

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

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Shinga Mushandi Shinga! Qina Msebenzi Qina!" (Workers be Resolute! Fight On!)

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

1. Introduction: Crisis in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has long been considered a country in crisis. It stands at 173 out of 187 on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2011), and the social, economic and political rights of its population have been repeatedly disregarded. Zimbabwe's entrenched economic crisis saw inflation peak at 231 million per cent in 2008; poverty is endemic and approximately 3 million people, or a quarter of the population, have emigrated abroad (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010). Attributing the blame for this situation and understanding how such a crisis arose is a complex task worthy of considerable analysis in its own right, but for the sake of this dissertation two concepts will be utilised as representing a duo of malignant forces largely responsible for the problems facing ordinary Zimbabweans.

The first is the domestic, political authoritarianism of the Zimbabwean government, a regime headed by President Robert Mugabe and populated by his party; Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). The Mugabe regime gained hegemony over Zimbabwean politics in 1987 and retained it until the Global Political Agreement (GPA) which saw the formation of a power-sharing government with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 2009. Under Mugabe's rule, repressive legislation and violence have been used to stymie dissent and oppositional voices, whilst numerous elections have been rigged and the coffers of regime supporters fattened by years of corruption. Equally, the regime's incoherent and frequently capricious economic policies over the three decades since independence have been roundly condemned as precipitating Zimbabwe's economic decline (Raftopoulos and Phimister 2004). It is important to note that the western media portrayal of Mugabe is often sensationalised, attributing him limitless power whilst ignoring the internal power struggles that have long characterised ZANU-PF and the consent for his rule apparent within a significant segment of the population (Chan 2012). Nevertheless, with these caveats in mind it remains necessary to consider the political authoritarianism of the Mugabe regime as a malignant force in many ways responsible for the crisis in Zimbabwe.

The second force responsible for the privation of the Zimbabwean people is neoliberalism. At the ideological centre of neoliberalism is the idea that 'the fundamental political good is freedom of the individual, which is best secured through a competitive market society, which in turn is only possible in states that do not interfere in the economy beyond that which is strictly necessary to ensure the second condition' (Harrison 2010, 19). These beliefs have gained hegemony within the governments of the global north, business and importantly within the International Financial Institutions (IFIs): the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The free market dogmas of neoliberalism have become axiomatic, and this discursive hegemony is evidenced in the policies of governments, the IFIs and the practices of global capital; demonstrating neoliberalism *as practice* (Harrison 2010). These institutions – which together form the neoliberal architecture – attempt to recreate the western, free market model across the world, utilising their strength to enforce the neoliberal vision and punish deviance. In Africa, this can be best understood as a process of 'social engineering', affecting 'not only the economic sphere but also the state, the state's relations with society, and society itself' (Harrison 2010, 32). Privatisation, de-regulation, the shrinking of the state and punitive actions against state 'roguery' have created much hardship across Africa, and these neoliberal reforms have arguably entrenched the continent's economic inferiority

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

whilst ensuring continued enrichment for northern and southern elites (Harvey 2007).

Political authoritarianism and neoliberalism are responsible for many of the problems facing Zimbabwe, but they must be understood as intrinsically interconnected phenomena whose relationship has altered over time. The 1990s saw a relative unity between political authoritarianism and neoliberalism within the Zimbabwean state, with an IFI-designed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) implemented using violence and political repression to crush internal dissent, precipitating a catastrophic economic decline which caused mass unemployment and poverty. This period coincided with the rise of a labour and civil society opposition movement. However, largely due to the rise of this political threat, the late 1990s saw the authoritarian state split from neoliberalism as it returned to an anti-imperialist rhetoric, focussing its attentions on rural land reform and a violent campaign against the MDC and its civil society allies. The regime's inability to service its debt repayments resulted in economic sanctions and the removal of development aid and IFI loans, culminating in a huge loss of confidence in the Zimbabwean economy and a mass retreat by global capital (Chan 2012). Yet again both political authoritarianism and neoliberalism were at work in Zimbabwe, but now the disciplinary neoliberalism of the IFIs, western governments and global capital was in force against the regime's transgressions. A truly progressive or 'emancipatory' struggle to end the poverty and repression engendered by political authoritarianism and neoliberalism must therefore aim to oppose both of these malignant forces.

