

Labour solidarity

the case of Zimbabwe

During colonial times, Boshiela says, trade unions in countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa formed part of the liberation movements. Unions were either affiliated to or were in an alliance with the liberation movements – this distinction is important as it ultimately impacts on the level of independence possible between the unions and the ruling parties. Unions in these countries now face some critical challenges in repositioning themselves to assist in transforming their societies, but at the same time retain their independence.

The unions in Mozambique were previously affiliated to Frelimo but have now split. In Zambia and Zimbabwe the unions have been involved in forming new parties to challenge their previous allies. The alliance between Cosatu and the ANC remains while the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) remains an affiliate of Swapo. In Botswana the relationship between the government and the official trade union movement is set to change.

Boshiela believes that unions in the Southern African region were weakened by their failure to create a distinction between themselves and the party in power. In South Africa the situation is unique, he believes, as Cosatu is in an alliance with the ANC and can therefore, retain its independence. In an alliance

Reneé Grawitzky interviews Simon Boshiela, Cosatu's head of international relations on labour solidarity in the region, the role if any, played by Satucc and Cosatu's approach to Zimbabwe.

relationship parties can differ on policy but as an affiliate differences are curtailed and the ruling parties' position will be binding.

Unions in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) therefore, became weak because of their overreliance on the liberation movements. In addition, Boshiela says, they had no financial or other forms of independence. In South Africa, there is a tradition of paid-up membership, which enables the formation of a strong federation. This is not the case in the majority of countries in SADC. 'There is a need to strengthen Satucc,' he argues. 'However,' he adds 'it can only be strong if its affiliates are strong.'

He recognises that unions in Satucc are themselves not financially strong nor are they large enough to have sufficient power on their own. This puts Cosatu in a

difficult position with Satucc as it is the strongest federation in the region. 'Cosatu does not want to be seen as the big brother,' Boshiela says. Therefore, it is trying to assist in the building of regional and international solidarity. Last year Numsa went out on strike in support of Mozambique workers employed on the Mozal project. Boshiela cautions, however, that solidarity action very much depends on having a strong presence in the country. He also acknowledged that solidarity action could become problematic as unions in the region were caught up 'in the race for the bottom line'.

Plans are now underway to build Satucc's infrastructure. Boshiela explains that the organisation has appointed a new executive secretary Moses Kachima from Tanzania who will be tasked with this responsibility. It is critical, he argues, that Satucc is able to engage within SADC on broad policy issues and to intervene in the broad agenda of SADC. Moves towards a more integrated SADC make this a priority. However, Satucc has to build its profile within the region for it to be taken seriously. Boshiela acknowledges this as being a key stumbling block. He adds that the building of Satucc will largely have to depend on the commitment of the unions in the region. 'Satucc will only be taken seriously where unions are taken seriously,' he says.

Turning to the situation in Zimbabwe, Boshiela says the dynamics are rather complicated. There appears, he says, to be no real consensus on how to take the country forward. He questions whether the MDC provides an alternative agenda.

Talking about the land issue, he says, this is a problem, 'but why after being in power for 20 years has Zanu-PF only now discovered this as an issue.' Land, he says, is not a new issue and is a legitimate question. However, Boshiela believes this

was used by the ruling party as a tool to get votes in the face of the government's failure to deliver to its constituency.

Zanu-PF, he believes, has sown the seeds of its own demise, as it has been unable to distinguish between the role played by the leader, the party or the state. The party, for whatever reason, allowed its leader to dominate to the extent that he has. The party leader has been able to use state machinery to crack down on his opponents. 'South Africa,' he says, 'can learn a critical lesson from Zimbabwe, where mass membership no longer matters, state power becomes the issue.'

Cosatu, Boshiela says, cannot be the messiah for Zimbabwe. It has held various exchanges with the ZCTU and provided advice, 'but the solutions must come from within.'

Away In Harare

Away in Harare, so early to bed
Sad Robert Mugabe lays down his tired head
He makes sure he sleeps with a large sleeping pill
The fear of elections has been making him ill

The ghost of Kabila floats past in the sky
The ghost of Abacha rattles chains just nearby
Gadafi, like an angel, is fluttering his wings
But there's no real solution in the oil that he brings

The press have been banned, the trade unions
suppressed

Despite all the moans from the hypocritical west
The EU accountants are looking for his loot
So how will he live then if he gets the boot?

Eliminate Morgan, that is the final solution
He called for smart sanctions, what a treacherous
notion

If he's dead and buried, the problems are gone
Now Bob's had a brainwave, he will call in Sharon

A post-Christmas tribute to Robert Mugabe (to be sung to the tune of 'Away in a Manger') written by the Few People's Poet.