inspectors and principals did not have any professional respect for teachers and this increased teachers’ frustration. Power relations became lop-sided as loyalty to officials and the department outweighed the interests and needs of teachers. In his narrative, Twist Ndlovu, a principal in Klarwater recalls that:

School inspectors will come and say there is inspection. They will come for five days and everybody will be like ‘cold’, you didn’t know what to expect. That is why when SADTU got in, in the 1990s, we said we were doing away with the inspections and we said, no inspectors should be allowed in schools. And even when the inspectors came, we [would] try even to make the learners threaten them because we did not see them developing us. They were more about fault-finding than developing teachers.

This testimony provides an insight into teachers’ experiences of, and perspectives on, the type of performance appraisal system they were subjected to under the Department of Education and Training (DET) which was responsible for African education under apartheid.

A number of interviews reveal conflicting and complimentary discourses on management practices. Some older generation teachers believed that some of the inspectors were good. This cohort of teachers would say that; ‘Teaching was teaching. And there is no way that you can deviate from that. Fortunately at the time, you had inspectors... they were good in what they were doing.’ In commenting on the negativity of the old administrative measures, Zakhele Nxumalo states that ‘Inspectors treated us like children. They would demand the green file [a daily workbook for teachers]. According to the current General Secretary of SADTU, Mugwena Maluleke- the green file was a monitoring file that conditioned teachers to follow a specific method of teaching which in turn deprived them from thinking and functioning independently. Elaborating on Maluleke’s testimony, many teachers revealed that they were informed by their principals what was expected of them. Questioning authority was not allowed. There was no space for teachers to think creatively. They had to be cautious of straying from the syllabi, let alone getting involved in political activities.

Many teachers confirmed during interviews that, in most cases, inspectors would arrive at schools without notifying teachers in advance. According to Ndlovu, “they would demand this and that and the poor principal and teachers would be running around like nobody’s business”. This was emphasised by Ephraim Liao, a former teacher who remembers;

You know... they demanded a lot of work from us and unreasonable work ... and a lot of writing. We became clerks instead of being teachers ... we were intimidated ... an Inspector can come in anytime without notice, you know. And some of the things that we said: ‘you can’t just visit us. We cannot get a visitor just abruptly without notification’, this is wrong! And it was very judgmental ... it was a mission of finding mistakes! Just to find

“By 1982, there were 72 500 African learners of whom 53% passed, compared to 94% of whites.”
mistakes, and charge teachers. Teachers were organised under this hierarchical and highly regulated system. Education was governed by legislation which stipulated the conditions of service, salary scales and grievance and disciplinary procedures, although there was no dispute resolution or collective bargaining mechanism. The principles and norms of institutional governance were established by the Ministry of Education and Training on the advice of relevant Boards and Councils. There was virtually no effective participatory governance in African schools. African teachers were deliberately excluded from participating in educational policy development. As Govender states, teachers worked under bureaucratic authoritarianism in which decisions were formulated by white government officials. The system forced principals and circuit inspectors to be highly authoritarian in their practices. Principals acted as ‘watchdogs’, and ensured that teachers adhered to the policies of the Department. They regularly conducted classroom visits from which they would decide who should be promoted. Twist Ndlovu, who was then a young teacher, remarked: ‘If the principal did not like you, you would be not promoted’. Principals were also responsible for decisions related to transfers; medical aid and pension matters. As such, they exercised absolute power over the lives of teachers. However, not all principals were seen in an entirely negative light. Ndlovu recalled: ‘the principal who was the chairperson of NATU, was very strict and the school was up to date, but after his departure things started falling apart...when you think of Kubheka, when you talk about Zwelihle you would think of Mdehe.’

It was within this context of authoritarian and bureaucratic practices that the young militant teachers of the 1980s saw themselves as revolutionaries responsible for advancing transformation of the education system. At the classroom level, there were certain spaces which they creatively appropriated as activists. This was expressed by Irshad Motala, the son of the late Pietermaritzburg ANC activist, Dr. Chota Motala:

When I’m teaching Shakespeare from a progressive perspective and when I’m teaching poetry, even within the constraints of a syllabus that was saturated with a dogma of racism and sexism, there were still spaces for us to maneuver. These were spaces that we wanted to creatively exploit [through the] subject committees of TASA. Teachers were not afforded a chance to develop their management potential. For example, ‘the old principals and their heads of department believed that teachers were not qualified to handle administration outside of their classrooms.’ The recruitment and the promotion of teachers lacked transparency and was characterised by nepotism. This is illustrated by the account of Steve Jules who recounts that, ‘just because my father was trading with a farmer you would think of Kubheka, when you talk about Zwelihle you would think of Mdehe.’

To recap, the system of apartheid education was highly fragmented and organised along racial lines. It was characterised by vast disparities that existed in the provision and funding of education for Africans and whites, which led to inferior education for Africans and deprivation of other potential incumbents. Principals were beneficiaries of this recruitment system. In most cases, inspectors would transfer principals to other schools without being interviewed. This form of staffing, transfers and promotions severely affected women. Female teachers were marginalised, not promoted to positions of principal, except at the lower primary level. According to Boitumelo Ramapulana,

‘In most cases, women were objects... In order to gain promotion, some women had to perform sexual favours for principals and circuit inspectors. So for young women like us, it was very difficult unless you were able to stand firm.’

Teachers had to dress formally and modestly. Women were forced to wear their attire with stockings. Men were expected to wear a tie and jacket. Carol Newman, a former teacher currently serving as a Director in the Upington Local Municipality recalls that, ‘I was the physical education teacher, but I was forced to dress in formal [attire] even though I was supposed to look sporty because of the nature of the subject that I was teaching.’ In the same vein, Mary van Wyk, one of the founders of SADTU in the Kalahari region of the Northern Cape, laments: ‘women were discriminated against. You could not fall pregnant while you were not married. If [you became] pregnant, you were forced to resign. I fell pregnant and thus I had to resign. I was called by the principal and the school board and I had to resign. This affected me personally.’ For convenience sake, many female teachers who became pregnant out of wedlock, were forced to arrange marriages with relatives to safeguard their jobs. The violation of female teachers’ rights persisted after 1994. This is illustrated in Carol Newman’s testimony in which she states that, ‘what frustrated me in 1996, is that I got pregnant and the principal asked me to resign. I fought against that discrimination and I won.’ Prior to 1994, it would have been difficult to challenge this. However, the presence of SADTU in 1996, made it possible for Newman to successfully challenge this, as SADTU, soon after its establishment placed the issue of gender discrimination in the profession high on the education transformation agenda.

Deepening of the Education Crisis:

Into the 70s and 80s

African secondary schooling expanded dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s. This was not because government policy towards African education changed but due to economic imperatives, especially the need for an expanded skilled and semi-skilled labour force that emerged with developments in industrial capitalism. This sudden expansion worsened the resource shortages, overcrowding and declining teaching conditions. By 1982, there were 72 500 African learners in secondary schools (of whom 53% passed, compared to 94% of whites.). Teacher training colleges could not keep pace with this expansion, leading to even greater employment of underqualified teachers. African teachers experienced difficulties ranging from shortage of teacher development programmes to living in poverty. The number...
of qualified teachers in schools was low. Basil Mothibi, a former teacher in Postmasburg and Kimberley in the Northern Cape, shared his experience while he was a learner in Kimberley:
When I was attending high school … our schools the ex DET schools were struggling to get teachers. When I did my standard 9 in 1984 we did not have educators for maths and science; I was doing mathematics, physical science and biology...we struggled to get [these] three content educators. …We had to go to neighbouring schools like St Boniface and coloured schools, the ex HOR schools-House of Representatives, to get education after school hours. [Nevertheless] this inspired me to complete, to become a teacher [and] to assist my fellow comrades.

It was the same in other provinces, as due to few well-trained teachers in these subjects, the quality of Mathematics and Science teaching suffered. Communities had to find their own solutions. Some high school graduates, such as Boitumelo Ramapulane, were approached by the community to teach as ‘private teachers’. Records show that in September 1978, African schools in Natal were short of about 3000 teachers.

African education was plunged into a worsening crisis with the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, resulting in spontaneous student protests in Soweto in 1976. Following the Soweto student protests, state repression increased. In all government-administered schools, no interracial mixing was allowed. Pupils had to attend the school that catered for their racial classification. The absurdity of educational segregation was heightened when the demography of the white population changed. While black schools were massively overcrowded, there were insufficient pupils to fill the white schools. After 1976, there were cosmetic reforms, such as the name changing of the department of Bantu Education to the Department of Education and Training (DET), with little by way of substantive changes to improve African education. As a result, the crisis in education continued, resulting in the radicalisation of students, parents and teachers.

Problems faced by Africans were magnified due to the shortage of houses and municipal services, which led to demands for improved living conditions and services in black townships. It was the period when education and civic struggles became closely entwined, leading to mass-based organisations such as the UDF demanding an end to apartheid and calls for equal political rights for all citizens. The lack of proper schools and facilities in African education was matched by a similar lack of housing, rent problems and inadequate municipal services. In a letter to the Department of Education and Culture, Mrs Dulcie Eramus, project manager of the South African Tuberculosis Association (SANTA), expressed her concern at the conditions in schools revealing that, ‘several classrooms have been without windows… ceiling and electricity.’ It is clear that the nature of the education crisis was multidimensional during the apartheid period. It incorporated social and political aspects. The problem was far more than education; it required a wider process of social change. As a result, teachers were confronted with civic problems that were directly linked to the apartheid administration in their communities.

The socio-economic conditions under which most African families lived had far-reaching implications for many teachers. This is illustrated by Mxolisi Dlamini who recalls

You will remember that during that particular period, it was the time that we were having councillors, but not democratically elected ones. And there [were]… serious problems confronting the communities... we wanted them [councillors] to demand, the question of electricity, the question of the toilets... the question of building the bridge because there were problems when people were crossing [over] to the township. Then it was very difficult on [a] rainy day. You cannot go to town and so on because of that we have to ask for those things, you know.

The conditions in townships compelled teachers to become involved in local political structures. As Dlamini puts it, ‘one will be a chairperson of the local civic structure, on the other hand, a chairperson of the street committee... we were overwhelmed.’ It is therefore evident that the education crisis did not exist in isolation. It was coupled with dire civic circumstances which coerced teachers into political activism. These circumstances indirectly impacted on the performance of teachers and learners in their respective schools.
The Awakening of Teachers:
Stories of politicisation and mobilisation

The 1970s and 1980s mark a momentous period not only in South Africa’s political history, but in the history of its teachers and of SADTU. In this section, members of SADTU recall stories of awakening to the injustices of apartheid and the planting of organisational seeds that would eventually grow into the largest and most influential teachers’ union in the country.