Resistance has certainly been evident within Zimbabwe, and the labour movement, organised under the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), has been a conspicuous presence in these struggles, often acting in concert with a broad coalition of civil society actors. By the end of the 1990s, civil society activism had a political figurehead in the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), spearheaded by ex-ZCTU Secretary General Morgan Tsvangirai. The MDC has risen as a political force throughout the 2000s and the 2008 elections resulted in extended negotiations between the two parties, culminating in the GPA and a power-sharing government from 2009 to the present. At its broadest level therefore, this dissertation seeks to trace the trajectory of the labour movement since independence in 1980, analysing whether it has been an effective and influential force in offering an 'emancipatory struggle' against both political authoritarianism and neoliberalism.

1.1 Literature Review

Since the late 1990s, the split between the authoritarian state and neoliberalism has seen political polarisation take root in Zimbabwe. This has made analysis of the labour movement problematic, as polarisation has created fiercely competing perspectives on whom and what constitutes an emancipatory struggle. In response to the threat of the opposition movement, the regime has utilised 'patriotic history' (Ranger 2004, 215) in order to cement its political hegemony, emphasising ZANU-PF's liberation struggle credentials and connecting the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) to an ongoing struggle against the white imperialists and their domestic supporters – namely the MDC and its civil society allies (Ranger 2004). The Mugabe regime has therefore attempted to divide Zimbabwe into 'revolutionaries and sell-outs' (Ranger 2004, 223), portraying itself as fighting the neoliberal imperialists and the opposition as 'enemies of the nation' (Raftopoulos 2009, 213). This polarising rhetoric has been lent some credence by the intellectual analysis emanating from the 'Nationalist Left' (NL), who represent one side of a leftist, polarised academic discourse in Zimbabwe (Moyo and Yeros 2007b, 173).[1] The NL has offered support for the 'radicalised state' in Zimbabwe, evidencing a return to radical, redistributive policies in the FTLRP (Moyo and Yeros 2007a). Furthermore, the NL has led a searing critique of the opposition movement, which is argued to be western-donor driven and reflective of a neoliberal 'good governance' agenda; emphasising political rights and regime change whilst aligning with the neoliberal architecture, thus ensuring the continued repression of the socio-economic rights of Zimbabweans (Yeros 2002).

The FTLRP means that this polarisation has not remained rhetorical, but has come to exist in a broad, if not unproblematic, divide between urban and rural Zimbabwe. It must be noted that demands for land reform were driven by the 'long-standing grievances' (Raftopoulos 2009, 212) of a vast, landless rural populace. The early 2000s saw spontaneous peasant land acquisitions increase under the guidance of the war veterans association, and the FTLRP saw the regime first support and eventually co-opt these early struggles for land reform into a government led policy initiative, forcibly re-allocating white-owned, commercial farm land to landless black peasants (Moyo 2001).

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

This certainly helped sustain ZANU-PF support in rural areas. A detailed analysis of land reform is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but there is consensus that in a country with millions of landless peasants and vast quantities of unused arable land held within 4000 white commercial farms, land reform was – and remains – an absolute necessity for the development of sustainable rural livelihoods (Bond 2001). Yet neoliberal property-rights and ‘willing-buyer, willing-seller’ policies failed to ensure land reform and concentrated rural wealth with commercial farmers (McCandless 2011). Land redistribution therefore forms a necessary part of any emancipatory struggle in Zimbabwe and the response to the FTLRP seen within the neoliberal architecture evidences the extent to which this would represent a challenge to neoliberalism. However, the regime’s FTLRP was undoubtedly authoritarian, with violence used in a politicised manner against opposition supporters and white farmers, and the programme lacked the infrastructural support necessary to empower the newly landed (Scoones et al. 2010); undermining NL suggestions that it was ‘fundamentally progressive’ (Moyo and Yeros 2007a, 106) in nature.

