

# Where should Cosatu stand on Zimbabwe?



Many South Africans are perplexed at the approach taken by both the ANC-led government and Cosatu towards Zimbabwe. Are Cosatu and the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) acting like traditional 'comrades in arms'? The **Labour Bulletin** recently spoke to a number of Zimbabwean trade unionists and researchers about the dynamics around ZCTU, Cosatu and the MDC.

**D**uring a recent visit to SA, Tendai Makwavarara, a researcher with the Zimbabwean-based, Ledriz (similar to LaRRI in Namibia and Naledi in SA), spoke to the *Labour Bulletin* about her views around the land reform process, the origins of the current problems, the relationship between the MDC and ZCTU and what role Cosatu should be playing.

*Labour Bulletin:* What do you see as the origins of the current problems in Zimbabwe?

**Tendai Makwavarara:** It would be nice to blame structural adjustment programmes imposed by the west and the west itself. To some extent the west has contributed towards the current problems. However, we also need to look at how we have maintained our own systems. Many of the laws now in place are from the colonial era but not because Ian Smith is back. President Robert Mugabe's regime has put them in place.

Does this mean that Smith was right? Those were his laws. Does this mean that the colonial period had the right laws? If we fought for independence to achieve true democracy, where are we now in our own democracy? Aside from the issues around the state of democracy, let's look at the question of inequality. Why have things not changed since the 1980s as inequality is not a new phenomenon. Who do you blame after 20 years? Now white farmers have been chased away, who will we blame in another 20 years? Can we continue to point to those outside Zimbabwe?

It is not to say that land reform and equity are not an issue. But what about equity amongst blacks. Now that Mugabe has given land to blacks, will their lives change at all? Will land reform deal with issues of poverty?

*Labour Bulletin:* What are your views on the land reform process?

**Tendai Makwavarara:** Land invasions started in 2000 and land has been returned to 'the people'. But who are 'the people'? Did the government ensure land for the people or for themselves? There is a view that the land reform process amounts to redistribution from white rich to black rich. Land has been redistributed to 150 000 people while 300 000 were expected to get land. Now that land has been given to 'the people' – now what? Is there sufficient finance to assist these farmers, some of whom have no training?

Before land invasions we had food riots in 1997 (and the largest number of strikes) and people got disgruntled. People were not complaining about land but had other issues. Did land become a convenient issue? Now having embarked upon this land reform process, does it take care of everything else aside from governments' challenge of trying to sustain the land reform programme? Farmers now need not only finance, but infrastructure to assist them and their families. Aside from much needed infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and electricity, the reform process led to the displacement of an estimated 250 000 workers. The process unfolded with the white farmers being chased off the land together with their workers.

*Labour Bulletin:* What are your views on using the race card?

**Tendai Makwavarara:** As much as we play the race card we have to look at other issues around us. Why did it take Mugabe 20 years to wake up and say the west is bad? He never spoke publicly about the west and the colonisers the way he talks now. After independence Mugabe said we now need to rejoin forces to build the country.

He was conciliatory towards the whites. It seems as if he only started raising the race and colonialist card round about the time of the birth of the MDC in 1998/99. When we got loans from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, did Mugabe complain?

**Labour Bulletin:** What about ZCTU and the MDC?

**Tendai Makwavarara:** The official position is that the ZCTU is not affiliated to any political party. At independence the ZCTU was strongly aligned to Zanu-PF. It then became strongly aligned to the MDC when it was formed. Essentially, the MDC emerged from the labour movement with its former general secretary Morgan Tsvangirai heading up the MDC. Strong links remain between the two organisations. However, the ZCTU cannot come out and publically choose one political party over another otherwise it would lead to a split amongst members. There are some affiliates and members who do not support MDC while some ZCTU leaders have become critical of the MDC and feel cheated because the MDC is not talking about labour issues. ZCTU has to be able to criticise both the MDC and Zanu-PF – after all if we are seeking to move towards a true democracy we should be able to criticise ourselves and others.

ZCTU does not only face problems with its membership in terms of political alliances but the government has begun to point to union leaders saying – you are the MDC. In view of that there is an attempt to separate the two organisations but that becomes difficult when MDC councillors are also in the ZCTU leadership. (see box)

**Labour Bulletin:** What role should Cosatu be playing?

**Tendai Makwavarara:** As a labour movement itself, Cosatu should be linking itself with the ZCTU as it is working with the same constituency. Cosatu needs to understand what Zimbabwean workers are saying. We do not want Cosatu to talk out about the land reform process but what is Cosatu saying about the working poor in Zimbabwe? What has Cosatu said about the hundreds and thousands of farmworkers who have been thrown off the land/farms? What would Cosatu be saying if its members were thrown off the land and what would Cosatu do? We

do not want Cosatu (or for that matter the ANC) to say Zanu-PF is bad. We are not expecting SA to side with the MDC and oppose Mugabe, but does that mean that silence should remain on the abuse of human rights? We want Cosatu to say something about the lives of Zimbabwean workers.

Nothing is always as it appears. The perception that there is total support in the ZCTU for the MDC is not the case. As I mentioned above, not all affiliates support the MDC. The MDC started with grassroots orientation and was supported by ordinary people including white commercial framers. Since its formation ideological differences have emerged. Some claim that Morgan has disassociated himself with guys (in the labour movement) that he used to engage with. The issue here is not about SA's support for the MDC but rather the need to

reject the current state in Zimbabwe.

In the same vein, is it helpful when the advice given by some in Cosatu is that the reason we in the labour movement are experiencing problems is because we are on the wrong side of the ideological fence. We need to realign with Zanu-pf. What is not acknowledged sufficiently by organisations such as Cosatu is that we do have problems with the MDC. The issue is not about which political party should be supported but rather whether real issues on the ground are being addressed. If Mugabe had left government in 1990/91 he would have left like a hero. We need someone to explain to us what went wrong. After independence Mugabe had a great history but is he now living up to his old principles? He followed them for a while, what went wrong? How does he feel seeing his people suffer if he is indeed the father of the nation?

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## ZCTU leader talks about his role as MDC councillor

The **Labour Bulletin** interviewed ZCTU assistant general secretary **Collin Gwiyo** who is also an MDC councillor on the relationship between the labour movement and the MDC.

**Labour Bulletin:** How do you see the rise of the MDC?

**Collin Gwiyo:** Zimbabwe is still being run by a national liberation movement. There is a view that Mugabe never turned the national liberation project into a democratic one. Hence the institutions of state began to mirror the practices inherent in liberation movements and not democratic movements. As a result the space existed for the MDC to emerge. A vacuum existed because there is no culture of tolerance and democracy. Zimbabwe's problems lie with the arrogance of Mugabe. The MDC is not a party of the

left. Rather it is a rallying point to get rid of Mugabe. Of course the problem will then arise, what then?

**Labour Bulletin:** Do some in the ranks of the ZCTU feel uncomfortable with the MDC?

**Collin Gwiyo:** After the formation of the MDC, organised labour began to play a lesser role in the organisation. At the same time the formation of the MDC created a vacuum within the labour movement as the experienced leadership moved over to the new organisation. Those who say that Morgan will not be accountable to the labour movement are wrong.