



SAFTU MOURNS THE PASSING OF PROFESSOR EDWARD WEBSTER

The South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) **mourns the passing of Professor Edward Webster. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, his many students and colleagues.**

We celebrate his life which has resourcefully contributed to the working class struggle in many ways and left an indelible mark on the working class movement and its activists.

His contribution to the struggle

In the 1960s, Eddie Webster was already contributing to the struggle against injustice as a student activist in the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Not only does this show his earlier interest in the movement to fight for justice, but begins his activism against capitalist injustice for the working class.

He was part of the students who contributed to the revival of black trade unionism in South Africa, which had suffered setbacks due to clampdowns by the apartheid government through laws and violence. Indeed, out of such courageous initiatives came trade unions like the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), which amalgamated with other allied unions to form the National Union of the Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA). Due to this connection through MAWU, Prof Webster has arguably contributed to the existence of SAFTU.

The reorganization of black trade unions inside the country became a subjective factor that combined with objective economic factors to unleash the workers struggle of the 1970s, marked famously by the Durban Strikes. These strikes were a watershed moment,

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in that, upon their ruins current trade unions were built. This is because the strikes resulted in the process that led to the legalisation of black trade unions and forced a change to the Industrial Conciliation Act.

He remained part of the trade union movement since then, even though he joined the university to contribute to the body of knowledge of workers, the working class, and sociology as a whole.

Intellectual and episteme contribution

He placed the study of the black working class and its independent trade unions at the center of sociological studies. Arguably, he is the founder of South Africa's Industrial sociology. Amongst some of his initiatives to develop the industrial sociology episteme, was the foundation of the Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP) and the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS) at Wits University.

He did research and contributed to building the research capability of trade unions across all federations. The research capacity building he was devoted to in trade unionism, was aimed at helping trade unions to formulate policy, debate with their counterparts and to improve the position as labour, its power, and living conditions of the entire social class of toilers.

He bridged access to the universities for ordinary working-class activists, particularly providing access to the most prestigious Wits University for many generations of black trade unionists and community activists. He set up Global Labour University (GLU), which is focused on giving activists, overwhelmingly from the labour movement, education on industrial trends, labour policies and globalisation, and how these impact on the nature of work, rights of workers and their livelihoods.

SAFTU will remember Eddie Webster as a patriot of the working class, devoted to it until his last breath.

A statement issued on behalf of SAFTU by the General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi.

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