Unfortunately, the opposition movement has thus far failed to transcend the regime’s polarised rhetoric and policies, and has actually played its own role in entrenching polarisation. The MDC in particular has echoed much of the sensationalised western media coverage in damning the FTLRP as dominated by cronyism and largely responsible for Zimbabwe’s economic problems despite a clear lack of evidence for either of these accusations (Scoones et al. 2010), thus placing the blame for Zimbabwe’s economic crisis squarely on the shoulders of Mugabe and ignoring the role of neoliberalism. Furthermore, the opposition movement’s concentration in urban centres and its support from western-donors and white farmers has not enamoured it with the rural population or countered the regime’s western-stooge rhetoric (Phimister 2005). The Internationalist Left (IL), representing an alternative leftist reading to the NL, has equally enabled the opposition’s polarising role.[2] The IL has offered an exclusionary and romanticised understanding of the Zimbabwean crisis, portraying rural and pro-regime actors as ‘uncivil’ (e.g. non-progressive) actors existing outside of civil society and reducing them to de-agentialised puppets of the regime (Helliker 2011), whilst portraying urban civil society as universally progressive in its fight against the authoritarian state. This framing of civil and uncivil society is reflective of neoliberal social engineering, in that rural land reform struggles have been depicted as uncivil purely because they undermined private property and market-based land transactions, regardless of the failure of neoliberal policies and the emancipatory necessity of land redistribution (Helliker 2011).

Zimbabwe therefore demonstrates a polarisation between an anti-authoritarian, urban-based opposition movement emphasising governance concerns and political rights against an authoritarian, anti-neoliberal regime with a rural base strengthened by its flawed – yet undoubtedly popular – redistributive land policies. Of course the complex social realities of Zimbabwe transcend such facile MDC/ZANU-PF, urban/rural, rights/redistribution dichotomies, yet these divisions have been evident as broad social cleavages and exist strongly as *discursive realities*, framing the actors’ perceptions of Zimbabwean politics and creating notably divergent readings of Zimbabwe in the left-leaning academic literature. A large part of Zimbabwean history is now analysed and interpreted in relation to contemporary polarities, making a thorough engagement with these polarised perspectives all the more pertinent. Therefore, it is necessary to create a framework for analysis which avoids reifying these polarising narratives.

1.2 Statement of Aims

In accordance with the findings of the literature review, this dissertation seeks to offer a de-polarised analysis of the labour movement in Zimbabwe. First of all, by identifying ‘emancipatory struggle’ as necessarily entailing opposition to both political authoritarianism and neoliberalism, the division between rights and redistribution perspectives can be broached, emphasising how neither can be advanced at the expense of the other (Ncube 2010). Furthermore, civil society will not be conceptualised as universally progressive or always pitted against the state (Helliker, Murisa and Moyo 2008), but as a contested terrain containing its own internal tensions and contradictions (Sadomba and Helliker 2010) which are not easily reducible to any preconceived theoretical notions of civil society (Masunungure 2008). As such, a context-based approach is necessary (Helliker, Murisa and Moyo 2008), analysing the tensions and ambiguities within and between Zimbabwean civil society actors in both urban and rural areas; including ‘uncivil’ actors. In doing so, this framework of analysis offers a less exclusionary and romanticised perception of labour and the opposition movement than offered by the IL, yet also provides a means with which to problematise the NL portrayal of these actors; offering a de-polarised framework for analysis.