As resistance to apartheid intensified in the wake of the 1976 Soweto riots and increasing student radicalisation in schools, a key question that confronted teachers was around the form of strategy that should be adopted in order to improve and transform the education system. Linked to this question, was whether teachers’ participation in resistance politics be linked to national political movements. Initially, there were no ‘progressive’ teachers unions or structures that were able to articulate teachers’ grievances within the broader political struggle for democracy in South Africa. The established African associations under ATASA, did not mobilise the membership to directly and openly challenge the apartheid education authorities, and link teachers’ concerns with broader social and political demands, as was the case in the 1940s and 1950s. The situation was very similar within the ranks of TASA and UTASA during this period. Instead, the leadership of these established organisations continued to adopt a “negotiations only” approach in dealing with education authorities, and concentrated their efforts on diverting teachers from political realities into social activities, most notably choir competitions and sports. A teacher from Inanda remembers that, ‘the union for teachers then, was to wear stockings then sing songs that has Shembe in them. I never saw them attend to matters that are work-related.’ In a similar vein, a former Transkei teacher described the Transkei Teachers Association (TTA) as follows: ‘they had choirs. They had funerals. They were involved in sports.

There was also a strong focus on ‘professional’ matters. As former TTA member, Boysie, recalls:

They [teachers’ associations] were good in professional development. They formed what is called … Maths Association, Marking Associations, and they will go deep into research. At some stage, teachers were taken to East London for Maths and Science, then they will come back...

This testimony illustrates that the teachers’ associations emphasised the importance of professional development and status. However, in the context of the intensification of education and political struggles, teachers across the political spectrum were forced to review their positions. A new, younger generation of teachers saw the need to become actively involved in oppositional politics, both in the educational and political spheres. At the same time, many teachers belonging to conservative associations engaged in much introspection and started to question the strategies of persuasion and cooperation with education authorities to effect meaningful changes in their circumstances. Arguably, recognition of black conservative professional associations suited the grand apartheid master plan as it encouraged such associations to pursue a policy of dialogue rather than militancy. These unions appeared to have enjoyed financial support from authorities, and recognition as the negotiating bodies of the teaching profession. Among Indian teachers, there was the South African Indian Teacher’s Association (SAITA), previously known as the Natal Indian Teacher’s Society (NITS), which was established in 1925. With
progressive political influence the association later desegregated itself and changed its name to the Teachers Association of South Africa (TASA). According to Samuel, A collective organisation of Indian teachers was an ideal platform for me. So I came through from the ranks. I became chairman of the local branch and later, chairman of the region of the North Coast and gradually I [worked] myself and became chairman of the body. The Indian body ... started now challenging the authorities by saying to them; we want better conditions of service. But we were largely, I don’t want to mislead you we were largely focusing on our own, improving our own conditions; ...[later] when we started mixing and mingling with everyone, we realised the way the others were been deprived, that’s when the new movement started moving in that direction.

In the Cape, many coloured teachers were organised under the umbrella of the Cape Teachers Professional Association (CTPA). Randal van der Heever a former executive member of CTPA recalls: ‘CTPA was based on a pragmatic concept...we were fundamentally opposed to apartheid... We tried to improve teacher’s conditions like salaries’. All these organisations including ATASA, were seen by younger teachers who later formed the ‘progressive’ teachers unions, as ‘useless’ and ‘conservative’. Some older NEUSA comrades, such as Zamayedwa Tom, popularly known among his Eastern Cape comrades as ‘bra Z’, gave a totally different perspective on how these associations were perceived by the ANC in exile. In his own words, he recalled that, ‘the ANC taught me that every existing teacher organization must not be looked at as “sell-outs”. Get in there and bring them over- that was the instruction.’ This was evident when ‘Bra Z’ mobilised ATASA members to form a localised teacher’s organisation called Alice Democratic Teachers Union, ADETU, in the early 1980s. ‘I said lets form ADETU, let us be united…first pay cheque, I saw the deduction of the Natal Teachers Society and

In 1980, the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA) was founded, as a non-racial, educational organisation, and affiliated to the UDF in 1983. Being a loose formation, NEUSA struggled to attract a mass membership. Duncan Hindle explained that, at the time NEUSA ‘never convened congresses, neither did they have a constitution, nothing. There were no major policy debates within the organisation.’ In other regions, such as the former KwaZulu homeland, across the Tugela River, NEUSA was suppressed. It only operated in some parts of urban Natal, such as Pietermaritzburg and some parts of Durban. The formation of NEUSA in this region, responded to the departmental action of forcing African teachers to join NATU, the affiliate of what was then Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe. Some Natal teachers, such as KK Nkosi, one of the founders of SADTU in KwaZulu Natal, were convinced by Ben Ngcobo not to join NEUSA because of its non-racial leadership. In his own words, KK remarked;

Criticism and opposition to the established teachers’ associations cut across all racial lines. For instance, Duncan Hindle, a progressive, young, white activist rejected the world in which he found himself in. He became a trade unionist, an organiser of NEUSA and the only white in the first, senior leadership of SADTU. When questioned why he joined teachers’ politics, Duncan responded as follows:

I was coupled with a deep sense of frustration when I joined the provincial education department. In my first pay cheque, I saw the deduction of the Natal Teachers Society and I said no, no, I am not a member of Natal Teachers Society. In reply they said, you have to be, it’s a statutory requirement that you have to belong to a teachers’ organisation. And I said its fine, but I want one of my choice. They said the teachers in Natal must join the Federal Teachers Association for Whites...when you were admitted you need to join that. These organisations were very well protected and supported by the state patronage. At the same time, there was this small organisation NEUSA, I was then committed to build NEUSA.

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Ben Ngcobo was an Africanist. He came to visit me at my school and he wanted me to consider mobilizing teachers. We then said that we will mobilize teachers but under what? I told him that there was an affiliate of the UDF which was NEUSA that we could consider joining. He indicated that NEUSA was led by whites and those people were racist...And then he suggested that we join NEHAWU because it is a COSATU affiliate..... We were schooled very well on trade unionism by a guy whose name was Thembu Nxumalo of Chesterville Township and a guy by the name of Kiza Dlamini of Ntuzuma. These were two guys who were responsible for political education in NEHAWU. We used to sleep in classes every Friday, in schools and whatever....And then we mobilized throughout [Natal] and then we became the competitor of NEUSA.

KK Nkosi’s statement gives an insight into the feeling of bitterness among some ‘Black Conscious’ movement teachers, who felt that if they joined NEUSA they will betray their fellow Africans. KK and his comrades challenged NEUSA. In his explanation, he suggests ‘we thought they were too soft’. Unlike in KwaZulu, NEUSA became strong in the Eastern Transvaal, Pretoria, Witwatersrand, the Vereeniging region, as well as in urban Durban. In these regions, the establishment of the movement symbolized a deep sense of frustration for teachers that were dissatisfied with the existing racially-organised teachers’ associations. According to Hindle:

It [NEUSA] had the participation of students, and it had the participation of teachers. It was a broader formation...ideologically it was a charterist movement. It was largely driven by Gauteng-based groups. Curtis Nkondo was there...of course, Thulas Noesi was there. So what we were getting going was the Natal branch of NEUSA that involved people like Archie Gumede from Claremont. We would have been termed the progressive education movement... the part of teachers focused on the educational curriculum development and alternative syllabuses. The parent side pushed more on the formation of school committees as opposed to state sponsored school committees. The student side was more on the line of ‘each one teach one’. It certainly was not a formal organisation. There were no subscriptions and it was a broad organisation that opposed working within communities.

As Hindle explains, NEUSA was an educational movement that responded to the education crisis. According to NEUSA’s information document:
The National Union gives priority among its aims to the focusing of professional attention on the education crisis in South Africa. It works for the achievement of a non-racial South African Teachers’ Council and a single and equal education system in South Africa, providing this does not imply centralized control. The National Union seek maximum co-operation with all existing teachers’ associations.

NEUSA called for the participation of the existing teacher organizations, which were fragmented and co-ordinated by the apartheid system. It did not call for the disbandment of these organizations, but for the formation of a single body through which the educational needs of the country as a whole could be represented. Given the recurrent educational crisis in the country, NEUSA extended its mobilisation to medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, as well as other professionals. The organisation was of the view that all parties should contribute in the design of a more equitable education system. The formation of NEUSA was followed by the emergence of a number of “progressive” teachers’ organisations, such as the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU). The progressive unions, led by NEUSA, would ultimately constitute the kernel of SADTU at its founding in 1990.

The formation of NEUSA, along with its political alignment to the national liberation movements, helped to attract a wave of young radicals into the teaching profession. Oral accounts reveal that the lack of other professional opportunities for Africans propelled a large proportion of this younger generation to join the teaching profession. For instance, ‘comrade Varas’ (as known among his comrades) recalls: ‘I wanted to be a lawyer, but it was really difficult because we did not have money to pay for university. I ended up in Phatsimang College of Education’ As a result, teacher education institutions were being subverted by many students who had no desire to teach but merely wanted an affordable route to a higher education qualification. Among this generation of teachers, there was a strong desire to become politically active within townships, colleges and universities. For instance, many teachers that later participated in the formation of SADTU, such as Mxolisi Dimaza, were active in this period. Mxolisi recalls how as a student, he was politicised:

[In] my third year, I was going to Mdantsane and they were having their conference and games and we saw at the college a yellow Kombi... only to find out that the person was Bantu Matthew, Matthew Goniwe. Matthew Goniwe came in a Kombi and started to say, I know you, you are Mxolisi ...and quite a number of things that he raised. Already, I was quite aware of him..., and then they asked us to accompany them because they were going to a certain place where the ATASA games [was been held]. There he gave us some pamphlets. [In] those pamphlets were written, “Teachers in South Africa unite for a democratic future”. You see, and we were spreading these pamphlets amongst the teachers who were busy playing these games. When you read the pamphlets, there was a lot that was written on how wrong ATASA was. It was a ‘sweetheart’ khekheleza organisation.

