

# SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES, TRIPLE CHALLENGES AND CONSEQUENCES OF INEFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

ST Mzangwa  
University of South Africa

## ABSTRACT

This article describes the significant role that government and trade union leaders should adopt to enhance economic growth and confront the triple challenges facing South Africa: inequality, poverty and unemployment. Trade union leaders, in particular, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in alliance with the African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party in government, and the South African Communist Party (SACP), are expected to be major role-players in the formulation of economic policies regulating labour matters via platforms such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) as well as the bargaining councils to negotiate strategies to build improved socio-economic levels in South Africa. Political and organised labour's leadership in a democratic state such as South Africa should provide expression to the common interest and should give direction to policy formulation and its implementation. The Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) of South Africa and legislation such as the Labour Relations Act (Act 66 of 1995) endorse the existence and operation of trade unions such as COSATU. As the largest workers' federation, COSATU has a strong alliance with the ruling party in government upon which it has an advantage as a bargaining entity. However, it appears that both political leaders in government as well as leaders of the organised labour (COSATU) engage in delaying tactics which derails socio-economic development. This conduct has a negative impact on society and perpetuates high levels of unemployment which leads to poverty and contributes to ongoing inequality. This article argues that inconsiderate and ineffective leadership from both political leaders in government and organised labour militates against the development of a truly democratic South Africa. A recommendation from this study is that the policymakers and structures which serve towards formulation of labour policies such as the NEDLAC must seriously pursue effective initiatives to moderate the level of labour matters. Effective political leadership demonstrated by government and the organised labour can help to yield results that can reduce socio-economic inequalities.

**Keywords:** Trade Unions, Poverty, Inequality, Unemployment, Government, Democracy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing public protests on service delivery and the unending strike actions on issues of labour and political disagreements are negative elements which the liberation movement, through their former leaders, vigorously opposed (Alden, 1993; Mpehle, 2012). Yet, these protests are symptoms of ongoing corruption and the perpetuation of cronyism within the ANC symbolising the loss of hope and mistrust in the general populace towards the ANC and its alliance such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) (Agang SA, 2014: 11).

South Africa like most of African countries as proclaimed by President Zuma faces serious problems regarding unemployment, poverty and inequality pronounces (Zuma, 2012). To overcome these triple challenges, trade unions' leaders and government leadership have a major role to play to build and develop not only the social living standards, but more so to create economic growth in South Africa.

Fakir (2009: 6) is of the view that senior government officials and leaders in corporate entities and labour should help fight the corruption and non-caring leadership to defend democracy in South Africa. The current leaders of the ANC and its ally COSATU as the largest organised labour movement appear to be failing the good intentions of the serving and empowering the struggling majority of South Africa and its working class. Based on information reported by the Statistics South Africa through the media (*Business Day*, November 21, 2016) 47% of employed people in

South Africa earn less than R3 500 per month. NEDLAC, chaired by the Deputy President of South Africa Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, met on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2016 and announced its proposal that the National Minimum Wage (NMW) be set at R 3500 per month. COSATU and the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) rejected this proposal (ANN7, 2016).

So the question remains: what more needs to be done to find agreement between labour and political leaders? The trade unions are expected to be at the forefront of coordinating the workers' issues which aim to promote a better life for citizens based as embedded in the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996, here after referred to as the Constitution) which endorses the existence and operation of trade unions as Ndou (2016:32) strongly argues. Section 77 of the Labour Relations Act (LRA) (Act 66 of 1995) gives NEDLAC the responsibility and duty of building ongoing relations between various parties (business, labour and communities), mainly the workers and employers in an attempt to resolve the causes of the strike or protest action.

In South Africa, supposedly a constitutional democracy, the respect for human rights and the rule of law is not just significant but forms part of our constitutional rights and must be always adhered to (Silima, 2016: 5). Equally so, the involvement and full representation of a trade unions in various authorised institutions or platforms recommended by the state put both trade unions and the state in a better position for positive working relationships. Institutions

like NEDLAC and platforms such as the bargaining councils are relevant fora in this regard. This paper departs from other research work explored in socio-economic and labour discourse since it takes a narrative form to examine the operations of trade unions in South Africa, particularly COSATU as an alliance to the ruling ANC. The literature reviewed provides the base which underpins this piece of work.

