

ZCTU congress aftermath

Cracks deepen

Instead of strengthening the Zimbabwe labour movement the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) congress appears to have created two factions that are more interested in getting at each other's throats than fighting for working-class causes.

Nunurayi Mutyanda and **Taurai MEREKI** write on the developments since the congress.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union's (ZCTU) 7th congress that was held on 19-20 August 2011 in Bulawayo has come and passed. For the first time since its inception about three decades ago, the congress will be known by its factions. The factionalism that rocked the federation before and during the congress reached new heights as the camps seemed like oil and water that cannot mix.

Recent statements by the other faction president Lovemore Matombo seem to suggest that he belongs to the Left and therefore can never reconcile with the mainstream president George Nkiwane because of ideological differences.

The run up to the congress saw the federation being torn into two warring camps, one led by secretary general Wellington Chibebe who was set to relinquish power at the congress to assume a position as deputy secretary general at the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and another led by then incumbent president Matombo. Despite these visible and threatening cracks, the congress went ahead without Matombo's blessing.

The Chibebe faction, which seemed to be in control of the majority of affiliate unions (22 of the original 33) argued that in the absence of the president for whatever reason, section 22 of the ZCTU constitution provides that the first vice president can preside over any gathering including the congress. Therefore the congress went ahead. This is the faction that presided over the congress that was held in August 2011 and recognises the election of Nkiwane as the incumbent ZCTU president.

The other competing faction led by Matombo initially comprised mainly of four unions: Communication and Allied Services Workers Union of Zimbabwe (CASWUZ), Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), Zimbabwe Energy Workers Union (ZEWU) and National Airways Union (NAWU). This faction refused to take part in the congress. The faction was also ordered by the High Court to stop from using the ZCTU name.

MEMBERSHIP FIGURES

During the run-up to the congress, the major dispute was around membership figures. There were claims by the Matombo camp that

membership figures for all railway unions had been inflated as they claimed to have 100% unionisation something not possible in the current Zimbabwean scenario. The other disputed unions included the Commercial Workers Union of Zimbabwe (CWUZ), the Zimbabwe Pulp and Paper Workers Union (ZPPWU), the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) and the Federation of Food and Allied Workers Union of Zimbabwe (FFAWUZ), which were also said to have inflated membership by more than 50%.

Inflating figures was seen by the Matombo faction as a move to rig the election in favour of the Chibebe faction. It was argued that delegates were likely to vote in favour of those who brought them to the congress. The Matombo camp claimed that the team tasked to carry out checks on membership was pro-Chibebe. Hence they inflated figures in favour of that faction and Matombo refused to preside over the congress.

The Chibebe faction however, argues that Matombo had presided over the supreme governing body of the federation, the general council

meetings that set congress dates. So the claim on procedure being ignored had no substance.

Although two of Matombo's most trusted lieutenants attended the congress from CASWUZ, the union which nurtured him for the past four decades, he and other faction union delegates did not attend. One would be persuaded to think that the CASWUZ delegates were sent to spy on the processes and hence report back on the proceedings. Thus on paper and in public the president told the world that CASWUZ boycotted the congress and did not have anything to do with it, yet in reality, two senior members from the union were among the 159 delegates that attended the congress.

Attempts by the Matombo faction to stop the congress were in vain as the high court refused their urgent chamber application as the case was said not to be urgent. The congress kicked off as planned but the absence of the president was felt as the congress was delayed by almost six hours as the leaders were locked in closed doors possibly debating the issue. The congress deliberated over a number of issues as highlighted by Chinguno and Mereki in a previous issue of *SALB*.

With the blessing of the High Court and over 22 affiliates, the congress kicked off in Bulawayo. The new leadership that was elected included: president: George Nkiwane (Zimbabwe Energy Workers' Union); 1st vice president: Sithokozile Siwela (Railway Artisans Union); and 2nd vice president: Rwatipedza Chigwagwa (Zimbabwe Furniture, Timber and Allied Workers' Union).