This clearly demonstrates that teachers’ colleges and universities were political mobilisation centres. It was where anti-apartheid activists, future SADTU leaders, as well as students, were introduced to politics. In turn, many young teachers who entered the
profession began to defy the statutory requirement that compelled them to automatically join ATASA. A Durban-based principal and a member of SADTU, Twist Ndlovu recalls,

So when I started teaching at Mthubatuba in 1987, it was a norm for teachers to become NATU members because even the sports was organised by NATU. But I refused to join NATU in my first year of teaching. I made my principal aware of my convictions. Why? I could not join something that was related to Inkatha at that time. And our school suffered because we couldn’t play sports as activities that were organised by NATU.

It was the same with the Western Cape ‘young lions’ that joined the teaching fraternity in the 1980s. A teacher from Atlantis, Uden van der Vern, remembers;

So when I started teaching there was a union already, a teachers’ union, CTPA, but me as a young lion, felt that this union was too tame. I remember when we started there; we were like five or six teachers. So when we came there, we were seen as rebels, you know, because we spoke… we spoke, we were not scared of the principal. When we came there, we were actually warned about this principal, his way or no way… We weren’t scared of authority.

It was not the same with the older generation of teachers who had become comfortable as members of ATASA. Abraham Leu, who started teaching in late 1970s, also recalls some of the challenges of the time:

‘Teaching was very tough by then. Very tough….you know. …And you know we are the generation e tlileng [that came] after the 1976 uprisings…. It was tough! We could not establish any student movement whatsoever because of Mangope’s regime. Ja it was tough! Because you would be expelled as soon as you started that….there were a lot of spies! Checking on our movements and all that, you know. But I was fortunate that when I came back I met Majova’s brother, they were here now… they [were] politically conscious.

Younger, politicised teachers did not find it easy working with older teachers from the established teachers’ associations given their history of conforming to authority. Ndlovu who was the youngest teacher in one of the Eastern Cape schools explained;

The members of the Ciskei Teachers’ Union were so conservative. They were older than us. We were just young, and also young activists. And they [saw] us as young energetic teachers who wanted to involve them in politics that might affect [them], maybe to be dismissed… or to lose benefits from the Department of Ciskei.

What emerges from the above testimonies, is that the story of teachers’ politicisation and radicalisation was far from homogenous. It was complex and shaped not only by the ‘professional association’ versus ‘militant teacher union’ conflict, it also reflected diverse social and political dynamics, such as contestation between Africanists and Charterists, as well as specific regional dynamics and challenges, for example, in the homelands and self-governing Bantustans.

In the 1980s, mass mobilisation against apartheid took a new turn with the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. The UDF brought together diverse communities, cultural, sports and political organisations, committed to working together in order to challenge apartheid. This was followed by the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which aligned the majority of the trade unions into an anti-apartheid front. These developments were boosted by dynamics within churches. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Institute of Contextual Theology became active. In the education sector, teachers and students’ resistance gave birth to the Congress of South African Student (COSAS), the Azanian Student Movement (AZASM) and the progressive teacher unions, such as NEUSA. The order from the Commander in Chief of the Umkhonto WeSizwe, Oliver Tambo, who called for an ungovernable South Africa, was taken up by these political formations.

The explosion of anti-apartheid organisational developments gave rise to an unprecedented wave of student and teacher militancy in African schools. African education was in a crisis. Unsurprisingly, as was the case during the Soweto uprisings, intimidation, clashes with the police, marches, stone-throwing, burning schools and other buildings were commonplace. Learners and teachers left the classroom and took to the streets, as part of widespread national insurrection against apartheid. The young radical teachers pledged solidarity with students and education collapsed in urban centres. Some teachers were recruited into the underground ANC military wing. Mfana Lushaba remembers that, ‘being a teacher, I got involved with the ANC military wing. I got exposed to cadres in the 1970s because of the guys who were crossing the border to Maputo via Mangweni village.’ It was the same with ‘Bra Z’, though older than the ‘young lions.’ With his extensive political exposure that ranges from the time of the Black Consciousness Movement, ‘Bra Z’ was able to link up with quite a number of activists across the border. From Lesotho, the ANC instructed him to mobilise the women, youth, as well as teachers. ‘Bra Z. recounts that;

[The ANC said] man you are well placed. We want you to concentrate on women’s development. Mobilize women, mobilize students and mobilize teachers’. So I had those three responsibilities. When the COSAS movement started, Lulu Johnson was one of the [first] presidents of COSAS. He was in Port Elizabeth and my car [would] be used to transport students from Queenstown; from Alice, from Beaufort and from King Williamstown, to Port Elizabeth to have COSAS meetings there. So I worked for COSAS and I worked for women and I worked for the teachers’ organization.

These testimonies signalled the militant mood and attitude among those who formed the backbone of the fragmented education system. Progressive teachers’ organisations in the homelands and self-governing states, however, encountered serious challenges, such as suppression by tribal authorities. Melikhaya Hubushe, a former teacher and a SADTU member, expressed his frustration with the then Ciskei government, revealing that;

The Ciskei government was very repressive and people feared it. They had the capacity to kill people. [The] majority of our activists were killed and guys from Soweto feared this area, like Thulis [Nxesi]. When we called them, we had to make sure that they would be safe and their lives would depend on us. It was an extremely dangerous environment. So our existence came to the attention of the Ciskei government. They had an arm called the CCIS – Ciskei Central Intelligence Services under Lennox Sebe, the younger brother to Charles Sebe. If you go there you might come back in a coffin. It was a very repressive military arm of the Ciskei government.
Unlike in most homelands, progressive teachers had positive experiences in KwaNgwane. This was probably due to the Chief Minister, Enos Mabuza, himself being relatively progressive. To some extent, his administrative style appeared to portray political understanding, as he led a delegation of 21 persons, including his entire cabinet, of the Inyandza National Movement to meet the ANC in Lusaka in 1986. Thus, the formation of localised teacher unions was not suppressed in KwaNgwane. In Hazyview, for instance, and other parts of KwaNgwane, local teachers’ unions were formed. One of the prominent organisations was NEUSA, launched by Sandile Sukati working with DD Mabuza, and Mgababa Mathonsi.

During this period, education was in a deep crisis. There was virtually no learning that took place in many parts of the country, particularly in urban centres. As a result key education stakeholders saw the need to regain time lost through protests and stayaways in order to restore the culture of teaching-learning. As a result, after intensive consultation, a progressive non-racial body, the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) was launched in Durban, in 1986. The NECC was part of the congress movement and thus allied to the UDF and COSATU. As an affiliate of the congress movement, the NECC brought together all sections of oppressed communities and all those who detested apartheid. The aim of the NECC, was to collect demands of the people regarding education through a process of consultation. The committee also aimed at drawing up guidelines for a future education system in a democratic South Africa that would satisfy the needs of all citizens. In the keynote address of the conference in 1986, the following was emphasised:

It is an important lesson to the apartheid forces: The people stand united. Ten years after the 1976 uprising, we remain united in our demand for the ending of apartheid education and the establishment of a democratic people’s education. We also remain convinced that this can only be achieved with the eradication of the apartheid system and the establishment of a democratic people’s South Africa. Ever since 1976, the people have recognised that apartheid education cannot be separated from the apartheid system in general. This conference once again asserts that the entire oppressed and the democratic community is concerned with education.

Thus, the notion of “People’s Education for People’s Power” was born. By this time, the Congress of South African Students had been banned and a large number of students detained. Many politically active teachers were dismissed and forcibly transferred to remote areas. The government was still instrumental in stopping the democratic SRCs from functioning. The South African Defence Force (SADF) troops were still in the townships. Boycotts were taking place throughout the country because of the intransigence of the authorities and their refusal to meet people’s demands.

In the midst of the educational crisis, the progressive teachers’ unions, who were affiliated to the UDF and NECC, and supported by the ANC in exile, identified the need to form a single teachers’ union that would be recognised as an organic part of the liberation struggle. This was a turning point in teachers’ politics which led to intensive mobilisation and recruitment efforts that boosted the membership of progressive teacher unions and would lay the foundation for the establishment of a mass democratic teachers union in 1990. Thus, from the ashes of struggle, teachers would emerge strong and invigorated, to dedicate themselves to the task of building teacher unity in South Africa.

"TEACHING WAS VERY TOUGH BY THEN. VERY TOUGH...YOU KNOW. YOU HAD NO SAY BY THEN."

ABRAHAM LEU
Towards national teacher unity: Introspection and conflicts

As described, two groupings of teacher organisations had emerged by the mid-to late-1980s, the established associations and the progressive teacher unions. The former were conservative, prioritised professionalism, and enjoyed recognition from various educational authorities. They were financially independent, with significant assets, had stop order facilities and a large membership, facilitated by their cooperative relationship with education departments through a system of automatic recruitment when teachers entered the education system. Randal van den Heever, a former CTPA official confirmed that the ‘CTPA became a big organisation of 20 000 plus members, which [made] it the majority organisation within coloured communities.’

In contrast, the progressive teachers’ unions were not recognised by the respective departments of education as they were viewed as having a political agenda through their alliance with the ANC, COSATU and the UDF. Being unrecognised, these organisations worked behind the scenes, resulting in many of their members been victimised and detained. They called for the transformation of apartheid education, the amalgamation of fragmented departments of education, and for better working conditions. In the eyes of the government and the old teachers’ associations, the militant action of these organisations was seen as undermining the culture of learning and teaching, as they prioritised political goals over the interests of learners.

Besides NEUSA, there were several other smaller teacher unions that emerged during the educational and political upheavals between 1985-1990, such as the East London Progressive Teachers Union (ELPTU); the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU); the Democratic Teachers Union (DETU) and the Mamelodi Teachers Union (MATU). Others included the Teacher Action Committee (TAC) and the Progressive Teachers Union (PTU), among others.

Towards the end of the 1980s, a serious attempt was made to form a single, united teachers’ organisation in the country. Initially, the progressive unions sought to form unity among themselves. However, this was in conflict with the democratic movement’s resolution which aimed to unite all racially and ethnically divided teachers’ organisations. At the same time, apartheid repression was at its peak and these initiatives were seen as a threat to the government of the day. This led to the detention of the ‘agitators’ for teachers’ unity, with some going into hiding. Describing the situation, Leslie Khumalo recalls that, ‘the arrest of the teachers’ leadership, such as Dlamlenze who was a conservative leader of ATASA along with our UDF and the NECC comrades drew conservative associations closer to us.’ Initially, ATASA was reluctant but the international pressure that resulted from the resolution that was taken by the International Federation of Free Teachers Unions (IFFTU) in Zambia in 1987, compelled its leadership to move towards the formation of a single progressive force.

"Among its children none should feel that he or she is but a step child."