The article is thus arranged to provide the introduction, the conceptual framework and synthesis, literature review on the stance of trade unions, political influence and trade union's reactions and links to politics in South Africa, the relevance of political affiliated trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa, the impact of politics on labour issues as a commotion to socio-economic development as well as conclusion and recommendations.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND SYNTHESIS**

This article is largely based on a conceptual context which seeks to provide integrated perspectives on existing theoretical views while addressing innovative and new issues (Watts, 2011). Thus, in an attempt to address and raise arguments on this paper, a conceptual analysis which narrate the views claimed on this piece of work utilising literature review and secondary data would be followed (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). The central issues of concern on this paper revolves around the socio-economic stance in South Africa whereupon, the trade unions or its leadership have been drawn as the source of derailment in advancing the

lives of the working class while concentrating [trade unions] more on politics than labour matters (Maqhina, 2015). The theory on socio-economic aspects derives from the development stance of a country which primarily entails that a country's progress constitutes from the level of its economic growth, the level of employment and the social status of its society (Friedman, 2014).

The theory of development implies to the structure of the social formations determined by social power and wealth in a country as maintained by Magubane (1979) whereupon inequality arise. Magubane (1979) further argues that inequality translates from different social status which in the South African stance, even race becomes associated to inequality. Socio-economic status therefore, refers to the ability to produce an adequate and growing supply of goods and services efficiently to accumulate capital and distribute production adequately (Jaffee, 1998). This postulation is in line with the government's responsibility to its citizens or society in terms governance and allocation of resources.

The article does not aim to demonstrate relationship of African leaders versus European leadership, but rather the position of leadership is looked at in terms of the stance of South Africa post-apartheid under the leadership of the ANC and its ally organised labour COSATU simply because both ANC and COSATU intended to uplift the socio-economic status of the majority of South Africans which happens to be black (Buhlungu, 2005). Thus, the

leadership of the ANC and COSATU should not be confused with race. In as much as the ANC and COSATU contains a majority of black people in their leadership positions, these organisations are non-racial and could be led by a person of any race for as long as such cadre is deemed fit to uphold the principles of the organisations (Jeffery, 2016). In this regard, it should be acknowledged and admitted that elements of corruption could be confused to race as it happens through media reports and by other people in society who confuses politics and administration (Sebola, 2014).

The reference and use of leadership on this paper primarily refers to the leadership role played by government or rather political leaders and leaders of the organised labour with specific reference to the ANC and COSATU's leadership since there is an alliance between these organisations.

The alliance was established prior apartheid mainly for the betterment of lives of the poorest of the poor which its majority are the blacks South Africans (Buhlungu, 2005). The leaders of these prominent political and labour movements appear to be failing to uplift the socio-economic status of South Africans, thereby failing to focus on addressing and tackling the triple challenges which is unemployment, inequality and poverty facing South Africa and /or Africa as a continent.

### **3. BRIEF OVERVIEW ON UNIONISED ACTIVITIES**

Historically, trade unions have influenced and impacted the establishment of labour rights as well as socio-economic and political reform in most countries some of which are indicated on table 1 in this subsection far below (Bhorat et al., 2014). The trade union membership rates and trade unions' coverage often varies from one country to another and density may change in each sector over time. In countries such as United States of America (USA) where there are liberal market economies, unionised employees are covered by a union contract at their workplace environment and they (members) may choose not to be covered (contracts) to the trade union which represents them.

This, therefore, implies that the union membership rates in liberal market economy countries such as the USA are typically lower than union coverage rates in those that are not liberal market economies. Countries such as Denmark, Finland and Sweden are referred to as continental market economies, which apply that the multi-employer bargaining and public policy principles negotiated contracts to non-organised sectors are very high coverage (Barker, 2015).