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

The primary aim of this dissertation is therefore to critically analyse the extent to which the labour movement has offered an emancipatory – and therefore de-polarising – struggle against political authoritarianism and neoliberalism in Zimbabwe; an analysis which necessarily involves an interrogation of the polarised perspectives and realities of Zimbabwe from the vantage point of labour. To do so, this dissertation will first consider the rise of the labour movement and civil society struggles during the 1980s and 1990s, analysing labour's influence upon the creation of the opposition movement and the explosion of grassroots activism through problematising labour's internal constitution and its relations with civil society, including rural 'uncivil' society. These insights will then be used to analyse the extent to which labour represented both an anti-neoliberal and pro-democracy agenda up to the birth of the MDC. The key organisational and ideological trends noted in the previous chapter will then inform an analysis of how labour has navigated political polarisation in Zimbabwe throughout the 2000s, particularly in relation to the MDC and land reform. Together, the first two chapters of this thesis will demonstrate how labour has stood at the centre of emancipatory struggle in Zimbabwe, cultivating a powerful rank-and-file critique of both political authoritarianism and neoliberalism which offers hope for depolarisation. Following on from this, the final chapter will consider the extent to which the labour movement continues to be capable of such an emancipatory struggle, evidencing its adaptive power in response to the challenges facing organised labour in the global south and the continued spectre of political authoritarianism in Zimbabwe. Many have sounded the death knell for organised labour in the contemporary global economy (Munck 2004), and the secondary aim of this dissertation is therefore to provide a case study of continued labour vitality within a neoliberal and authoritarian setting in the global south.

2. Rise of the Labour Movement 1980-2000

The labour movement was organisationally weak upon independence, and numerous wildcat strikes in 1980-81 were harshly crushed by the Zimbabwe African National Union government under Robert Mugabe (Saunders 2001). Labour had played an important role in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, yet tensions with the nationalists over its organisational autonomy remained and spilled over into the post-colonial period (Raftopoulos 2000), with the nationalist regime co-opting the labour movement into state power in order to curb its autonomy and force conformity to the party-defined project of national liberation. The six union federations were soon merged into the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in 1981. ZCTU's relationship with the regime was paternalistic in nature, with ZANU claiming to protect workers and their rights, instituting a minimum wage and employment protections (Alexander 2001; Dansereau 2003). Despite a number of such progressive measures, including impressive public spending on health and education, the violence used against dissent and potential opposition, particularly the massacres in Matebeleland province (Alexander et al. 2000), demonstrate the authoritarian tendencies of the Mugabe regime during the 1980s.

By 1987, political hegemony was secured under the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the ubiquitous figurehead of Mugabe. However, it is misleading to suggest state hegemony over labour was monolithic or that no significant opposition existed. The early ZCTU was rife with 'corruption, embezzlement, maladministration and authoritarianism' (Dansereau 2003, 177), and this was met with much dissent from amongst the workers and affiliate unions, leading to the eventual collapse of this early labour centre (Bond and Saunders 2005). The 1985 ZCTU Congress called for greater autonomy from the regime and by 1987 a new leadership had emerged from labour centre affiliates; this included Secretary General Morgan Tsvangirai from the mines and President Wilson Sibanda from the railways, who moved ZCTU towards increasing autonomy and critical distance from the regime (Bond and Saunders 2005). In particular, the new labour leadership facilitated a restructured labour centre and a growth in affiliates which enabled ZCTU to engage in a strong anti-capitalist critique of the Mugabe regime's move towards liberalisation in the latter half of the decade (Raftopoulos 2000).

The genesis of labour opposition during the 1980s reveals clear trends which would solidify in later activism. The seeds of opposition were evident throughout civil society; including intellectuals, peasants, and students (Muzondidya 2009), and the labour movement had already begun to make connections between their struggles in this early period. Student anti-corruption demonstrations in 1988-89 were met with vocal support from Tsvangirai and ZCTU, representing a clear break between labour and ZANU-PF, with the latter assaulting and arresting the student leaders (McCandless 2011). Labour's response to the student demonstrations also indicates early signs of

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

the labour movement broadening the scope of its concerns beyond workers and the shop-floor, with ZCTU campaigning against corruption and successfully opposing the regime's attempts to create a one-party state in 1990 (Raftopoulos 2000). Regime hegemony therefore entailed notable gaps during the 1980s, with labour's connections to broader civil society and the organic integration of governance concerns into its agenda evidencing the progenitors of activism in the following decade.