GOVAN MBEKI
As the process towards unity talks unfolded there was a rapid increase of meetings within respective associations and teachers unions. A crucial challenge that faced both the established associations and emergent progressive unions, was the consequences of their involvement in the unity process. The established teachers associations had to grapple with the reality of disbanding their organisations, while the progressive teachers unions were hesitant to be perceived as uniting with teachers who were deemed to be apartheid ‘collaborators.’ However, despite the heaviness of heart and nostalgia that comes with an ending of an era for established associations, many leaders of the old organisations were cooperative. They realised that the noblest of causes was being pursued and change was inevitable.

In the Zambian conference, there were delegates from PTU, ATASA, NEUSA, Black Sash, COSATU and from the Pan African Congress (PAC). All these delegates acknowledged that ‘teachers cannot be good professionals unless they are good trade unionists. In 1988, ATASA became the affiliate of the World Confederation of the Teaching Professions (WCOTP). This resulted in tensions among the WCOTP circle, as well as the local progressive teachers unions. The main concern was over the conservative background of ATASA, which many teachers felt was not strong enough to challenge the status quo. This concern pressurised ATASA to withdraw from the structures of the Department of Education and adopt principles of the Freedom Charter. This was evident when ATASA stated that, ‘[we] are strongly opposed to apartheid in all forms... and pledge to move with urgency towards the promotion of one national and non-racial organisation of teachers.’

It could be argued that ATASA’s affiliation to the international organisation was premised on ‘bread and butter’ issues rather than education transformation. Nevertheless, in the eyes of international donors, ATASA appeared to be representing African teachers, and was thus able to secure financial and material support to run its activities. This included officers’ salaries, travelling expenses, equipment, information and publications resources. Internationally, ATASA was perceived as a strong teachers’ association that would be in a good position to mobilise teachers against apartheid. In the Zambian conference, there were delegates from PTU, ATASA, NEUSA, Black Sash, COSATU and from the Pan African Congress (PAC). All these delegates acknowledged that ‘teachers cannot be good professionals unless they are good trade unionists. In 1988, ATASA became the affiliate of the World Confederation of the Teaching Professions (WCOTP). This resulted in tensions among the WCOTP circle, as well as the local progressive teachers unions. The main concern was over the conservative background of ATASA, which many teachers felt was not strong enough to challenge the status quo. This concern pressurised ATASA to withdraw from the structures of the Department of Education and adopt principles of the Freedom Charter. This was evident when ATASA stated that, ‘[we] are strongly opposed to apartheid in all forms... and pledge to move with urgency towards the promotion of one national and non-racial organisation of teachers.’

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The National Teacher Unity Forum

A development that was to have a major bearing on teacher unity was the formation of the National Teacher Unity Forum (NTUF) following the organisation of a conference in Harare in April 1988 and the drafting of the Harare Accord on Teacher Unity. After the Harare Accord, the deliberations that emerged during the unity talks, illustrate how different generations of teachers and their establishments attempted to negotiate for their political space within the transforming political dispensation. The Harare conference was convened by the international body of teacher’s organisations, the World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) and the all Africa Teachers Organisation (AATO). The ANC also attended the meeting at which

The National Teacher Unity Forum

"YOU AS TEACHERS ARE KEY INSTRUMENTS OF THIS CHANGE. WE URGENT THAT WE DISCUSS AND DEBATE IN A DEMOCRATIC, FRANK AND OPEN WAY. LET US BRING THE BEST TRADITIONS OF ALL ORGANISATIONS INTO THIS TRULY REPRESENTATIVE UNION OF TEACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA. LET US DISSOLVE ALL OUR ORGANISATIONAL AND SECTIONAL INTEREST IN PERSUIT OF MUCH MORE IMPORTANT AND HIGHER GOAL-THAT OF THE UNITY OF ALL TEACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY."

JAY NAIDOO
the labour federation, COSATU, was mandated to convene and assist the process of establishing a single national teacher’s organisation in South Africa. The ANC was represented by Humphrey Langa and Mohammed Tikly. These delegates stressed the need for unity and condemned disunity.

The conference succeeded in getting widely differing groups, namely TASA, ATASA, UTASA and the emergent progressive unions to forge a commitment towards unity of teachers in South Africa. It was agreed that COSATU, under the leadership of its General Secretary, Jay Naidoo, would help raise funds for the activities of the unity forum. Chris Seposengoe, an educational officer of COSATU, was seconded to assist the process of establishing a national teacher’s organisation. The question of whether the new union teachers’ organisation should have a unitary or a federal structure emerged as highly contentious. Finally, the organisations agreed to their structures to establish the negotiation machinery that would pursue the recommendations of the National Teachers’ Forum.

In November 1988, the NTUF convened a follow-up meeting in Cape Town to reflect on the decisions taken in Harare and chart the way forward. A significant part of this meeting, focused on the incorporation of white teachers’ associations into the NTUF. This issue, however, remained unresolved. Perhaps, what became a stumbling block was the fact that racially divided Departments of Education still existed. However, this initiative heightened awareness among white teachers. Apart from the fairly positive response of the Natal Teachers’ Association (NTA), the other white organisations, the Afrikaner associations in particular, remained uninterested. Subsequent talks were held at the University of Natal in Durban. At this meeting, nine demarcated regions were determined under which regional unity structures would operate. In Natal, NATU’s poor attendance at meetings posed a problem. Nevertheless, regular meetings of the NTUF continued in the quest for a single, unified body.
Key issues and debates that dogged the NTUF

There are number of issues that emerged during the unity talks. The analysis of these issues helps to illustrate the different organisational perceptions within the NTUF. Harold Samuel explained that, ‘people were pulling in different directions...it is where all fighting took place.’ Among the circle of established organisations, CTPA and TASA were prepared to join the unity initiative, but had reservations. Besides disagreement over the ‘unitary versus federal structure’ issue, there were other major issues that caused uncertainty, notably the issue of assets, and positions; the question of professionalism versus unionism, and the question of political alignment. The established associations, with their financial resources were concerned that they would end up ‘carrying’ the progressive unions which had limited or no resources. This was partly why they preferred a federal to a unitary structure, so that they could retain a degree of autonomy. Other issues, such as not wanting to be taken out of comfort zones and rushing with the process of organisational change, also emerged, as explained by Antony Moonsamy:

We had a lot of members that wanted to resign. They did not want to see this happen because they were comfortable in their own zone[s], ...for example, some leaders were getting honoraria, they were comfortable. .... There [were] letters [from members] that were sent to the organisation [TASA]. ‘We don’t think that you are making the right move’, you know, ‘it’s still under decision, why so quickly ...you know you just deciding that you want to disband and going to this formation, it shouldn’t take you two years; it should take you at least 6 years. Why within two years now you suddenly want to disband and go?’ So, there were conflicts that were still happening there at that time. Where the so-called Indian teachers say, ‘no, no, no, the move is too quick, we do not want to be part of this move’.

The issue of assets came out clearly during the interview with Randal van Heever who reminisced that ‘Franklin Sonn [then President of CTPA] and myself agreed [with] teachers’ unity, but there were things within the CTPA that we had to work out... one was whether we were going to dissolve and give our assets out.’ Within TASA, as well, much of the anxiety arising out of this unity process was directed towards assets. According to Moonsamy, ‘TASA had a lot of resources ...we were a major shareholder of the Teachers’ Centre building...TASA had 60% in that building...

Another central issue that emerged was the debate over professionalism and workerism (unionism). The question was whether the new organisation should be purely professional in character, or incorporate trade unionism or be reflective of both positions. The established associations did not perceive professionalism and teacher activism as compatible. However, during a group interview with former TASA members in Pietermaritzburg, S. Mahabir, expressed a different view from the associations’ understanding, when he coined the concept of ‘revolutionary professionalism,’ arguing that both professionalism and workerism, and the politics thereof, were intertwined.

This debate was heightened by the fact that older teachers who belonged to established associations, believed in negotiations rather than strikes or ‘chalk-downs.’ These educators were of the view that professionalism was being re-oriented towards trade
unionism. With an attempt to explain the situation Mxolisi Dimaza suggests that,

‘These are things we were fighting over and which delayed the formation of SADTU.... for them an association will not embark on strike action. And for them if you are a union.... that means you are going to go and affiliate to other trade unions...And as a professional, you are a person who is wearing a tie, a person who won’t go on strike and the child [comes] first and so on. And if you are a union to them, you will be thinking that as a union, you don’t want to put the child first. It’s a question of only fighting for our conditions of service. And so that was a very, very serious debate which was there.

Established associations were disturbed by the approach that the young militant teachers adopted. While unity talks proceeded, progressive teachers were also engaged in mass democratic action. By this time, militancy among teachers was reaching its peak. Educators were increasingly engaging in mass action with other sectors of the oppressed. The NTUF’s role was to coordinate a decisive national action in support of teachers’ demands. There were issues that affected teachers on a day to day basis, such as salaries, working conditions and provision of facilities and equipment. In June 1990, for instance, the Weekly Mail reported that, ‘the threat of a strike looms after angry teachers this week warned to take decisive national action, if their demands are not met. They also accused Minister Gene Louw, of arrogance and irresponsibility given the militant mood of teachers.’ All these persisting mass actions alienated the established teachers’ associations who perceived such activities as unprofessional. CTPA and other associations felt that militant tactics and political radicalism undermined teachers’ self-interest. These were some of the debates that preoccupied the unity process.

As the talks unfolded, the NTUF constitution helped define the organisational structure for a single national teachers’ union. This included the number of representatives that each union qualified for in proportion to its national membership. Finally, in a concluding meeting, all delegates from different teachers’ associations and unions declared themselves satisfied that a reasonable compromise had been reached. In order to formalise the unity agreement, a legal firm chaired by Haysom, Cheadle and Thompson prepared the terms of the agreement. The unity agreement nevertheless, posed a serious challenge for organisations that still wanted to maintain their autonomy. These organisations realised that unity was inescapable; it was taking their commitment beyond mere rhetoric. Among them, TUATA, NATU, NTS and the Transvaal Teachers Association (TTA) withdrew and declined to sign the agreement. A NATU representative intimated that ‘his union was not mandated to sign unity talks.’ On the other hand, TUATA’s participation in the unity process had been minimal, in the initial stages. The president attended only one NTUF meeting in three years of the forum’s existence. It was therefore deduced that TUATA’s rejection was in line with its negative approach towards unity. The NTS, on the other hand, stated that according to legal opinion obtained by the association, it was precluded on constitutional grounds from signing the agreement. Also declining to sign, as contained in a letter from the organisation, dated 26 September 1990, was the following:

At an Executive Committee meeting of the Transvaal Teachers Association (TTA), it was decided that the TTA would not be able to sign the Unity Agreement primarily because certain of its clauses were in conflict with the autonomy of the association and legal contract which the association has with its employees.