Collective bargaining determines and encourages employment relations in various sectors in countries such as Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland including South Africa (Wilton, 2010). Hence, Antonio Gramsci (the prominent leader of Italian Communist Party) during the 1920s

regarded collective bargaining mainly as “industrial legality” which marked a victory for the Italian workers as the communist militants had been granted a platform to negotiate with the “bourgeoisie employers” who were in control of the workers and means of production (Annunziato, 1988). Trade unions’ recognition remains relevant and workers believe that through trade unionism their voices and concerns are better heard and that they have more power through collective bargaining than via a single employee’s voice or concern. In exercising the workers’ rights and power trade unionism had been understood to be on the forefront of worker’s rights based on Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2015).

In countries such as South Africa trade unions or organised labour are recognised through Constitutional rights (Section 23) and the LRA as enshrined under Section 37. The level of unionisation in South Africa stands above 40% (Adcorp, 2013). According to Balkaran (2011), in South Africa there are, at most, four trade union federations, namely, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and the Confederation of South African Workers’ Unions (CONSAWU). These trade union federations represent organised labour in South Africa and are key members and role players in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC),

the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC). They are also involved in government and political structures (Balkaran, 2011). Trade unions in South Africa are powerful organisations given their right to bargain freely and their recognition in the country’s Constitution. The membership of the registered trade unions forms approximately 43% of the formal employment in the country (Adcorp, 2013) which, in respect of measurements of the international standard and scales of developing countries, is a high density. One of the major roles of the trade unions is to prevent workers’ exploitation and ensure that the wages are satisfactory to the working class (Barker, 2015). In this regard the role of the trade unions, government and employers in the bargaining council is significant while the government is regarded as the legislator, regulator and conciliator (Maree, 2014).

Creativity of trade unions is displayed in campaigns run in countries such as Brazil and Germany which reveal a new approach in the way trade unions view how they should operate as opposed to the ‘traditional way’ which focuses solely on wage issues. Through these campaigns, trade unions pay attention to strategise on workers’ demands and benefits while also investing for workers, not for their own gain or profit by leaders and for leaders but more so for workers’ benefit mainly. During his time as COSATU leader, Willie Madisha amongst others was involved in a financial scandal about trade unions’ funds, and lately, Vavi was expelled

on account of issues which involved misuse of trade unions' funds amongst other reasons (Losi, 2015). It would appear that trade unions in South Africa are less interested in workers' interests and protection, but more interested in gains for their leaders with no energy for innovative ideas which would culminate in mutual benefit to employers and ordinary union employees. Trade unions in the public and private sector should be seen to be promoting and exercising alternative approaches to enhance workers' conditions and to pave ways for job opportunities and employment creation.

South Africa is described as a striking nation based on the number of trade union strikes which have taken place more frequently since the dawn of democracy (Greg, 2013). This conduct by South African trade unions, in particular COSATU as the main trade union federation in South Africa, hasten the country's degeneration into poverty and economic stagnation and do nothing to alleviate the triple challenges facing South Africa as it also happens in African countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Angola and others (Webster, 2007: 3).

Strikes and protests occur mainly due to high demand for wage increase and better living conditions since most of the low-paid workers live in squatter camps, with bad or no proper water, sanitation and waste collection (Bench Marks Foundation, 2012). The trade unions blame employers of exposing employees to unhealthy working conditions while they persistently pay low wages as demonstrated during the

strike actions which took place in 2007, 2010 and 2012 by the public service and mining sector workers respectively (Alexander, 2013).

Employment opportunities are directly affected by the high increase in the demand of higher wage levels often promulgated by trade unions neglecting to seek possible avenues for mediation in the bargaining councils (Urbach, 2010). In the third quarter of 2016 the unemployment rate stood at 27.1% based on information from Statistics South Africa's Statistician-General Pali Lehohla (Lehohla, 2016).

Surely this must be a matter of concern considering that job losses have been increasing since 2010 when approximately 750 000 jobs were lost (Urbach, 2010). According to Maree (2014), the role of the state or government in the South African bargaining councils is legislative, regulatory and conciliatory. The bargaining councils create a forum for collective bargaining, which is the appropriate platform where trade unions and employers' organisations and the state maintain labour peace. Subsequently, the bargaining council agreements contain mainly substantive items and include a peace obligation which is a declaration of negotiating in good faith for all parties or role players involved in collective bargaining (Davids & Meyer, 2012).

