

GEORGE MATLALA

LEADERS of the SACP have had their hands full trying to manage a revolt by branches over a decision to try to avoid a succession battle by having the party's boss, Blade Nzimande, remain in his position for another term.

Another matter that delegates are apparently up in arms over is that they want the party to contest elections on its own instead of campaigning for the ANC, a campaign Nzimande and party officials are against. So angry are some delegates from provinces such as the Western Cape that they decided that should the party's second deputy general

Tensions flare over SACP leadership contestation

secretary Solly Mapalla not contest Nzimande's position, they would nominate another candidate.

Nzimande has been at the helm of the party for the last 19 years.

Mapalla decided not to run against Nzimande, but appears to have been persuaded to take the position of first deputy general secretary, left vacant by Jeremy Cronin.

The party's international relations head Chris Mathhako has been nominated to replace Mapalla.

Nzimande remains in his post.

At the party's congress east of Johannesburg, a significant number of delegates had been singing songs in praise of Mapalla. This, while party officials have had to convene provincial secretaries to try to ensure the unhappiness over the "management" of a leadership contestation does not flare up in the presence of the media and expose the deep fissures over some issues.

The party mandarins were worried that a contestation would weaken the party in the run up to the

ANC elective conference in December, while there was uncertainty over Nzimande's future should former African Union Commission chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma take over the governing party.

One delegate who has attended SACP congresses since Nzimande took over in 1998 said the conference was more tense than the one where the leader ascended to power.

"I haven't seen such revolt. The branches are unhappy," he said.

It all started on Monday when

Mapalla announced he believed Nzimande should continue in his post, while Cronin, said he was no longer available to serve.

This set tongues wagging.

On Monday, Nzimande intimated he was aware he had served his time and that he was old furniture.

The party's central committee (CC) had discussions on succession before the congress. There were arguments Nzimande should remain, while others wanted "renewal".

It is understood the CC had

agreed there should be changes in the party's leadership, especially the secretariat. But the branches seem to be unhappy with the arrangement.

The delegates also openly sang songs demanding that the party contest elections.

While Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa was ushered out the venue, delegates broke into a song "thina sifuna i state power" (we want state power). It was a battle to contain the battle cry for state power, and at some point it was said

Mapalla should deal with the delegates, mostly from the Mpumalanga and the party's youth wing, the Young Communist League.

Ramaphosa pleaded with delegates not to part ways with the ANC.

He warned that the two organisations would be weaker if they contested elections separately.

"As you ponder leaving the alliance, pause for a minute. Are we better off united or divided? You may delude yourself that we will form a coalition (after elections), but when you get there, there will be nothing."

But this did not stop delegates from singing for state power immediately after Ramaphosa had finished.