Finally, the unity agreement was signed by all the progressive unions, most of the provincial African teacher associations and TASA. The contract bound organisations to the following process:

A single unitary union of teachers would be established
National Office Bearers should be nominated
A Transnational National Executive Committee with a fixed number of representative per organization would govern the new union until the first National Congress
Established organisations would be granted dual membership but had to take a decision to dissolve or not to dissolve before the congress of SADTU
Affiliates will do all that is reasonably possible to recruit and to allow SADTU to recruit members from among their own membership
Affiliates will finance the establishment of and the running of SADTU on a monthly basis.
The birth of SADTU

After a long and painstaking process of teacher unity talks lasting about three years, a single, unitary teachers’ organisation, the South African Democratic Teachers Unions (SADTU) was launched in Johannesburg on 6 October 1990. The launch was attended by teacher representatives and educationists from around the world. All these delegates hailed the birth of the new union as an important move towards meaningful change in education. Among the international representatives were Tom Bediako of the All Africa Teachers Organisation (AATO), WCOTP President, Mary Futrell of the United States, President of the Canadian Teacher Federation, K.O Callaghan, the President of the Swaziland National Association of Teachers, Albert Shabangu and the President of the Botswana Teachers Union, Mr Motshu. In his keynote address, late President Nelson Mandela expressed concerns about the crisis of education in African schools, however, he stated that, ‘with this organisation we will be able to tackle the problem.’ He further noted that ‘organizations like SADTU are an appropriate expression of the struggle against apartheid. They are also a means through which we entrench our opposition to apartheid.’ As the product of political struggle, SADTU was formed not only to fight for and protect the rights of teachers, it had a mandate to align educational struggles with the national democratic struggle to end injustice in South Africa. In line with President Mandela’s sentiments, the first President of SADTU, Sheppard Mdladlana, stated in his address that, ‘this is the moment every teacher has been waiting for.’

It was indeed a historic occasion as it brought together a range of racially-divided teacher organisations into a unitary structure with a progressive educational and political vision. Many teachers described the day, as ‘the day of victory’ where teachers from throughout South Africa met to launch this giant union. The organisation was launched with signatories from more than eighteen organisations. Subsequently, the newly emergent progressive organisations, such as WECTU and others, immediately dissolved their structures. However, not surprisingly, given the tensions during unity talks, many of the established associations, with the exception of TASA, found reason to delay their dissolution, and eventually organise themselves into a separate organisation, NAPTOSA. The federal structure of ATASA, for example, merely declared its intention of dismantling its national office. On the other hand, the CTPA declared itself at loggerheads with SADTU and later withdrew. In February 1991, the CTPA was against the temporary teachers’ campaign of SADTU in the Western Cape, and actively attempted to persuade its members to withdraw from SADTU. Consequently, CTPA complained that, ‘we are thrown together in one pot, professionals as well as unionists.’ This became one of the main reasons why they pulled out. However, some CTPA
The South African Democratic Teacher Union will be launched at a two-day conference in Johannesburg on October the 6th and 7th. 1500 delegates from all the major Teacher organisations in the country will come together and begin a process that will see the birth of a unitary, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic Teacher Union, SADTU will strive to represent the interests of the thousands of teachers throughout South Africa - unemployed, temporary, permanent, victimised, underpaid, overworked, etc.

At the conference a transitional National Executive Committee (NEC) will be set-up, consisting of representatives of all the organisations involved in Teacher unity. The office-bearers for the next 12 months will come from this N.E.C. and will have a "caretaker" leadership to see to the setting up of regional and branch structures. After a year all organisations would have sufficient time to dissolve and a National Congress will elect the next National Executive from the ranks of SADTU.

LAUNCH PROGRAMME

NB: THE CONFERENCE WILL BE A CONSENSUS CONFERENCE AS ALL ORGANISATIONS PRESENT WOULD HAVE REACHED AGREEMENT ON THE BUSINESS OF THE DAY.

SATURDAY - 6th OCTBER

CHAIRPERSON - Cde JAY NAIDOO (COSATU GENERAL SECRETARY)

ADOPTION OF:
* Constitution
* Unity Agreement
* Resolutions and Programme of Action

ELECTION OF NATIONAL OFFICE-BEARERS

SUNDAY - 7th OCTOBER

PUBLIC LAUNCH - MASS RALLY

ORLANDO STADIUM SOWETO

FORWARD TO A SINGLE TEACHERS' UNION !!!
members, such as Randal van den Heever remained with SADTU. He was then followed by a group of young progressive CTPA members largely from rural Boland, Northern Cape, Atlantis and Central Karoo. Following the formation of branches, SADTU’s membership grew phenomenally. When SADTU was launched in 1990 it had a membership of about 20 000. At its first National Congress in October 1991, the union reported that membership growth had peaked at 37 497. By July 1993, on the occasion of its second National Congress, this figure had jumped to 74 249, an increase of almost 100% (Govender 2009).

**Early challenges**

Building the new union

After SADTU was launched, the union’s structure was divided into 15 regions, with several branches. With the assistance of international teachers’ federations, SADTU formulated a principle for the election of leadership that would represent all the teachers’ organisations. The union had to employ a General Secretary and other office bearers. The issue of leadership posed a serious challenge. A compromise had to be made in order to accommodate leaders from established associations. In his testimony, Dimaza explained:

How do you accommodate all those who were from other teacher organisations? That is why in SADTU we have what we call Vice President of Education, Vice President of Sport. It was meant to [satisfy] people from other Unions, for people to fill some positions. Some of them were Presidents in their Unions and some were Vice Presidents... we were trying to please people like aboThonjeni, people like aboSwartz and so on and so on... We were trying to please them. That’s why we said, let’s talk about this issue of “Vice President this, Vice President that”...

It was the same predicament with the recruitment of SADTU staff members. The union had to accommodate staff members from the established associations. Antony Moonsamy who was transferred from TASA to SADTU explained how uncertain he was when TASA was incorporated into SADTU. He recalls that,
Well in my mind it was a challenge. I’m an Indian. I said, we will have to take the chance. If it works out for me, then it works out. If it doesn’t work out for me, then I’ll have to look for another job. But for myself and other colleagues, I tell you we survived. And I’ve been with the organisation for more than 20 years now. I have been part of the launch that was in 1990 and now this is 2013, so it’s gone like 23 years with the organisation. I was also assisting that time in my Indian organisation to move towards SADTU, so there was no regret for me.

**Establishing branches**

As a new union, SADTU faced immense administrative challenges. Communicating with the membership was difficult as the few existing offices did not have fax facilities and there were no information publications at the national level to facilitate effective communication. It therefore became extremely difficult for the union to reach all corners of the country.

However, Thulas Nxesi, the first General Secretary, and other members of the NEC, visited different regions to address teachers about the role and significance of SADTU. His speech in Pietermaritzburg, where he addressed more than 250 teachers, was impressive. Many teachers recall that, ‘listening to him had been a learning experience in respect of SADTU and its policies.’ In many parts of the country, the establishment of branches was a delicate and complex task, as competition for members between SADTU and the established associations became intense, which was exacerbated by the intransigence of apartheid education authorities and political contestation that prevailed in the early 1990s. However, the commitment of politicised teachers, who mobilised and formed branches nationwide, was a decisive factor. In all the regions, teachers, particularly those who came from the emergent unions were very active and instrumental in forming branches. For instance, in KwaMashu, where the first SADTU branch was formed, teachers like ‘comrade Chris Mlotshwa,’ who was a member of NEUSA, became instrumental in mobilising his peers into SADTU. One of Mlotshwa’s peers, Roes Ntanzi remembers,

We didn’t know about the existence of SADTU… we asked Mlotshwa who is this Mdladlana you keep on talking about. He said he is an activist who is also a teacher… That was in 1990. They intended to form a Union. It will be a wing of the ANC, but inside of South Africa. If it is inside of South Africa it can push the interests of teachers.

Thus, the prevailing political environment, and especially SADTU’s alliance with the ANC, was a key mobilising factor in the building of SADTU. After the launch of SADTU in KwaMashu, new branches were formed in Umlazi and other townships. Many teachers joined, often because of frustrations with the Education Department. When the KwaMashu branch was launched, local organisers used their resources to canvas and mobilise. Ntanzi recalls, ‘KK had a green Cressida GLI-6, he said, here is my car. I volunteer, just put petrol. We will go to schools and meet other teachers.’ These interviews reveal the high level of commitment among teachers who dedicated their time and resources to the formation of SADTU. In some parts of Natal, particularly in areas that were under the jurisdiction of the KwaZulu government, it became extremely difficult to mobilise and build branches. The KwaZulu government was repressive and its protective service, the Zulu Police Department, was brutal. Samora Nene, a former teacher and one of the founders of SADTU in the Northern Natal region, described the situation as follows,

It was difficult in the 1990s for a union to take-off the ground because there were ZPs [Zulu Police] and police brutality which made it difficult for us to convene meetings. When the union started, we could not form branches of the union in our schools because these schools belonged to the KwaZulu Government. We had to mobilise underground.

Moreover, there was a civil war in Natal between Inkatha and the Congress movement. Any structure that was aligned to the ANC, was severely dealt with. At the same time, the political environment of the country was changing. There was a resurgence of the ANC and liberation movements following their unbanning and the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners. This created a new context that was at the same time intimidating as it was highly contested.

The growth of SADTU was uneven. In some parts of the country the organisation was formed very late. In Atlantis, for instance, SADTU structures were only formed in 1993. Its formation was a reaction to the implementation of the ‘teacher rationalisation’ policy, whereby government attempted to restructure education, through the introduction of the white ‘Model C’ schools and reducing the cost of education from the state to parents. In effect, this meant that only rich parents would be able to afford the standard of education afforded by white schools, and thus constituted a subtle form of racial exclusion. This initiative proceeded in tandem with cuts in provincial and departmental education budgets and the retrenchment of teachers. Not surprisingly, it raised the ire of teachers all over the country, and in some remote parts of the country, helped to mobilise teachers into forming SADTU structures. The situation urged teachers to call meetings under the banner of SADTU nationwide and to discuss the growing crisis in education. After a local teachers meeting in Atlantis, John Gusty, a principal at Robinhood Special School recalls,

‘We still came from the meeting empty. After that meeting, we realised that these people will not take us anywhere, we must become part of a more progressive structure. And me and the other three guys, we were in the executive of the primary sports union. We were only four and we started to organise the SADTU branch. And we started talking amongst ourselves about SADTU and then we [contacted] the provincial [people] and we set up a branch here in Atlantis… [in] 1993, almost sixty percent of the teachers joined the union.