Some of the influential factors which strengthen unionised activities include trade unions' capacity, trade density and structural adjustments of unions as they gain power through bargaining

councils (Jose, 1999; Webster, 2006). Trade union density is defined as the total membership of the unions at a percentage of the number of employed workers as determined in the national labour force (Barker, 2015). The changing economic environment is often linked to globalisation which is threatening to trade unions. As such, the unions tend to respond in different ways, and by responding to such threats as outsourcing and subcontracting of workers (Barker, 2015: 95). Barker (2015) further elaborates that the hiring of temporary workers directly by the company or through an agency has been long considered as atypical employment but that practice has become common in South Africa. The workers employed under these types of employment are insecure because their employment contracts do not last long and benefits are few or not available at all. As the result of temporary contract employment most workers appointed under these contracts are often not unionised according to National Labour & Economic Development Institute (NALEDI) (NALEDI, 2006). Temporary or casual workers who are used by employers as replacement workers to get business and or produc-

tion rendered during strike actions are a major cause of strike actions turning violent (Tenza, 2015). Tenza (2015) argues that casual or replacement workers are exposed to danger since striking workers become increasingly angry at employers both for failing to meet their demands and for employing casual workers to run their business.

Trade unions in virtually all developed economies have lost membership in recent decades, and the decline has been sharp, especially in Britain. The union density in the UK stood at 27% in 2010, compared to 30% and 50% during the years 2000 and 1980 respectively as argued by Wright (2011: 3). Table 1 below depicts the top ten highly unionised selected countries as well as the ranking of South Africa globally in terms of unionised sectors from the year 2005 until 2014. The US statistics of unionisation have been captured as a point of referral since the USA is used in many instances for measuring various rates of socio-economic aspects including labour (OECD, 2016).

**Table 1:** Most Highly Unionised Selected Countries

Most highly global unionised selected countries as per OECD statistics										
Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Country										
Iceland	84	85.1	84.8	84.6	85.1	85.4	85.2	85.2	85.5	86.4
Finland	70.6	70.4	70.5	69.8	69.2	68.6	69.6	69.8	69	..
Sweden	76.5	75.1	70.8	68.3	68.4	68.2	67.5	67.5	67.7	67.3
Denmark	70.7	68.4	67.9	66.3	67.7	67	66.4	67.2	66.8	..
Belgium	53.7	54.8	54.7	54.4	54.9	53.8	55.1	55	55.1	..
Norway	54.9	54.2	53	52.6	53.6	53.7	53.5	53.3	52.1	..
Italy	33.8	33.6	34	33.9	35.2	36	36.3	36.9	37.3	..
Austria	33.9	31.6	30.5	29.7	29.4	29	28.4	28	27.8	..
Canada	27.7	27.4	27.3	27	27.3	27.2	26.9	27.2	27.1	26.4
United Kingdom	28.6	28.2	28.1	27.3	27.3	26.6	25.8	26	25.8	25.1
United States	12	11.5	11.6	11.9	11.8	11.4	11.3	10.8	10.8	10.7
South Africa	22 <sup>1</sup>									32*

**Source:** OECD, 2016; ITC-ILO Country Report (South Africa) 2014

In most countries the union density is generally larger in the public than in the private sector since the former is often characterised by a strong bureaucratic undertone which facilitates conditions in the workplace where employees need a collective voice (Armstrong & Steenkamp, 2008: 25; Bhorat et al., 2014: 5). Based on Armstrong & Steenkamp's (2008: 25) views, the trade unions in the public sector appear to have been primarily effective and most interested in matters relating to the increase of wages for their members. Like many organised labour movements, COSATU declares itself as striving for better wages and no exploitation to workers (Buhlungu,

2005). However, the outright dismissal and rejection of the recently proposed NMW as an initiative to find ways to uplift the wages earned by the lowest paid employees in South Africa is evidence that COSATU has less interest to constructive labour matters other than destructive ideas opposing meaningful proposals. This is found to be a violation of negotiating in good faith which seeks to destroy the power of bargaining by trade unions as laid out under section 77 of the LRA. As argued by Sieder (2014), that ongoing protests and persistent strike demonstrated by trade

<sup>1</sup>The trade union density in South Africa has been reported being above 22% since 2005 and by 2014, trade union density has been reported being at \*32% (Rautenbach 2014)



unions negatively affect industries while contributing to the job losses and unemployment rate. Instead of trade unions playing leading role on labour resolutions and meaningful proposal such as the recent NEDLAC proposed NMW, COSATU drags the implementation of this initiative. The economy has struggled over the years as a consequence of the incessant strike actions and resistance by trade unions to find labour solution to help enhance economics stance. This has increasingly contributed to government's struggle to achieve its objectives of reducing inequality, poverty and unemployment as stated in the New Development Plan (Koma, 2013).

