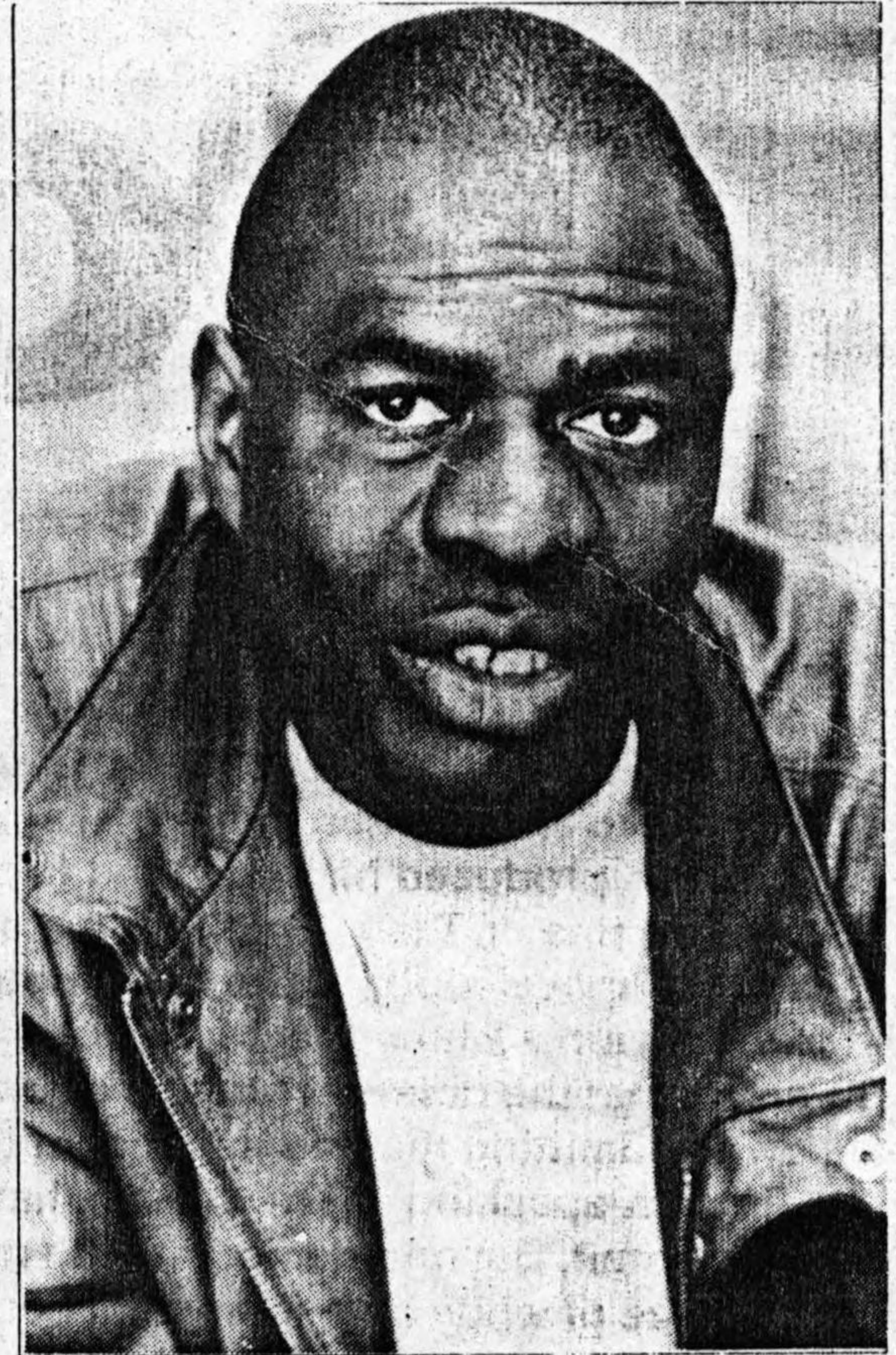


Can the alliance hold?

Rapid political developments and changing power relations between state and capital could demand that traditional political allies – such as the ANC, SACP and Cosatu – may have to review their own relationships.

face theNation spoke to **Sam Shilowa**, Cosatu's assistant general secretary about the future of the alliance and related issues



NEW NATION: How do you envisage the relationship between Cosatu and its alliance partners, the ANC and SACP, changing when these organisations become part of an interim government?

Sam Shilowa: That will depend partly on the type of interim government (IG) that we have. In so far as the first phase of the IG is concerned, where an appointed interim governing council will be required to level the playing field, the power relations would not have changed significantly. And our alliance will therefore also not change. It is also unlikely to change once we have an elected IG/constituent assembly. This is mainly because the elected IG will be a government of national unity, one which is a jamboree of political parties, even if the ANC emerges as the majority party following an election for a constituent assembly.

We must distinguish between this scenario and one in which a majority party, assuming it is the ANC, appoints a cabinet and then begins to represent the state.

It will then mean that you are dealing with a party in power. But in so far as the first scenario is concerned, you would be dealing with the ANC as part of the collection of political parties. And in this situation the alliance will have to remain in place, as a pressure group.

In fact, it may well be that the alliance asks trade unionists to participate in the drafting of the constitution. Cosatu will also actively mobilise workers around the alliance platform for the constituent assembly.