In Northern Natal, the visit by the Minister of Education in KwaZulu, Lionel Mshali, led to the formation of SADTU. In this region, Mshali, and many older teachers who had long-held school management positions, were also members of Inkatha. They were antagonistic towards SADTU. Mshali’s hostility towards SADTU was evident when he visited Siyamukela High School in 1992, where he scornfully said ‘labothisha bayakhonkotha and bakhonkotha kuhle lwamdlwane’ (‘teachers are barking like small puppies.’) His statement was in response to SADTU’s call for wage parity. In spite of their affiliation to Inkatha, a significant proportion of teachers was disturbed by Mshali’s statement. As a Minister, he was seen as lacking professionalism and sensitivity to the needs of teachers. This led many teachers to seek protection from SADTU, Samora Nene, Motha Mshali and their comrades used this opportunity to mobilise teachers by asking Mshali to apologise. These events led to the formation of a new SADTU branch in Madadeni Township.

Elsewhere, in the Ciskei homeland, SADTU experienced some problems in terms of recognition and mobilising teachers. Principals denied them access to teachers, and this
compelled them to use forceful tactics. MziwuMandla Dlomo describes the situation as follows,

We began organizing, we would visit schools, and we would go and demand to meet teachers. It was not easy, you would go to a school and the principal [was] not welcoming. The teachers were scared and we would demand that ‘we want to talk to the teachers’ and the principal would say ‘this is my school you can’t just come in’ and we would say ‘hey, this is not your farm’.

In areas, such as the East London region, mobilising teachers and opening branches was not as difficult because of an already existing progressive union, the East London Progressive Teachers’ Union (ELPTU). In the Western Transvaal, Ouapa Seboali, Lucky Tsagai, Jobie Motumi and their comrades, were active in organising teachers to form SADTU branches in that region. At that time, Western Transvaal was a tiny land parcel that covered Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp. The larger part of the region was under Bophuthatswana. During the interview with Jobie Motumi, he recalls that, ‘we had …massive work to do in terms of recruiting, and mobilising… But there was always resistance by our elder comrades at the time…. we started mobilising the former Western Transvaal so that we [could] solidify our base as a way of trying to reach out’. At the time, these SADTU organisers did not have an office. Jobie remembers,

There were no resources. We didn’t have a fixed office … we would go to a particular school and in the end there was this teachers’ centre. The person who was in charge of the teachers’ centre was an educator, it was someone we understood, we organized meetings there, … those were the days.

Thus, it is clear from the above testimonies that SADTU faced huge challenges in the establishment of regional and branch structures. Foremost among these, were those of an administrative nature, such as obtaining office space and office equipment. The situation was made more difficult because of the attitude and actions of intransigent authorities especially in the former homelands and self-governing states, such as KwaZulu and Ciskei. Nevertheless, due to the commitment of dedicated teacher activists and cadres, solid progress was made, and these efforts put in place the early building blocks of the union. The political transitional context, which saw the gradual ascendency of the ANC and its allies, was also a major contributing factor in SADTU’s early development, as more and more teachers identified with the national democratic struggle.

Funding

Like most anti-apartheid organisations, SADTU relied heavily on international funding when it was established. From 1990 to 1992, SADTU’s operational budget was almost fully funded by the union’s international allies, namely WCOTP and IFFTU, which later became the International Education (IE) consortium. The SADTU Executive Committee acknowledged in no uncertain terms the invaluable funding and material support from its international fraternal allies. Although the funding was insufficient, SADTU was able to accomplish a great deal. Funds that were contributed by the international donors covered membership recruitment and services, governance activities, publications, campaigns and labour relations education. Staffing and general administration was also funded by the international consortium. There was also a transfer of skills, as SADTU was guided on how the union could move towards self-sufficiency. With the assistance of international support, SADTU was able to rent office space, provide office equipment, establish 139 branch structures, recruit 36-459 teachers, hold meetings of the executive committee and appoint 8 committees to deal with different portfolios.

Some of the national established teacher associations also played an important part in supporting SADTU’s early development by providing both material and human resources support, ranging from staff transfers, office space and financial assistance. The young SADTU was able to draw on their many years of experience and expertise as teachers’ associations. For example, TASA made a significant contribution to SADTU’s finances, by assisting with stop order facilities and other resources. In order for SADTU to survive financially, dual membership had to be maintained as a transitional measure. Former TASA administrator, Antony Moonsamy remembers that, ‘since the department did not recognise SADTU, we continued with TASA deductions…teachers were running dual membership, we were collecting cash subscription from members. So whatever income was coming from TASA was going to SADTU.’ Apart from finance and administration, it should be acknowledged that TASA comrades played a very important role in building SADTU in Natal. This was expressed by Nokuthula Ngcobo a teacher at Inanda. In her narrative Nokuthula recalls,

We had a huge problem when the KwaZulu Government refused to take our subscriptions, deductions for the union… Our Indian comrades who carried us since we were not paying members of the union protected us. With the support of other comrades we managed. With all the struggles that we had, we made sure that our work was up-to-date and we made sure that our struggle was the same as our work.

In Natal, SADTU activities were funded and enabled by TASA because of its long experience as a teachers’ association. The important role played by TASA in the creation of a single non-racial, unitary teacher’s organisation, was highlighted by the election of the late Poobie Naicker as the first Deputy President of SADTU under President Sheppard Mdladlana. Poobie often claimed that success was not his alone, but belonged to all those within the association, who have toiled and sacrificed for the principles of justice and democracy in South Africa. During the interview with Nokuthula, she acknowledged the role that TASA comrades played in building SADTU when she said:

I respected the Indian [comrades] when I joined the union; I found them to have lots [more] information than us. They were already recognized as SADTU members. We used
at the Teachers Centre in Beatrice Street, [Durban], and there was catering and that time we did not even contribute a cent towards catering. The Indian [comrades] [could] claim for petrol and other things because they had funds.

Another association that provided valuable support was the Transkei Teachers Association (TTA). This is supported by Mxolisi Dimaza’s testimony which reveals how the TTA under B.B Mabandla assisted SADTU after its launch. Dimaza revealed that,

The only organisation of the Eastern Cape, that we are proud of is TTA, it assisted us a lot. It... had some of the progressive people like B.B. Mabandla. Even the national office was assisted by TTA. Sometimes when it is said that they don’t have money to pay rent, TTA would assist. TTA, also took their car, Toyota, I still remember a bluish Toyota ...XA 125 ST. They took that car for Thulas [Nxesi] to use in Johannesburg.

UTASA, the Coloured teachers’ federation, also contributed, for example, in negotiating the group assurance scheme for SADTU employees. However, the same cannot be said for all the established associations, such as the then Ciskei Teachers Union (CTU). Initially, the former border region of SADTU relied on this organisation for office space in King Williams Town. However, the relationship between the young SADTU members and the old guard of the Ciskei Association was not harmonious. This relationship was constantly threatened by the inherent historic tensions and distrust. Comparing, TTA and the CTU, Dimaza laments how they were unfairly treated: ‘we used their offices but at some point in time, we could see that these people are not happy...we were relying on them solely.’ Dimaza also shed light on how some of these associations squandered resources:

There was also a serious problem of looting of some kind that was taking place. And they were not telling you all the resources that they had...They did not declare cars. The only things they declared mostly is the things that we see in the offices. But as far as the cars which they had, they didn’t declare [those]. As far as their finances were concerned, they did not declare [those].

From a financial and administrative point of view, therefore, SADTU owed a great debt to its fraternal allies, both international and local teachers’ associations for their support during its early years of establishment. Although the finances was not enough, the organisation was able to undertake its daily activities and mobilisation work. The main challenge that confronted SADTU was to develop its own independent financial base, which it was able to do as its membership increased. From 1993 onwards, SADTU was in a position to distribute funding to the regions. A Congress resolution directed that funds be allocated on the basis of percentage, which was 40% to the National Office, 30% to the regions and 30% to branches. Today, as the union with the largest membership in the country, SADTU is able to finance its own activities and be recognised as financially independent.
After the launch of SADTU in October 1990, one of the biggest challenges that frustrated the union was the state’s refusal to grant it legal recognition. SADTU initially adopted a constructive engagement-negotiations approach with the authorities for recognition. Ironically, SADTU was recognised by WCOTP and IFFTU as the only legitimate teachers’ organisation in South Africa, but not recognised in its own country. The issue of recognition was crucial for many reasons. Firstly, recognition meant that the union would be able to legally negotiate for improved salaries and conditions of service for its members. Secondly, it would enable the union to negotiate fair procedures for lodging of grievances, resolving disputes and seeking arbitration. Thirdly, it would allow the union to gain stop order facilities, which was critical to facilitate collection of members’ subscriptions and enhance the union’s financial stability. Finally, with recognition, SADTU would be in a position to defend its members from intimidation and victimisation by the education authorities and apartheid state, which had been intensifying in the early 1990s just prior to the first democratic elections in South Africa.

In seeking recognition, SADTU held several meetings with the Department of Education. The first meeting was with the Minister of National Education, Louis Pienaar, in Pretoria, on 25 November 1990. A detailed memorandum containing motivation for recognition was submitted. The Minister undertook to respond to SADTU’s application for recognition as soon as possible. He also agreed that a joint working group should be appointed to facilitate this matter. A year later, the recognition of SADTU had not been approved. As a result, a working group meeting between SADTU’s National Executive Committee (NEC) members and a delegation of the Department of Education met in Pretoria. The meeting clarified the legal position regarding SADTU’s recognition. It was then agreed that SADTU should submit a blanket application for recognition which would be sent to all the Departments of Education. A fully-motivated application was despatched on 16 January 1991. In response, SADTU received acknowledgement letters from the DET and the Department of Education and Culture (DEC), as well as from the Ministers in the Houses of Assembly, Delegates and Representatives. A follow-up meeting was held with the National Minister of Education in Cape Town on February 1991. From this meeting, it became clear to SADTU’s delegation, that the Minister had not undertaken the necessary consultation with other educational Ministers in respect of the matter. After realising that recognition was been deliberately delayed, SADTU pursued the matter at a higher level. The union approached the office of the State President F.W De Klerk in 1991, to resolve the matter. The State President’s office responded by acknowledging receipt of SADTU’s request. From the above meetings, it was clear that the state was not willing to recognise SADTU. A representation to the government, on behalf of the ANC, was also made by Nelson Mandela. The international community also supported SADTU’s recognition bid. For instance, Margaret Axell, the International Secretary of the Swedish Teachers Union, Lararforbundet urged Mandela to support SADTU’s struggle for recognition. A letter that Axell wrote reads as follows:

We have more than once been disappointed and surprised when we learnt that SADTU has not yet obtained legal recognition from the authorities in South Africa. Therefore, we plead to you, Mr President, to take necessary actions in order to get the department of education to recognise SADTU immediately. If this will not be the case, we would like to know which criteria SADTU has not met that is required for recognition.