#### **4.POLITICS AND TRADE UNIONISM IN SOUTH AFRICA**

According to Duncan (2006), the manifestation of violence in a society results from citizens frustrated over the failure of government to deliver basic services such as electricity, water, sanitation and so on. Violence is demonstrated through protests, strikes and marches which are all daily occurrences in South Africa where even members of the ruling party [ANC] join or lead the marches to legislative structures like parliament and other government offices - marching "against" their own leaders.

This conduct appears to be absurd as Maluleka (2016) suggests. Surely, the governing body or the ruling party can do something about a system which is evidently wrong or any unprincipled mechanism which hinders government operations? At the same time, both political and trade union leaders

keep fueling the fire to suppress lower and middle class workers since the dimly fail to discuss rewarding labor issues which could help enhance the economic status of the country than degrading employment and job opportunities (Hartford, 2012). According to Hartford (2012), visible displays of ignorance and a lack of care on the part of union and government leaders exacerbates inequality, poverty, and unemployment while political leaders claim to empower black entrepreneurs and create better employment opportunities for lower earning working classes (Murwirapachena & Sibanda, 2014). Instead, strike actions seem to be the inspiring factor which workers are willing to take irrespective of the outcomes thereof and to force employers to meet their demands.

Personal attributes and popular cliques would appear to take precedence over sound political philosophy in South Africa resulting in a lack of responsibility and accountability (Prah, 2015: 3). Mafunisa (2003: 97) strongly maintains that political office bearers have a major role to play in a democratic state since they are the ones who provide expression to common interest and give direction to policy formulation and implementation.

Therefore, the honor of any political office bearer or senior government official lies solely in their personal attributes, conduct and ethical responsibility for their actions in and out of office. Unfortunately, the lack of leadership ethics wipes out all the good work done by prominent past leaders of the ANC who applied their minds

intellectually and constructively even during very difficult times during apartheid and other trying times during the early years of democracy in South Africa (Mandela, 1993). Poor, weak and ignorant leadership as seen currently in the ANC's senior leadership eradicates the good ground work already done in making South Africa successively governable as a "rainbow nation".

The ANC's leadership, particularly under the steerage of President Zuma, continues to defend an array of improprieties including the Nkandla saga which started in 2009, and continue to disrespect the Chapter Nine Institutions as laid out in the Constitution (Section 181(1)(a)) such as the office of the Public Protector. In all these scandals, COSATU has not condemned this conduct until recently when it (COSATU) declared its stance to support the Deputy President Mr Cyril Ramaphosa (*Business Day*, November 21, 2016) for presidential candidate as the next ANC president. This move does not indicate that COSATU or rather its current leaders are independent as organized labor which stands for workers and labor issues. COSATU is still trying to cling onto the wing of political milieu of the ANC despite the acknowledgement that a move such as that of pronouncing its support of presidential leadership of ANC may have cost COSATU a lot since the Polokwane Conference resolution in 2007. This argument is confirmed by claims made by Losi (2015) and Mashele (2016) that Zwelinzima Vavi, the former General Secretary of COSATU and Irvin Jim including NUMSA (former COSATU affiliate) as an organized labor were all leaders who are

now out of COSATU yet they were vocal and helped Zuma to lead the ANC. The significant point made here is that the current COSATU leadership does not seem to learn from history as they repeat the same error which they are likely to regret later. The government and the trade union leaders must surely be concerned about the condition of the society's living standards. When the economic conditions of the country deteriorate and the strikes continue in the main industries that generate employment opportunities such as the mining and manufacturing sectors, then most people will lose jobs as companies will retrench if they cannot make profit. The relevance and role played by trade unions post-apartheid could then be questionable since there are platforms such as the bargaining councils, NEDLAC, the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) which stands to maintain employment relations unbiased, yet trade unions such as COSATU forsakes these platforms.

