

TRADE UNIONS & PARTY POLITICS – Labour Movement In Africa

Edited: Björn Beckman, Sakhela Buhlungu and Lloyd Sachikonye

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Just prior to the move by Cosatu to try to assert itself as independent from the ruling ANC party via the recent public statements by Cosatu secretary-general Zwelinzima Vavi that the lifestyles of senior ANC members and government be investigated, this book had hit the bookshelves.

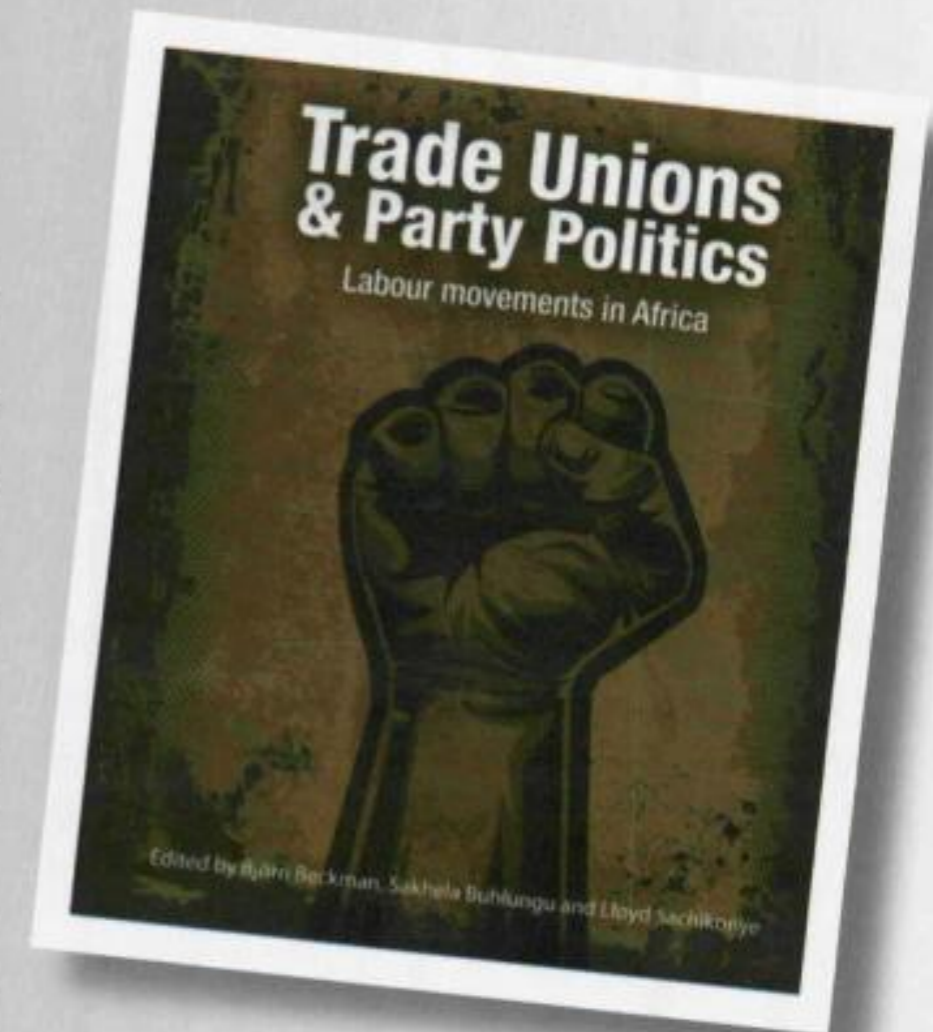
I must say I enjoyed reading the book because I am one of those who had been concerned about Cosatu being aligned to the ruling party while workers continue to suffer under the neo-capital policies implemented by the same ruling party. I am one of those who believe that Cosatu has been compromised by selling the rights of the poor workers while the federation's leaders hob knob with the ruling party. I agree with University of Johannesburg's Prof Sakhela Buhlungu's recent report that Cosatu has neglected its members while it delved in politics of the alliance including the ANC succession debate. However one is open-minded here because even the authors of this volume state it clearly as to why some unions align themselves with political parties and why some prefer to remain independent from the ruling elite.

As the titled says, the book is about the relationships between trade unions and party politics. The authors including the editors of this volume come from diverse backgrounds and are authorities on trade unionism, research and politics in general. Countries covered here in-

clude South Africa, Uganda, Ghana, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Namibia. The 14 writers discuss the advantages and disadvantages in aligning trade unions with political parties. One gives a perspective as to why the trade union movement in Uganda preferred to stay out of the party politics, how the trade unions helped the opposition MDC in Zimbabwe to challenge Zanu-PF for power.

Surely many might have had questions about why Cosatu chose Jacob Zuma over Thabo Mbeki in Polokwane, why the federation is closer to the SACP than it is to the ANC and why it is leading the debate for the implementation of the National Health Insurance, the inflation targeting, the food prices and even Eskom tariff hikes. The answer is that they want a politico-economic environment that would be conducive for the well-being of their members. For instance, Zuma is seen as more amenable to the plight of the workers and the poor than Mbeki, the NHI will help the healthcare of the poor while inflation, high food prices and electricity increases would hit the poor hardest, hence they have to be challenged.

This debate also finds linkage to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the election of former trade union leader Lech Walesa as president of Poland (both my additions), the emergence of labour parties in countries such as Britain and elsewhere and other situations internationally where the trade unions played a



crucial role in the liberation struggle. It is all about asserting the hegemony of the workers' power in society.

Question is, by insisting that Cosatu is an independent body whose right to differ must be respected, is Cosatu's Zwelinzima Vavi not preparing to serve divorce papers on the ANC? Should the ANC/Cosatu/SACP tripartite alliance be dismantled and what are the implications of that for the workers? Will Cosatu serve its members better if it is not aligned to the ruling ANC? Answers to these questions and others, in one way or another, are provided in the pages of this book. This book came at the right time, not so?

Reviewed by Eric Naki