

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA AT THE LAUNCH OF A
BOOK BY DAVID SECHABA NKOANA, LANDMARK LODGE,
POLOKWANE

01 May 2026

TITLE: BUSINESS UNIONISM AND THE PROLIFERATION OF TRADE
UNIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Programme Director,

The author, Mr Sechaba Tsoele David Nkoana,

COSATU President, Ms Zingiswa Losi,

Distinguished guests, comrades, members of the press,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ndi madekwana, Thobela, Riperile, Silotshile, Good evening, Goeie Naand.

There are nights when words do not simply sit on pages but rise like living
voices from history itself.

Tonight is one such night.

A night where ink becomes memory and memory becomes movement.

For books are not silent companions, they are enduring witnesses of time.
They outlive their authors, outlast their critics and outgrow the seasons of
political convenience.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We gather here tonight not only to launch a book, but to welcome a new contribution into the intellectual bloodstream of our democracy.

It is indeed a great honour to be part of the launch of “Business Unionism and the Proliferation of Trade Unions in South Africa” by Mr David Sechaba Nkoana, a work that dares to ask difficult questions in a time that often rewards silence.

As the legendary writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o once reminded us, “Writers are the memory of a people.” Indeed, David has chosen not to forget, not to remain silent and not to look away. He has chosen to write.

Comrades and friends,

We often say that the pen is mightier than the sword, not because the sword lacks power, but because its power is temporary. A sword can force obedience, but it cannot sustain truth. It can win territory, but it cannot win consciousness. The pen, however, penetrates generations. It teaches, it unsettles, it liberates.

And tonight, we honour a writer who understands that responsibility.

David Nkoana first entered our intellectual space with his earlier work on land reform, a subject that speaks directly to the historical wound of

dispossession. In that work, he engaged in a matter that lies at the heart of justice, dignity and economic transformation.

But tonight, he takes us further from the soil beneath our feet to the labour that shapes our economy.

In this new work, he turns his attention to the evolving character of trade unions in South Africa. He confronts a reality that is often spoken about in whispers but rarely examined in depth, the proliferation of trade unions and what it means for unity, strength, and solidarity in the labour movement.

He further introduces us to the complex and sometimes uncomfortable concept of business unionism, a phenomenon where questions arise about the balance between labour's historic mission of emancipation and its emerging entanglements with financial and institutional interests.

He challenges us to look at how some unions have shifted from being the voice of the voiceless to becoming multi-million rand investment vehicles. David asks the uncomfortable question: has the pursuit of capital within unions structures diluted the revolutionary spirit of the floor?

This is not an attack; it is an invitation to reflection.

Because comrades, when movements begin to fragment, history teaches us a simple truth: division weakens the collective voice of the working class. And when the working class is weakened, inequality finds space to grow.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to deliver a speech for an author like David is to acknowledge his bravery. He doesn't just write to publish; he writes to provoke. He writes because he believes that through rigorous critique, we can find our way back to a more honest, more powerful form of collective bargaining.

David is therefore not merely describing a phenomenon; he is challenging us to think deeply about the future of organised labour in a rapidly changing economic landscape.

He writes with courage, not comfort. With honesty, not convenience. And with conviction, not fear.

And that is the role of intellectual work, to disturb complacency so that renewal becomes possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must also remind ourselves that knowledge is a form of struggle. Those who write shape how societies remember themselves. Those who read shape how societies imagine their future.

That is why we must encourage both the young and the old to write, to document and to publish. A society that does not write its own story will always find its story written by others.

Let us nurture a culture where books are not seen as luxury items, but as instruments of liberation and development. Let every school, every home,

every workplace understand that a book is not just paper bound together, it is a bridge between generations.

As we celebrate this launch, let us also recommit ourselves to the principle that ideas matter, and that informed debate strengthens democracy.

David has contributed his voice. He has added his pen to the national conversation. He has done what writers are meant to do, he has made us think.

As we officially launch *Business Unionism and the Proliferation of Trade Union in South Africa*, let us remember that the pen of the author is only as powerful as the eyes of the reader. David has done his part. He has taken the “mighty pen” and laid out a roadmap for the future of South African labour. Now, it is up to us, the workers, the leaders and the citizens to read, to debate and to act.

In conclusion, let us remember that the true value of a book is not in its launch, but in its legacy. Not in the applause of today, but in the conversations it will inspire tomorrow.

On behalf of all of us gathered here, I extend heartfelt congratulations to Mr David Sechaba Nkoana on this important intellectual contribution.

May this book travel far. May it provoke thought. And may it strengthen the ongoing discourse on the future of labour in South Africa.

I thank you.

