

MAYIBUVE
asked the
t general
secretary of the
recenHy
lau:h_Ohed South
African
Democratic
Teabbers Union,
Randall van'den
. 5:7,- Heever, to
explain the role
Of teachers
-. under present
conditions
his was the first time a
1:7 ganisation was formed,
clearly committed to the sting-
gle for a people's democraey'in
the country. . ' '
Education has long been' one
of the most racially-segregated .
arenas of public life in South Af-
rica. It has always been very
firmly divided into various com-
partments. And there were. as
many tegchers' organisations. as
there were departments.
While one acknowledges that
various teachers organisations
had tried to remedy problems in
their immediate school environ-i
ment, it cannot be denied that
separate teachers organisations
soon became a blueprint of
apartheid. v .
When teachers therefore de-
cided in Harare in April 1988 to
form a single, national union of
teachers, it was a very signifi-
cant political decision that was
taken. Thatcher: decided that
r'they themselves pave-the way
for a new education dispensa-
tion.
As much as teachers demand-
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truly non-racial_ . and: .
democratic teachers' or:
ed, a demOcratic constitution
with a single parliament, as
they called for a single education '
system with a policy of non-
racialismu in schools, so they
Would have to be prepared to
'form a single non-racial teach-
ers' organisation themselves.
- Teachers would -demonstrate
by such an act that they were
prepared to apply the demand
for transformation to their own. .
organisations and that they did
not simply demand a non-racial
society, a principle which they
were not prepared to implement
themselves.
-It was this commitment tog;
nonqacialism and democracy:

which led to 191-organisations and affiliates signing an historic unity agreement or) 30 September in which they committed themselves to the above-mentioned ideals.

iThe teacher formations involved were: Atasa, Utasa, Tasa, Neusa, Detu, CTPA, Wectu, PT". Ectv, 'Edasa, Catt: Ofsata, Ofsta, Sonat, Elptu, PTL, TTA (Transkei), Boptul

However, there were organisations such as they'h'ansvaal Union of Affican Teachers Associations, the Natal Teachers Society and the 'hanskei Teachers Assobiation, which pulled out of the unity initiative at the last moment. And there are some other organisations who had signed the unity agreement who are now raising doubts about their continued participation in SADTU.

Some of the arguments raised by these organisations are'that SADTU is ANC-amliated, that it has leanings towards trade unionism which are estranging professional organisations, and that the teachers from the newly emergent organisations were attempting a coup through ,SADTU on the established organisations and their considerable assets. .

SADTU's responses to these allegations were as follows: Sadtu is an organisation of teachers.

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It is committed to fighting for fundamental change in education. The union, however, realises that education does not occur in a vacuum, and that consideration has to be given to the sociopolitical context in which education operates. SADTU members are therefore free to join whatever political organisations they feel committed to. This is the essence of democracy. _

SADTU is further of the opinion that unionism and professionalism are not mutually exclusive concepts. A trade union is not necessarily opposed to professionalism.

The World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) - an international organisation which is the epitome of the professionalism - is today largely made up of teacher trade unions.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a trade union with a long tradition, is today involved in many professional projects like teacher upgrading and curriculum development.

SADTU is busy with a professional programme never before realised by any other organisation - the formulation of a teacher code of ethics. But SADTU remains equally committed to serve as a union advancing the rights of its members.

Finally, SADTU was not established in order to dispossess m? ieewezzg

organisations .5 of the assets which they have built up over the years. The main reason behind the formation of SADTU was not a decision based on financial or material considerations - it was a fundamental political decision, I _

It was based on the realisation by teachers that mass-based forms of struggle were the only means by which we could overthrow apartheid. 1

It is this commitment to struggle that has led to the teachers of SADTU declaring 'In the coming institution of the reorganisation we dedicate ourselves to the establishment of a South Africa in which the doors of learning and culture shall be opened to all'. 6
Mayibuye February. 1991