NN: What about relations in the post-constituent assembly phase – assuming the ANC is elected to power?

Shilowa: Questions on the kind of relationship will obviously have to be revisited. But I cannot say that relations between Cosatu and the ANC will be terminated. The alliance will be reviewed from time to time.

NN: You talk of the need for the trade union movement to remain independent. How do you ensure that trade unionists are not co-opted into government and demobilised as has happened in many parts of Africa?

Shilowa: During discussions in Cosatu, the emphasis has always been on staying dynamic and independent, and that we should not act as a conveyor belt of any political party. That position must hold now and in the future.

To ensure that this situation prevails, Cosatu could decide that its officials should not take up positions in government. But Cosatu should not assume that some comrades will not take up positions in government. Instead it should prepare for such an eventuality by building a second layer of leadership, which could take the place of officials leaving the trade union movement.

So, although Cosatu can decide whether it will allow its members to take up positions in government or not, it is not such a resolution that will suffice to ensure the continued existence of a strong trade union movement. Ultimately, it must be the individual's choice.

But if a person does take a position in government, Cosatu will ask that official to vacate his or her seat in the federation in line with our congress resolution. That is

why we need a second layer leadership.

NN: An ANC government is unlikely to be a socialist government. In fact it is possible that the ANC may be forced to make a range of compromises that will not be in line with the development towards socialism. Given Cosatu's commitment to a socialist future, when do you envisage Cosatu will have to break ranks with the alliance?

Shilowa: It is something that will have to be discussed by all alliance partners. Ultimately, it must be remembered that Cosatu's stated objective is a socialist system. It therefore means that a closer relationship will develop between all those striving for socialism.

But I am not saying that, when the ANC gets into power, we should club together with the SACP against the ANC. It is possible that, given our common goal, namely socialism, Cosatu and the SACP may have to close ranks to ensure forward movement.

We will, however, ensure that an ANC-led government takes on issues in a way that allows for forward movement towards our stated goal. It will also depend on whether the ANC remains a liberation movement, with dynamic contact with its members, or goes the route of political parties, which only consult their members once every five years.

We are also aware that pressure will be put on the ANC by big business to make compromises. And that is why we have called for an election manifesto which will represent a set of minimum demands of the alliance. These minimum demands should not be compromised even under pressure from big business.

But that does not mean that Cosatu will not have positions which differ from that held by the ANC.

The task of reconstructing the economy to the benefit of the working class will be enormous. And in this regard we will have to ensure that the type of accord that we enter into with the ANC and the SACP allows for effective reconstruction of the economy to the benefit of our own members and the community.

But whether we have an active or inactive social accord will depend on the extent to which we combine struggles on the ground with central bargaining at national and industrial level.

NN: It is sometimes argued that Cosatu has become the lame duck in the alliance. This for example is suggested by the fact that Cosatu in the end conceded to exclusion from Codesa even though this went against its executive committee decision.

Shilowa: Our executive committee had decided that Cosatu should participate in Codesa. But at some point, we communicated to our alliance partners that, because of the government's intransigence on our participation, we would hold off our application.

But that same day we decided that we did in fact have a role to play and that our application should stand. This to and fro movement in our position caused some confusion. For example, at a Codesa preparatory meeting, the PAC called for the inclusion of the trade union movement. But they did not find support among the ANC and the SACP delegates because we had changed our position in view of government intransigence. We then changed our position to continue our bid to participate.

There was confusion also among our members as to what we wanted. But now our position is that we still want to partici-

"... we will have to ensure that that the type of accord that we enter into with the ANC and SACP allows for effective reconstruction of the economy to the benefit of our own members and the community."

pate. However, we have to ask – what kind of contribution can we make at this late stage, with Codesa II just days away.

On the other hand, we have not been totally excluded. We have Chris Dlamini, Bernie Fanaroff, Peter Dantjies and myself, even though we are participating through the alliance.

NN: But if the position remains that Cosatu still wants to participate, why has the federation not used its muscle to ensure that this position prevails?

Shilowa: We felt that we could resolve the issue through discussion in the alliance. But we also felt that if we were unable to go to Codesa, the alliance would be amenable to giving us a clear voice at the convention. And we have not been found wanting in this regard. There was a possibility for Cosatu to resort to mass action. But personally, I feel that would have been counter-productive. The focus at Codesa would have shifted away in the same way as happened with the demand by Inkatha that the Zulu king be accommodated.

NN: But there are no parallels – Inkatha has been unable to bring sufficient pressure to bear on Codesa simply because it does not have the same capacity as Cosatu to mobilise mass pressure?

Shilowa: Yes, but it would have put the alliance in a difficult position. If Cosatu were to push for mass action, it would have been able to do that only if – and I want to underline that – Cosatu had taken one position from the outset and stuck to it.

The fact that we took one position and changed it several times would have made it very difficult to sustain that kind of action. Our own members were confused on what Cosatu's actual position was. The confusion went beyond that and some of our affiliates then started debating anew whether we should be participating or not. It is against this background that we decided against mass action in support of Cosatu's demand that it be allowed to participate in Codesa.

Presently, the federation's decision is that mass action should be focused on ensuring forward movement to an interim governing council by June this year and a commitment to the election of a constituent assembly by the end of the year as well as restoration of South African citizenship in the TBVC areas.

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