

## Two Faces of Information Minister Webster Shamu

Contributed by CZ Editor  
Tuesday, 17 February 2009  
Last Updated Friday, 27 February 2009

The Zimbabwe Union of Journalists, according to The Herald, has welcomed the appointment of "Cde" Webster Shamu as the new Minister of Media, Information and Publicity. Reading the statement attributed to ZUJ president Matthew Takaona, and also reading a comment from the head of SWRadio Africa, one would think they were talking about two different Webster Shamus. Takaona's statement reportedly said the union was encouraged by "Cde" Shamu's "vast media experience and his strong interest in the sector over the years."

They hoped he would restore professionalism in journalism, defuse polarisation and help bring down hate speech that has become the hallmark of Zimbabwean media. Perhaps Shamu could start by asking The Herald to stop referring to the MDC leadership, including the Prime Minister, as Misters and the Zanu (PF) Ministers as Comrades. Surely we are all now in the same struggle and should be referred to as Cdes. But according to Jackson, a former presenter at Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation when Shamu was still deputy Minister of Information, Shamu not only helped to destroy Central Film Laboratories, once the most successful film lab in Africa, but he was also instrumental in helping to turn the ZBC into a centre of hate speech and blatant propaganda. ZUJ talks about Shamu (Charles Ndlovu)'s keen interest in media issues and tin he welfare of journalists, including activities as the patron of Chinhoyi Press Club and appearances at weddings and funerals of journalists. Jackson and her colleagues however howled in disbelief at his appointment - "a clear indication that the regime has absolutely no intention of relinquishing it's media stranglehold." ZUJ "expressed confidence in "Cde Shamu" and hoped that there would be opening up of media space and creation of job opportunities for journalists. The union hoped he would look into the working conditions of journalists and arrest the high staff turnover in newsrooms. Contrarily Shamu was instrumental in the formation of the violent National Liberation War Veterans Association and is considered "a political thug of the first order; and a savage individual who as editor of The People's Voice encouraged and fueled the hatred that caused many whites and MDC supporters on farms to killed. He has been implicated in armed violent confrontations and threw a political opponent, Philemon Matibe, his wife and two children, off their 1,600-acre farm, backed by an 80-strong mob, before it had even become fashionable to invade land. The fact that Matibe, an MDC candidate, was black did not stop Shamu. Perhaps the ZUJ President was simply playing good politics, being polite with the Minister; taking the attitude that since Shamu is now the Minister, it is better to be on his good side than bad. This is the very politics that Zimbabwean journalism does not need if it is to come into its own and be respected. Part of the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change)'s struggle for democracy is to also open up the space for journalists to be able to fully practice their profession, calling a spade a spade. This is also the only way that we will be able to have a proliferation of newspapers and radio stations, and in that way address the problem of employment for journalists. How does Takaona hope the Minister will address the employment issue, when The Herald itself has been reduced to a paltry eight and sometimes 12 pages because of its kind of journalism which sings praises of Ministers instead of scrutinising them to see if they are doing their jobs diligently while maintaining the highest exemplary standards &ndash; which is what public office is all about.