## **5. RELEVANCE OF POLITICALLY AFFILIATED TRADE UNIONS IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

The socio-economic development of a country and the country's attraction to investors lie mainly on how the state is governed (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014: 20). Public governance is about authoritative and equitable allocation of resources to citizens. In this regard, a democratically governed country such as South Africa or where multiparty democracy is practised, government must ensure that the public resources are allocated

sufficiently and equitably to all (Mondli, 2016). This practice resonates with service delivery principles and the values of the Constitution as set out under Section 1(a). The leadership of COSATU as a trade union and an alliance partner to the ANC which is in governance appear to have allowed the negative attributes of an uncaring leadership in direct opposition to what the alliance originally stood for. Such conduct practised by the current organized labor's senior officials and political leaders defeats the very purpose of the entire alliance's existence and its principled uniqueness to other political parties. Bhorat et al. (2014: 16) contend that:

“Employers' organizations and trade unions are not merely economic agents they are necessarily key actors in the political arena. These organizations influence the laws that regulate labor markets and may even influence policies beyond the sphere of labor relations”.

The main objective of the South African democratic government through its ministries and parliamentarians as well as organized labor, COSATU included, should still be to build a new legacy to be supported by younger generations. In line with these sentiments, it is appropriate to repeat an observation made by scholars such as Adriansen et al. (2016), Naidoo et al. (2016) and Southall (2016) that, worldwide, amongst other social impacts, education has emphatically enhanced skills development and knowledge in the devel-

oping and the developed countries in recent times. Why do trade unions and political leaders in democratic states like South Africa fail to use their power and proper platforms which they have an opportunity to enhance education and skills development for example? Such initiative will aid skills development which may translate to a less number of unemployment rates. By so doing, the country does not only have a chance to develop but also to create opportunities and set itself up for advancement in the global economy.

Trade unions such as COSATU through NEDLAC and the bargaining council fora via their affiliates such as the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) are supposed to play a major role in uplifting the standard workers as the social problems such as the issue of basic and higher education. In this way, the positioning of higher education for instance, is a “fundamental inventory centre” for economic development (Naidoo, 2011: 8).

Naidoo (2011) maintains that the economies of developing countries have been strengthened and empowered through the recognition of higher education yet in low-income countries since the 1990s trade unions are not playing vital role in this regard. A significant moment was the recognition by the World Bank that through appropriate implementation and policy enforcement, higher education could be regarded as an investment and a means of uplifting the socio-economic status of the country (Castells, 2001; Kubler & Sayers, 2010; Naidoo, 2011). However, the major challenge for both

government and society in countries such as South Africa is the high level of poverty, inequality and unemployment which carries elements of racial divisions, amongst other factors, in South Africa (Brady et al., 2007).

Trade unions' leaders are not to be regarded as isolated from participating in social problems such as the crises of funding education. They hinder economic stability with all these ongoing strike actions and rejection of initiatives made at the NEDLAC level instead of playing a vital part to the positive resolutions taken at these forums. For instance, the NEDLAC proposal emanating from the resolution taken on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2016 is that the lowest earning employees in the work force cannot be paid less than the set NMW as proposed.

Trade unions have been vocal about the issue of NMW yet COSATU rejected the proposal, suggesting that the NMW must be raised from R4 500 to R6 000 while NUMSA has reported that the NMW must be R10 000. In this extreme response, trade unions do not seem to support good initiatives by government or any stakeholders who are visionary in helping economic growth (ANN7, 2016).

## **6. IMPACT OF POLITICS ON LABOUR AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The combination of labour and politics makes it difficult for the employees in both the public and private sectors to see realization of the labor matters being resolved through bargaining chambers. For instance, COSATU's

main interest post-apartheid (1994) shows lack of continuation of policies intended to uplift living standards of the working class which it demonstrated quite well prior democracy. During its transition to a democratic South Africa, COSATU in their alliance with the ANC proposed the Reconstruction and Development Policy (RDP) which COSATU rightfully served a central part to develop (Govender, 2011). It could be stated that COSATU aimed to achieve most of what were seen as the working class' interest including proposals to the living wages and or the minimum wages during its inception in 1985 and during the time it joined alliance with the ANC (Buhlungu, 2005).