The 3rd vice president is Lucia Matibenga (Commercial Workers' Union of Zimbabwe - Minister of Public Service as from October 2011); secretary general: Japhet Moyo (National Engineering Workers' Union); 1st deputy secretary general: Gideon Shoko (Zimbabwe Amalgamated Railway Workers' Union); 2nd deputy

secretary general: Unganayi D. Tarusenga (Federation of Food and Allied Workers' Union of Zimbabwe); treasurer general: Enock Mahari (Zimbabwe Catering and Hotel Workers' Union). The new look executive reflected deep-seated factionalism as all the leaders emerged from the Chibebe faction.

As earlier indicated, there were four ZCTU-affiliated unions that openly disassociated themselves from the congress proceedings. However, by the end of 2011, the Matombo faction claims its union membership had more than quadrupled and its number of affiliates stood at 17. The faction claims more unions from the Chibebe faction had promised they will cross the floor in 2012.

It should however, be noted that most of the Matombo faction affiliates were not previously affiliated to the mainstream ZCTU neither were they affiliated to any federation. These included a faction of the Commercial Workers Union of Zimbabwe (CWUZ), College Lecturers Association of Zimbabwe (CoLAZ) and the Civil Service Employee's Association (CSEA).

The successful membership drive by the Matombo camp, however, is equally matched by the mainstream ZCTU, which is also adding new members to its list of affiliates. New recruits include the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) and the Zimbabwe Energy and Technical Staff Association (ZETEA) also not previously affiliated to any federation.

The Matombo faction has lived up to its billing regarding the holding of elections; when the camp refused to take part in the congress that was presided over by the Chibebe camp, the Matombo camp promised its own elections before the end of 2011. The elections kicked off in November whereupon regional office bearers were elected.

The faction held its congress from 16 to 17 December 2011. As had been predicted, the post of

president went to Matombo while PTUZ general secretary Raymond Majongwe was appointed secretary general. Other senior officials that were elected at the congress included: 1st vice president: Angeline Chitambo (Zimbabwe Energy Workers Union); 2nd vice president: Lloyd Ndaba (Zimbabwe Leather Shoe and Allied Workers' Union); 3rd vice president: Thabitha Khumalo (MDC Member of Parliament).

Other posts were distributed as follows: 1st deputy secretary general: James Gumbi (Zimbabwe Rural District Council Workers Union); 2nd deputy secretary general: Nobert Mudzumwe (Commercial Workers' Union of Zimbabwe); treasurer general: Emilda Rungano Mhuriro (Civil Service Employees' Association); national organiser: Elijah Chiripasi (National Airways Workers Union); education officer: David Dzasunga (Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe); trustees: Isdore Manhando Zindoga (ZSLAWU), Clifford Nkala (CASWUZ) and Madziwo Chimhuka (ZGWU).

Interesting enough, some members in the Matombo faction claim that their leader, Matombo is obsessed with ZCTU elections while turning a blind eye on the same issue at his CASWUZ union whose congress was supposed to be held in May 2011 well before the holding of the ZCTU August 2011 congress. Critics from the mainstream ZCTU led by Nkiwane also claim that the majority of the top brass of the Matombo faction are not employed in the sectors they purport to represent, and therefore cannot hold a political post in the federation.

For example, Movement for Democratic Change member of parliament Thabitha Khumalo who was elected vice president does not belong to any union. There are further claims that some have been dismissed for one reason or the other or have ceased to have any relationship with their employers. While their claims could be true, the ZCTU constitution is not clear



with regard to issues of election of leaders who are no longer employees of the sectors they purport to represent. Regardless of such union career damaging claims, the top brass in the Matombo faction appear to be on top of the situation both at their unions and the 'rebel' federation where their leadership seems to be virtually unchallenged.

Unfortunately, this tussle for power is not sparing workers who are supposed to enjoy the protection of the federation. The effects of factionalism at ZCTU are starting to emerge as evidenced by the failure of the current administration to pay wages to its workers after the disputed congress.