In response, Mandela wrote,
Thank you for the support you are giving to SADTU. The ANC has already made representation to the government about the recognition of all public unions. Our struggle for the right of Freedom of Association will see results only once a non-racial, non-sexist, united and democratic South Africa is in place.

The application was even extended to other departments, most notably, the former KwaZulu government. A SADTU delegation led by Randal van den Heever, Sheppard Mdladlana, Thulas Nxesi and Duncan Hindle went to Ulundi to meet the KwaZulu National Assembly to negotiate for stop order facilities and recognition. Randal remembers:

Yes and the big chief [Buthelezi] was there, he was sitting there... and we could feel the stares you know; and I mean [at] that time, there was terrible tension between ANC and Inkatha. What Buthelezi did [was] he allowed people to talk [first], at the end he talked... their response was, you who are saying you are a teachers' union, you are ANC, and you are COSATU. We are not dealing with ANC and COSATU, sorry... you are a smokescreen for ANC, so that was the view. I mean there were several NATU members who were sitting in the meeting; but in the end [there was a breakthrough] because... I think Buthelezi liked Sheppard... he said at the end, look, you a man I can talk to, you know.

Considering the political stance of SADTU, it was not going to be easy for the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) to allow teachers to be mobilised under the banner of SADTU. It is clear from the interview that SADTU was seen as ANC. What the Inkatha representatives said to the SADTU delegation was reminiscent of an earlier dramatisation of the ‘burial of COSATU’ during an Inkatha rally held on May Day in 1985. On that day, members of the Inkatha Youth League, led by Inkatha’s formidable warlord Shabalala, carried a coffin seemingly bearing COSATU leaders, Barayi and Naidoo to their ‘grave’.

As a result of the state’s delaying tactics in granting SADTU recognition, the union and its structures embarked on rolling mass action to pressure the authorities. The union was careful, however, to ensure that the campaign should not lead to a disruption of education activities in schools. It was reported that 40 000 teachers took part in mass action nationwide. From then, there were a series of mass actions related to recognition and educational issues, which were linked to the broader demands for peace and democracy in South Africa.

In different regions, teachers participated in demonstrations organised by SADTU. These actions formed part of a two-day nationwide call for recognition of the union. In Pietermaritzburg, the protest included two placard demonstrations by over 200 teachers. A memorandum was delivered to Mr Ramiah, the acting superintendent. This protest was followed by the march of about 700 teachers, students and community leaders. Several public meeting were held to highlight the protest action. The union also criticized the recognition of the National Professional Teachers Association (NAPTOSA), the federation that became the home of the established teachers’ associations that chose not join SADTU, and destined to become a strong rival of SADTU. During this period, the struggle been waged by the democratic movement, led by the ANC, for equal education and inclusive participation in policy processes was intensifying. The state of black education was in crisis and teachers were increasingly been subjected to terrible working conditions spawned by apartheid and Bantu education.

In May 1993, SADTU declared a national strike. This was a historic strike that laid the basis for...
for the establishment of labour legislation that gave teachers bargaining power. It also led to the formation of a national body, the National Education and Training Forum (NETF) in August 1993 that was charged with the responsibility to negotiate the transition to a post-apartheid education system. The year 1993 to 1994, marked the turning point as the country was moving towards a democratic government. The union convened its second Congress where resolutions pertaining to the national strike, recognition in the homelands, teachers' performance appraisal and education reconstruction and development were adopted. By this time, tension between the educational authorities and SADTU had reached boiling point. SADTU's alliance with the working class was prioritised and the union adopted radical positions in line with the national democratic struggle.

Against a background of the aforementioned educational problems, the teacher strikes led by SADTU between 1990 and 1993 became commonplace, and covered a number of demands, including recognition, the battle against victimization of members, the union's opposition to education restructuring, salary parity for female teachers, and demands for improved wages and conditions of service. Ultimately, SADTU's long and difficult struggle for recognition would reap rewards with the passing of the Education Labour Relations Act in 1993, and the creation of the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC). Above all, SADTU drew attention to persisting inequalities and imbalances in society, which were reflected in an unequal education system. In this way, SADTU had placed itself in the forefront of the vanguard for change.

In the final analysis, SADTU's emergence and preparedness to challenge the policies and actions of an unjust state and employer were influenced by the contested nature of the political transition. This led a deepening of the crisis in African education, compelling SADTU to demand equity, social justice and democratic practices in service delivery; SADTU had adopted a clear and unambiguous policy of aligning itself with the forces of progressive change, and it was not surprising that those who stood to benefit from a preservation of the status quo, criticised SADTU's militancy as irresponsible and 'unprofessional'. These critics included NAPTOSA affiliates, members of the public, media commentators and Department officials, and set the tone for educational and political contestation in the years ahead.

South African Democratic Teachers' Union

SADTU AND RECOGNITION

RESOLUTION:
SADTU RECOGNITION

The resolution adopted by the SADTU launch conference on 8 October 1990 in respect of recognition was:

PROGRAMME OF ACTION

It is hereby stated that SADTU believes in pursuing a Programme of Action with clearly stated short term and long term goals, and therefore resolves the following:

Short Term:
- to immediately get recognition from the Minister of National Education as the only teachers' union representing teachers on a non-racial, national basis;
- This recognition will include the acceptance of stop order facilities;
- to recruit membership for SADTU and organise it into branches and regions;
- to elect office bearers;
- to employ branch/regional organisers.

Long Term:
- to organise a campaign for a Teachers' Bill of Rights and a Teachers' Charter;
- to build the Union on all fronts and pursue the aims and objectives of the Constitution.

WHAT DOES RECOGNITION MEAN TO SADTU

* SADTU is the only national, non-racial teachers' organisation in South Africa and as such demands recognition at a National level. It is only at a National level that we will be able to negotiate on behalf of all our members.

* The Nationalist government and its education departments have met with SADTU on several occasions at National and Local level. They have even responded to some of SADTU's demands in respect of maternity benefits, equal salaries for women teachers, and an in principle decision to introduce a uniform calendar for all schools.

WHAT RECOGNITION DOES NOT MEAN

1. Sitting on departmental advisory committees as junior partners.
2. Abandoning the right to take collective action in defence of the rights of our members.
3. Ending the struggle for a single non-racial, education system in a democratic South Africa.

SADTU DEMANDS DE JURE (legal) RECOGNITION
NOT JUST DE FACTO RECOGNITION

WHY DOES SADTU WANT RECOGNITION

Recognition will give us the right to:
1. Negotiate improved salaries and conditions of service for our members.
2. Establish clear procedures of grievance arbitration and resolving of disputes.
3. Defend our members against victimisation and harassment.
4. Have access to Information about educational matters.
5. Gain stop order facilities.
The goals and programmes of SADTU, which had been spelt out during the early years of its establishment, have continued to guide its development to this day. These were: Political, Unionism, Professionalism and Organisational Development (Govender, 2009:260). The Political Programme was encapsulated in the theme of its second National Congress, namely: “Unionise for Educational Reconstruction and Development”. An important aspect of the political programme was the commitment “to the end of Apartheid in education and the development of an education system which is just and the expression of the will of the people” (SADTU, 1995: 21). This expression of political intent has underpinned SADTU’s political alliances since its birth, particularly with the tripartite alliance of the ANC, COSATU and SACP. SADTU’s second programme was its commitment to unionism wherein it stressed the importance of campaigning for better salaries and the job security of teachers. Thirdly, the Union identified the importance of developing its professional programme, especially with regard to education policy; and fourthly, it committed to a programme of building a strong organization with effective structures. (Govender, 2009)

It is important to get an insight on how SADTU funded these programmes. In August 1993, members of the Education International (EI) consortium met to assess their capacity to support and assist SADTU activities. The EI was and still is the world’s largest global teachers union federation with more than 30 million education workers in 171 countries. In this meeting, the consortium agreed that it will shift from supporting SADTU’s operational costs, as it did from 1990 to 1992, to supporting the union’s programmes. It was agreed that SADTU would cover its operational costs from its own resources. The NEC then had to raise funds in order to facilitate workshops on labour issues, and seek ways and means of providing legal assistance to its members.

Overall, SADTU’s programmes were located in the context of transformation. SADTU had to redefine its role in educational restructuring and reform following the struggle for liberation, while simultaneously focussing on challenges relating to gender issues and capacity-building, among others.

Professional programme: To help support educational reconstruction in the country, SADTU realised it had to build its capacity as a union and the professional capability teachers in classrooms. Teachers had to be subject specialists, curriculum developers, and innovators in teaching methods, as well as researchers. The union had to focus on the issues of educational policy and teacher development. In order to help resolve educational crisis issues, SADTU had to develop the union’s policy skills, given the lack of experience in this area among its leaders and membership. There was an early focus on curriculum issues, wherein SADTU drew on some of the earlier experiences of NEUSA in setting up alternative curriculum projects. This led to the founding of SADTU’s Education Desk, which was at the forefront of developing the union’s education priorities and policy responses. This included issues on curriculum, teacher appraisal, and teacher professional development.

The Education Desk received a larger budget than SADTU’s other desks. It was responsible for analysing policy and for generating comments that were a response to...
proposed education policies. The desk issued discussion papers on various educational issues. According to the former educational officer in the Northern Cape, Lesego Monyera 'we would be assembled at Matthew Goniwe House, SADTU’s headquarters, and we will go through what government …[had] prepared, and we would craft the union’s response, collective response to whatever draft policy would be on the table.’

