



African trade union **roundu**

Malawi

In early September, Malawi's only textile factory was closed down. The company, David Whitehead & Sons, employed 2 000 workers all of whom were retrenched. Until 1994 the company was 51% owned by the multinational Lonhro, with the rest being owned by a Malawian grain parastatal. In 1994 Lonhro transferred its shares to government, making the company wholly government owned at the time of closure. At its peak the company was producing 33 million metres of cloth annually but by the time it closed it was producing seven million metres. The government blamed ongoing losses for the closure. Trade unionists blame the closure of what was once seen as a symbol of economic growth and large-scale employment, on trade liberalisation and growing pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the Malawi government to stop subsidising state-owned enterprises. Malawi has sold more than 30 of its 100 parastatals. The Malawi government says it will be inviting bids for the purchase of the shutdown company.

Zambia

Workers in Zambia's troubled state-owned Zambia National Building Society (ZNBS) went on strike on 23 September to protest the non-payment of wages and ongoing deterioration in working conditions. Leave pay, advance allowances and

loans were recently unilaterally withdrawn from workers. Meanwhile, the Zambia Union of Financial and Allied Workers alleges that the bank's managers receive handsome gratuities and benefits. The protesting workers demanded the resignation of all top managers.

Nigeria

On 23 and 24 September, Nigeria's two oil and petroleum unions went on a warning strike against the Nigerian government's plans to privatise four government owned refineries and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). The strike was also in protest against deteriorating working conditions since the merger of US oil giants Chevron and Texaco.

Nigeria is Africa's biggest crude oil producer and 95% of the country's foreign earnings are from the sale of crude oil. Most of Nigeria's oil is offshore and is extracted by multinationals such as ChevronTexaco. The local government refineries refine for domestic use only. They meet only 50% of local demand for petrol. The NNPC distributes fuel.

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) have argued that privatisation of NNPC would lead to massive increases in the local fuel price and large scale job losses. The unions blame the poor performance of the refineries on wilful neglect by

past military regimes and argue that with sufficient maintenance and upgrading the refineries could be turned around while in state hands.

The two-day strike was fully supported by the six million strong Nigerian Labour Congress, which stated that selling the country's major economic assets, would exacerbate capital flight that would deepen Nigeria's economic crisis.

The two oil unions have vowed to step up their action if the Nigerian government does not respond positively to their demands. The Nigerian government has held preliminary talks with the unions.

Meanwhile the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) and the Nigeria Ports Authority senior staff association have vowed to take up a constitutional challenge to stop the privatisation of the country's ports. The unions are arguing that Nigeria's constitution says that the nation's economy should not be put in the hands of a few individuals.

Ghana

Steelworkers in Ghana have petitioned government to re-introduce a ban on the export of local steel scrap. Prior to 1994 such a ban was in place. The steelworkers argue that local manufacturers cannot compete in buying scrap for manufacturing purposes. They say that the 'Buy made-in-Ghana' campaign is not achievable so long as conditions for the purchase of raw materials do not support local manufacturers.

Kenya

Kenya's labour federation, the Central Organisation of Trade Unions (Cotu) has called for a nation-wide strike in October if government does not respond positively to the demands of striking teachers. Members of the Kenya National Union of Teachers (Knut) went on strike in the second week of September in support of a demand for government to implement the last phases of a wage agreement reached in 1997. This is the third national teachers' strike aimed at putting pressure on the government to implement the agreement since 1997.

The strike led to almost all schools in Kenya being closed. The Ministry of Labour declared the strike illegal and teachers were threatened with eviction from their government-owned homes. The strike has been characterised by a number of incidents between police and striking teachers. In October, the Education Minister attempted to revoke the 1997 pay deal and to suspend the collection of union subscriptions. The High Court ruled against this move.

Zimbabwe

Three political journalists from the state-controlled newspapers *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail* were defeated in the election for the union's executive when the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) held its congress in early September. The three are believed to have the backing of Jonathan Moyo, the Junior Minister of Information and Publicity.

The ZUJ now suspects retaliation by the Zimbabwe government. Minister Moyo has demanded a copy of the union's constitution in a move the ZUJ believes is an attempt to subvert the election results. The union has refused

to hand over the union's constitution, and has warned that any interference by the government in the union's affairs will be strongly resisted. The union has previously refused to hand over a list of its members. The ZUJ secretary general Luke Tamborinyoka says the union was an affiliate of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and not an appendage of the Department of Information and Publicity.

Meanwhile in August, Zimbabwe's construction workers won a 95% pay increase (spread over six months) after going on strike for two weeks. At the start of the strike workers were demanding an increase of 150% and employers were offering 40%.

Swaziland

The Swaziland Transport and Allied Workers Union has threatened to go on strike if management of the state-owned Swaziland Railways does not negotiate its intention to put 300 employees (half the workforce) on

early retirement. Swaziland Railways says it wants to downsize as there have been reductions in traffic passing through Swaziland from Richards Bay to Zimbabwe because of the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe. Sugar exports from Swaziland have also declined due to a smaller than usual harvest.

Africa's two largest union federations meet

The continent's two biggest labour federations – Cosatu and the Nigerian Labour Congress – met in September 2002 to continue a process of building a powerful partnership.

Cosatu and the NLC met at a time when both organisations are involved in major political campaigns dealing with the privatisation of essential industries and services.

The two federations have a combined membership of six million members. In view of their size, they have important roles to play on the African continent.

Satucc general secretary talks about labour's challenges in SADC

The *Labour Bulletin* spoke to the general secretary of the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (Satucc) Moses Tito Kachima during a recent visit to South Africa.

Kachima was appointed to his position in September 2001 to spearhead the building of Satucc's profile in the region. He is aware that this is critical if unions in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are to engage and articulate their views on regional integration. Kachima is aware that much of his task depends on support from the 13 affiliates (representing six million workers) who are members of Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council. That is a rather tall order because Satucc has limited capacity as many unions in the region themselves have limited resources. Some union affiliates, he says, cannot afford to pay their affiliation fees to Satucc. However, the organisation is able to obtain some support from international organisations that assist in funding various projects. At this stage, Satucc's key objectives are to ensure it becomes an essential part of discussion on integration in the region; the implementation of Nepad; to play some role in promoting good governance and democracy in the region and dealing with some of the social issues such as HIV/AIDS.