

**SIVIWE
FEKETHA**



COSATU'S much-awaited special congress has left expelled Numsa and its dissident allies licking their wounds and plotting a political comeback.

While the dominant faction of the federation's top brass, led by its president Sdumo Dlamini, might start having good sleeps following their victory, it is worth pondering on some of what unfolded during the two-day congress.

The dominating unions made it clear they would not entertain a debate over the return of former general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi. They pointed, through songs on the first day and debate on the second, to his appetite for sexually exploiting women.

The secretary of the SA Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu) in KwaZulu-Natal, Nomarashiya Caluzashe, expressed disappointment at the failure of Cosatu leaders at the congress to condemn Vavi's sex scandal.

"I never heard even a single person standing firm in advancing gender struggles in relation to what has happened in a Cosatu house."

Deputy president of transport union Satawu Kate Thlou also weighed in, explaining how women in the tripartite alliance have stood by, allowing Vavi to go free after exploiting one of their own.

Soon, Vavi's exploitative ways were the subject of plenary deliberations and it was clear that the scandal would always haunt him.

The debate raised searching questions in one's mind.

Was this a principled and genuine gender battle against sexual exploitation of women by leaders?

Or was it just a case of the moral weakness of a leader being used as ammunition to kill him, politically?

Why is it easy to nail Vavi with this sexual scandal while many leaders with scandalous and morally questionable lives have been left alone?

The clarity of the delegates' thoughts showed that Vavi will never be able to morally justify the scandal as a former leader in the alliance.

But, then again, if Vavi was not the first leader to be caught in this predicament, why not hold other leaders morally accountable?

President Jacob Zuma was accused of raping a comrade's daughter, a charge of which he was acquitted.

The trial drew international attention because he was also

DIFFERING VIEWS ON SEX SCANDALS



TALE OF TWO DANCERS: Former Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi and President Jacob Zuma's sex scandals have played out differently, says the writer

PHOTO: RAJESH JANTILAL

Zuma lives on, but Vavi falls from moral ground

waging a battle for the presidential throne at the time.

He said it was consensual, as Vavi also did.

I tried to compare the two incidents. The first difference between these two scandals is that Zuma was acquitted by a court of

law, while Vavi's accuser withdrew an internal disciplinary complaint.

The second is that Vavi's scandal has irretrievably dented his credibility as the representative of the struggle against exploitation in the ranks of the alliance. But Zuma is doing just fine.

During his trial, women supported him with dance and ululation outside the court.

The accuser was viewed as a political tool aimed at thwarting Zuma's political prospects.

If there is a genuine revolutionary commitment to dismantle gen-

der exploitation from the alliance, why are these leaders and their scandals treated differently?

The reason lies partly at the heart of what the two individuals are purporting to represent.

Vavi, as a trade unionist, has become the representative face of a moral and revolutionary fight against exploitation and capitalism.

Part of the reason he continues to command support of the more militant voice in the alliance is his outspoken criticism of those who betray the working class.

He has fashioned himself as a revolutionary who is endowed with moral and ethical leadership qualities, never shying away from lambasting those who dared deviate from being upright.

Kenny Kunene was not spared for his public use of female bodies as plates to serve sushi.

Our first citizen, on the other hand, does not play with fire. While he may recite much-venerated texts of the ANC about fighting exploitation in his speeches, he never fashioned himself as a moral leader.

He is indeed not known to use ethical and moral imperatives but his culture as justification for his doings, including in the alleged rape.

The high court even heard that it was against our president's culture to leave a woman turned on.

It's a tricky business to try and hold a person morally or ethically wrong in his actions when he hasn't claimed to represent such ethical principles.

After all, the president has been leaping from one scandal to the next, and that did not dent his hegemonic influence in the alliance.

It's not clear what Vavi's exact plan will be from now on. The new federation in the pipeline to be formed by Numsa and Vavi might rescue him politically and give him a second chance.

But he must not blame the junior employee he had sex with for his misfortunes. He must also not blame Zuma or his backers in Cosatu, who are always going to use the sex scandal to drive him to revolutionary irrelevance in the congress movement.

He must blame himself and his inconsistency.

In a political environment plagued by a leadership deficit and where moral uprightness seems to be a foreign concept, Vavi should have known better.

He shouldn't have raised such valuable moral expectations and then thought people would expect less from him.

Even our first citizen does not play like that. He is very consistent and clear about not being exemplary in that regard.

● *Feketha is Aggrey Klaaste scholar at Stellenbosch University's department of journalism*

King Mswati's tyranny in Swaziland shows some cracks

SWAZILAND has recently experienced two events with potential significance for the country's democratisation.

The first was the issuing of a warrant of arrest for Chief Justice Michael Ramodibedi in April.

The second is the release on bail of human rights activists Thulani Maseko and Bheki Makhubu, banned political party People's United Democratic Movement (Pudemo) leader Mario Masuku and youth leader Maxwell Dlamini.

Ramodibedi was largely thought to be King Mswati's pawn. He worked to ensure that opposition politicians and others opposed to the regime would be jailed on spurious charges and minor offences such as a critique of the judiciary and wearing T-shirts with the logo of Pudemo.

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King Mswati shocked many in the judiciary when he opted to depose Ramodibedi after charges of corruption and abuse of power surfaced against him. This has been seen as his attempt to lend credibility to the judiciary.

The release of political prisoners was most likely a reaction to international pressure, especially from the United States, the European Union, and the International Labour Organisation. But it could also have been Mswati's attempt to redeem the judiciary following revelations of Ramodibedi's impropriety.

Only time will tell if it is possible to legitimise the judiciary. But these two events should give Swazis hope. Although a number of political prisoners remain behind bars, the Swazi government has demonstrated some level of willingness to accommodate international pressure.

Right now, the pro-democracy movement is rightly rejoicing with the released prisoners. But when the joy has been dampened, they need to put considerable energy into identifying new pressure points for advocacy and change. And this might prove difficult.

Arbitrary arrests of those opposed to the regime are easy content for international campaigning. Such state actions violate the country's own constitution and international laws. But

their activism and advocacy will always be limited if they continue to agitate in the realm of the law.

Swaziland is an absolute monarchy, a dictatorship, where laws stop and start with the royal family, more

precisely the Queen Mother and her son King Mswati III. In this context the law itself is illegitimate. It is highly

unlikely that the solution to the democratic deficit should be found within an inherently undemocratic constitution and accompanying set of laws.

The solution can only be found outside the legal system, not in terms of means but in terms of an end. It is simply not possible to log-

ically rely on an inherently undemocratic constitution to achieve multiparty democracy – the end goal.

The pro-democracy movement should focus its attention on exposing the horrendous mismanagement of

the country orchestrated by Mswati.

Despite Swaziland's relative high gross national income, on

par with Namibia's, 80% of the population lives below the poverty line while the royal family fly around the world in their private jet.

Mswati seems completely oblivious to the HIV/AIDS epidemic ravaging his country or is simply indifferent as he marries one young beautiful Swazi after another.

Other issues that could be used to sustain and increase international pressure is to highlight the dubious business relationships between the royal family's investment fund, Tibiyo, and South Africa's business elite, or even Mswati's occasional trips to the Middle East to apply for loans.

It is of course uncertain what will have the highest resonance with the international community.

The release of political prisoners and the seeming opening up of some democratic space through a re-shuffling of the judiciary might provide the best opportunity for the pro-democracy groups to apply greater pressure.

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“ People live in poverty while royal family fly in private jet