It is worth considering that during this period, institutional and educational structures generated in the apartheid era remained largely intact. The central developmental task that faced SADTU as a revolutionary organisation was to influence strategies to be followed in order to change the educational system, which included curricula and subject content matters. With an attempt to reposition itself in relation to the emerging educational policy for a new South Africa, SADTU’s educational desk had to be clear and effective. The manner in which this desk functioned was organically linked with provinces and regions. At the provincial level, each province was divided into regions. Before provincial education convenors attended national meetings, they were required to workshop and conduct intensive engagement at the regional level. Monyera, for instance, remembers:

I was responsible for convening the education desk at the provincial level, so I would call all the then…four regions…I would call and coordinate meetings around this draft white paper, this draft legislation … We will discuss the proposal by the department of education; we will craft our own provincial response towards that [for submission] to a national meeting, where each province was represented by each provincial coordinator.

SADTU’s Education desk worked very closely with the National Education and Training Forum (NETF), which prior to 1994, was the main stakeholder body wherein education problems were debated and attempts at finding solutions were made. The NETF was established to prevent the apartheid government from the unilateral restructuring of education during the transition. The forum was open to all stakeholders with an interest in education and training. The 1993 SADTU National Congress took a resolution to participate in this forum which was viewed by the union as the ‘new site of struggle.’ The NETF Curriculum Committee created a number of syllabus committees that were responsible for cleansing the old syllabus and outdated material. This committee had to consolidate different departmental syllabi into a single national syllabus. Coordination of this task was given to representatives from different organizations. The most important element of this process was public participation. The call for public submissions attracted over 800 written comments. SADTU was very active in this process. With the support of COSAS and SASCO, the old allies of the union, SADTU was able to win debates in the Curriculum Conference that laid the basis for ongoing participatory curriculum processes.

**Gender issues**

The question of gender equity became central to transformation, and given the significant involvement of females in the profession, SADTU placed gender concerns high on its agenda. Teaching was and still is one of the few professions that women occupy in large numbers. In 1991, women made up 71% of the teaching profession in DET primary schools and 42% in secondary schools. Women were rarely promoted to become HODs and principals. They were also discriminated against in terms of salaries and conditions of service. For instance, they were not remunerated the same salary as their male counterparts for similar positions, and did not enjoy the same benefits, such as housing subsidies, medical aid, retirement funds and other fringe benefits. In its attempt to fight for gender equality, SADTU convened a workshop on 27 September 1993, which was attended by representatives from all 15 regions. The workshop was conducted by Pinky Mbowane who was then the Vice President for Gender. It focused on the various issues, including maternity and maternity leave, childcare, abortion, harassment at schools and affirmative action.

Organisational development: One of SADTU’s earliest tasks was the building of grassroots structures. This included empowering members with skills to establish branch structures, become effective site stewards, promote membership participation and ensure that all members understood their rights. To this end, SADTU developed the following programmes:

- Setting up local offices
- Grievance handling for site stewards
- Conflict resolution and advocacy skills
- Negotiation skills, presentation skills for meetings and for media
- Education funding issues and budget presentation
- Internal and external communication
- Funding
- Research and technological needs
- Setting up professional development
- Collective bargaining.

Women members engaged in a Capacity Building Workshop
The victory of the Congress movement during the 1994 elections confirmed the dominance of the ANC in a new, democratic South Africa. For SADTU, this was the turning point in the history of teachers’ politics, with new dynamics coming into play. Before 1994, SADTU’s politics was the politics of resistance, urgent, often heroic and oppositional. It was attuned to immediate problems with relatively less focus on the future. After 1994, the challenge that faced the union was to move away from resistance to the politics of engagement, and policy making for education reconstruction and development. The union had to remain honest, accountable and transparent to its membership. SADTU had to gauge at the 1980s as ‘history,’ and to engage this history critically and less nostalgically. However, for the union there was still considerable political resonance with the strategies and organizational structures of the 1980s.

Thus, in the post-1994 period, SADTU had to redefine its role in the context of a new dispensation. One of the major debates that emerged was the question of labour’s relationship with the new government and how SADTU would undertake future campaigns. In the meeting that was held between the IE consortium and SADTU, the union was of the view that there would be contradictions within the government of National Unity. It realised that the ANC as a ruling party, will be under pressure from small and big enterprises, including multinational and financial institutions, whose approach to wages will undermine labour demands and workers’ rights in the form of cutbacks and retrenchments, especially in the public sector. SADTU had to ensure that as a union it continued to fight for the rights of its members, albeit this time, with a democratic government. It had to maintain a degree of independence without forgoing its historical political alliances. As stated in the minutes of the aforementioned meeting, ‘alignment with the ANC-Government of National Unity was based on the RDP which aimed at advancing both the ANC and SADTU’s interest’. Another challenge that confronted SADTU was to restructure the organisation from fifteen regions to nine new provinces. This meant the creation of new subregional structures within nine regions in order to break the vast gap between the newly created regional structures and branches. This process disturbed the rhythm of the union and it prompted SADTU to place some programmes on hold.

Nevertheless, at an organisational level, SADTU was able to demonstrate sustained growth. Between 1993 and 1995, SADTU’s membership grew to 80 000, and by 1999 it had increased to 200 000. The professional role of membership had to be balanced with the bargaining processes and collective agreements. After 1994, there was a great deal of consensus around the vision and goal of educational reform. This broad consensus was premised on the values of equity, redress, access, participation and quality. In order to achieve this goal, there were a number of programmes that the union had to embark on as outlined above. SADTU’s concern was to make its programmes sustainable in order to enable the organisation to meet its objectives.

**Labour Legislation**

After 1994, public sector labour legislation was reviewed. SADTU’s participation and input was substantial. It was based on well-researched information which gave teachers the best collective bargaining rights. This was ultimately encapsulated in teachers’ right to strike and the statutory right to be involved in socio-economic protests through Section 77 of the Labour Relations Act of 1995. Together, with the earlier passing of the Education Labour Relations Act in 1993, teacher unionism had become institutionalised in South Africa. This was a major achievement in contrast to the persecution that the newly emergent teacher unions had faced in the 1980s. In this way, the pact between teachers and the working class was cemented, notwithstanding the importance of teachers’ professional interests and goals. SADTU’s affiliation to COSATU, moreover, strengthened its historical ties to the working class struggle.

**From unionism to bureaucracy**

Following the newly constituted Ministry of Education, the first White Paper on Education and Training was produced in 1995. The building of a new system of education required actions on several fronts. This urged the government to open lines of communication on a more regular basis in order to address issues of common concern. As a result, all stakeholders in education, including teacher unions, committed themselves to the task of education reconstruction.

A decision with far-reaching implications for SADTU, was that taken at its National Council Meeting (NCM) in April 1995, which stated that ‘SADTU has released union members and officials to participate in various structures of government.’ There were two reasons why the union had to release its members. At first, the union had to be in a good position to influence transformation in education. Secondly, it was a political obligation for SADTU to keep communication lines open between the department and the union. Subsequently, in the Free State, Luki Nkonka was seconded to the department, and he later became the provincial Head of the Department (HOD) of Education. In the Northern Cape, Kevin Nkoane became the first post-1994 HOD. Rej Brijraj was appointed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the South African Council of Educators (SACE). Brijraj’s placement could be attributed to his responsibility as trainer of professional ethics and conduct within SADTU. There were also female comrades, such as LS Mabote from the Free State who was seconded to hold strategic positions within the Department of Education.

This shift, however, removed key personnel from the union’s leadership. To some extent, the loss of leadership was positive in that ‘comrades’ would be involved in decision making. However, this led to the collapse of some regions and SADTU was faced with the building of a second layer of leadership. With ‘comrades’ holding key decision-making positions, members of SADTU thought that the union might move beyond the level of protests and concentrate on education transformation. However, as developments in the latter half of the 1990s and beyond would illustrate, the need for a strong union would not become redundant just because SADTU’s political allies were the majority party in government. One of the consequences of SADTU’s decision to release senior members to serve as ANC Members of Parliament and in local government structures, was that it
deprived the union of some of its most experienced leaders, which led to serious capacity constraints. This would eventually compel the Union to embark on a major capacity-building programme, the ultimate aim of which was to build a strong second and third layer of political leadership in the union (SADTU NEWS, June 1996: 4).

The shift from parochial union interests to education rebuilding clearly demonstrates that SADTU’s strategy went beyond the political rhetoric, and was aimed, in part, at strengthening effective education administrative mechanisms, and reforming those aspects of the previous bureaucracy. Besides, the union was fostering cooperation within the national development strategy. However, these initiatives were vigorously criticised by other parties, particularly, the NAPTOSA affiliates, who interpreted this action as a political strategy aimed at what was dubbed as ‘bureaucratic cleansing.’ However, this was consistent with SADTU’s belief that education and politics are two sides of the same coin, as it is in most states around the world. In the context of South Africa, this highlights the reality that education and politics are inseparable.

Considering the historical relationship of the role players within the transitional education department post-April 1994, ‘bureaucratic cleansing’ was inescapable. For instance, it is recorded in the resolution 14 of the NCM that, ‘the old bureaucrats still wielded lot[s] of influence within the educational circle of the new Ministry of Education…. these officials misrepresented the Ministry by promoting their own minority interest.’ On the other hand, SADTU members were still suffering the effects of apartheid victimisation and harassment. For both parties, therefore, there was a sense of continuity and identification with the past.

**Conclusion**

This booklet has used archival sources and oral history to document SADTU’s past. It has presented the founders of SADTU and the younger generation of teachers who strengthened the union an unprecedented opportunity to tell their story. This has been achieved through the detailed investigation of personal narratives, history and lives of teachers within the broader context of political processes that affected them in different provinces and regions. This examination has offered a variety of experiences, as well as the motivations of some teachers who were directly engaged in the formation of SADTU. Having adopted this method, the book has captured the origins of the union, its complex relationship with the apartheid education authorities and how it rose to challenge the authoritarian pre-1994 regime. Through teachers voices, their strength, limitations and involvement have been gauged. Most importantly, this work also took a fascinating gaze at the plight of teachers and how the history of teachers’ politics could not be understood without the political forces that informed their lives.

The booklet closes with the dawn of a new era, and SADTU’s location within education reconstruction and development post-1994. Thus, ends an important chapter in the life of SADTU. But this is only part of the story. SADTU would face enormous challenges in a democratic dispensation, especially after 2000, that would ultimately lead to tensions within the democratic alliance, and public criticism that the union was still steeped in the past. This story and SADTU’s perspective on more recent education developments, remains to be told, and will constitute an important part of future publications in the history of SADTU.
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