One of the general council members (the supreme governing body of the federation) claimed that as a mitigatory measure, a resolution was passed by the mainstream ZCTU faction whereby all affiliates were asked to share the burden of paying wages for the full-time staff.

In actual fact, workers were paired to a particular union that was given the responsibility of meeting the wages. However, it appears as if the move to pair workers to a particular union failed.

NO PAY FOR WORKERS

As a result, the workers under the mainstream ZCTU were notified in November 2011 that they were not going to receive their salaries for three months because the union federation was broke. This has been worsened by the fact that some unions are not remitting their subscriptions to the federation, claiming that the employers were not remitting the subscriptions. There are fears that these unions in the Nkiwane-led ZCTU might be deliberately doing so. Most of these affiliates that are not remitting their subscriptions are said to be sitting on the fence and willing to cross the floor to the other camp. This may confirm the claims by the Matombo camp that there were more unions

willing to cross the floor from the Nkiwane faction this year.

The failure to pay workers might justify the claims by the opposing faction that the outgoing secretary general's administration had accrued debts over US\$500,000 which it was struggling to repay. The failure to pay its own workers may also substantiate the claim by the Matombo camp that membership figures of some unions in the mainstream ZCTU were cooked during the run-up to the congress. It is speculated that the donor community which at some point was funding the union federation might also have adopted a wait-and-see attitude pending the outcome of the struggle to control the federation.

High Court Judge Ben Hlatshwayo on 23 November 2011 recommended that the two ZCTU factions reconcile and work together to serve the interests of the workers, stating that what was happening is not trade unionism. The judge's

calls for the two warring camps to put in place an interim committee comprising equal members from both camps that would be in place while modalities of holding fresh elections were being finalised seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

The splinter federation led by Matombo claims that the Chibeb-backed camp is the one that flatly refused this suggestion insisting that the 19-20 August 2011 results stand since the congress was procedural. This refusal to hold fresh elections by a camp that won a clear majority is suspicious since the chances of winning were high if at all the 19-20 August vote was free and fair. Although there are claims of ideological differences by the Matombo camp, these wars seem to be more to do with self-fulfilment than for the struggle of the working class.

By resorting to court action, the union leadership has divorced itself from the general membership. Both factions have deliberately not consulted their members over the split. The membership is just getting the news of the goings on in the federation from the media, both print and electronic. This confirms what Michels claims was inherent in human beings: 'as organisations grew bigger there was a tendency towards oligarchy' that is rule by the minority.

The events at both camps show that no consultation was done at grassroots to seek the mandate from the workers they represent. The various meetings that were held at national level only sought the opinion of the leadership and not the constituency they represent. There seemed to be little or no reason to ask for the perception of the general union membership as their leaders seemed to know what is right for them.

Ironically, the membership is not even questioning their leaders regarding this issue. This situation shows the degree of passiveness of the labour movement in Zimbabwe.

While leadership is running the show at the federation, no one seems to care about the direction the events are taking. The problem could be inherent in the nature of worker education amongst Zimbabwean workers.

CONCLUSION

The fragmentation of the ZCTU is a sad chapter in the history of the labour movement in Zimbabwe. It is a slap in the face to all progressive forces willing to see a democratised workplace and the only hope of a unified force in the quest of achieving decent work for the poor Zimbabwean worker. It is however, clear that the factionalism is driven by self-interest and the love for power rather than the interests of the workers they purport to represent.

The other issue of major concern is the heaping of posts on the same individuals and this affects their capacity to deliver. A typical example is where one assumes a ministerial

position and still continues to serve as a trade unionist. Unlike in South Africa where the cadre has to surrender the union position, it becomes difficult for that cadre to serve two masters with conflicting interests, as government is also a big employer.

The passivity of the working class in Zimbabwe is in clear contrast to their South African counterparts who receive class lectures in Marxism, hence are conscious of the Left. Whereas Zimbabwe boasts a high literacy rate, the majority of institutions teach business subjects and workers therefore lack class consciousness. The union movement has to do more in terms of capacity building if ever there is a hope for a vibrant labour movement in Zimbabwe. ^{LB}

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