The impact made by trade unions on employment relation debates from structures such as NEDLAC carries more weight and have a positive impact to workers' concerns than the more political stance and attention trade unions such as COSATU seem to be spending on political matters than workers' issues. COSATU opposes economic policy initiatives proposed and implemented by government such as the National Development Plan (NDP) and other economic policies like the New Growth Plan (Koma, 2013: 155) citing that such policies are not in favor of the working class but are capitalist based.

As a result, this reaction by trade unions impedes economic performance in many ways (Koma, 2013). Trade unions seemed to be more involved in strike actions than meaningful proposed resolution to embark on workers' issues and wages. Amongst other effects,

violence engaged in by striking trade union members not only impairs human rights but infringes on the good purpose of democratic principles as promulgated in Section 23 of the Constitution. As outlined in subsection 3 of the White Paper (1997): "a democratically elected government has a mandate from its electorate and is responsible to Parliament for ensuring that the mandate is fulfilled". Ministers or government have a duty to provide leadership and so should the trade union leadership.

Government plays a significant role in building social life particularly in a democratic state such as South African where civilians' cooperation and participation is essential as that of trade unions expected to play vital role of employment relations (Silima, 2016).

The concerning factor is that low-earning employees in the labor force are still in large numbers even after apartheid and they, (the majority are black) are the ones suffering while trade unions keep delaying the progress and initiatives which emerge from time to time from government or employers. Trade unions are supposed to help government to uplift and help poor-earning workers which is implied as a step in the right direction via the NMW proposal made recently.

Political and trade union leaders must walk the talk and engage in negotiations which are beneficial to the working class in the labor force. Yet trade unions do not seem to be proactively thinking of those who may be victims when NMW is not implemented on time

(*Business Day*, November 21, 2016).

## **7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this article an attempt was made to understand the role of the leaders of organized labor as well as that of the political leaders which both have significant role in a democratic country. The outcomes of this article emanate from a theoretical exploration of the above discussions. Regulatory labor and attributes of good governance in South Africa informed by how trade unions have operated in other countries, particularly developed countries, has been used to showcase the stance of South African politics and trade unionism.

Trade unions' alliance to the governing party and politics contributes to a state of lost relevance to the working class or those employees who are supposed to benefit from and be protected by trade unions. This then raises a question for future studies to investigate the relevance of trade unions in contemporary South Africa or rather to question the impact and significance of trade unionism for the low-level working class in particular the black society in general in South Africa.

It has been suggested that the failure of union leaders have consequences in exacerbating the triple challenges in Africa, namely, inequality, poverty and unemployment all of which are on the rise despite policies and regulations designed to ease this burden as Bhorat et al., (2016) and Greg (2013), strongly contend.

Not only are high levels of unemployment experienced year after year in South Africa, but more so, trade unions appear to be a stumbling block to the positive initiatives pledged either by employers and or through government instigation. The current reaction of COSATU and NUMSA regarding their dismissal of the recently proposed national minimum wage of R3 500 per month to all low level paid employees is a clear sign that instead of cooperating in finding a starting point, trade unions are at all too ready to refute initiatives to find solutions either to shape better labor market opportunities or to reduce high levels of unemployment. It could thus be concluded that the South African trade unions contribute significantly in perpetuating the triple challenges which South Africa faces like many other African countries. This reaction by trade unions do not only defeats the purpose of this developing state (South Africa) but more so it strongly opposes democracy in that only the few who are employed benefit and trade unions are even willing to lose members through retrenchment than to help create employment in the country. As a way forward to ease the situation, a recommendation from this study is that the policymaker must seriously pursue effective initiatives to moderate the rate of unionised strikes and protest by organised labour in South Africa. Importantly so, the institutionalised means of dispute resolution and structures such as NEDLAC and the bargaining chambers must be embraced and enhanced to assist socio-economic development in South Africa for the better of the working class and society at large.

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