2.1 Zimbabwe in the 1990s: A Decade of Activism

The 1990s witnessed a 'defining watershed in Zimbabwe's political economy' (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010, 113). In 1991, both increasing IFI pressure and the closeness of the ruling and economic elites (Saul and Saunders 2005) saw the Mugabe regime put its full force behind an Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). ESAP saw a fundamental restructuring of the Zimbabwean state, economy and society, with the welfarist economic policies of the 1980s swiftly replaced by a neoliberal package of trade liberalisation, deregulation and public sector restructuring, including large cuts to the health and education budgets (McCandless 2011). The regime's enforcement of ESAP reflected the synthesis of authoritarianism and neoliberalism within the state, leading to below-par growth, high unemployment and soaring poverty rates (Alexander 2001). Even the World Bank had to concede failure with growth rates never reaching the 5 per cent per annum anticipated, averaging only 1.2 per cent between 1991 and 1995 (Dansereau 2003). Whilst Zimbabwe's economic problems can be traced back to its colonial legacy and earlier neoliberal involvement in the 1980s which caused Zimbabwe's foreign debt burden to rocket (Dansereau 2003), it was the turn to ESAP which catalysed the full-scale collapse of Zimbabwe's economy.

The keenly felt impacts of ESAP upon workers and their families led the 1990s to become 'a decade of unprecedented industrial and social action' (Bond and Saunders 2005, 45; Matombo and Sachikonye 2010). Labour movement activism during the 1990s represented the full fruition of the two key trends noted in civil society opposition in the 1980s: the connection between labour and other civil society groups, and the growth of governance concerns in labour's agenda alongside traditional socio-economic issues. Together, these trends reflect the key characteristics of Social Movement Unionism (SMU) (Moody 1997). By tracing the rise of this form of unionism into the labour movement in the 1990s, labour's organisational influence upon civil society struggles can be considered and problematised, alongside analysis of whether labour had expanded its traditional remit in order to proffer genuine opposition to both political authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Such an analysis also presents an opportunity to engage with the polarised understandings of activism during the 1990s, and offer a de-polarised analysis of labour and the development of the opposition movement.

2.2 Labour Organisation and Activism

The early 1990s witnessed noticeably higher levels of labour activism than seen at the end of the 1980s, with at least 184 incidents of activism from 1990-97 compared to 38 between 1985 and 1990 (Saunders 2001). The labour movement became increasingly bold in its opposition to ESAP, arguing it led to 'permanent joblessness, hopelessness and economic insecurity' (Raftopoulos 2000, 265), yet grassroots anger did not automatically translate to mass action and ZCTU was beset with organisational weaknesses. Low attendance led to the failure of an early protest march in 1992 (Alexander 2001), and many workers did not properly understand union functions or the achievements that could be made through collective bargaining (Raftopoulos 2000). Furthermore, the Labour Relations Act of 1992 had deregulated labour relations whilst also attempting to constrain union power on the shopfloor and in collective bargaining processes (Raftopoulos 2000), further compounding labour's organisational weaknesses.

In response to these early organisational failures, labour leadership began a dual process of consolidation which would result in ZCTU becoming synonymous with Social Movement Unionism (SMU) (Moody 1997). This involved both strengthening ZCTU infrastructure and deepening rank-and-file capacity whilst expanding labour's influence to draw wider civil society into shared struggles. The first step was to strengthen union structures; 'building capacity from below' (Saunders 2001, 143). This included the establishment of ZCTU regional committees and nation-wide Labour Forums where workers at the grassroots level could discuss their issues and play a role in union strategy (Yeros 2001). Equally, information and economic centres were established at the national level in order to provide a

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

centre for information on the economy and labour rights, whilst workers received training in labour law and collective bargaining mechanisms (Saunders 2001). Encouraged by these developments, numerous strike actions, slow-downs and sit-ins took place, with major strikes in 1993 precipitating large anti-government demonstrations and riots in 1995.

The strengthening of its infrastructure increased ZCTU's organisational power, allowing it to expand union influence. The unprecedented public sector strike of August-September 1996 dealt the first major blow to the Mugabe regime, with 70,000 public sector workers striking against poor pay, poor working conditions, authoritarian industrial relations and corruption (Gwisai 2009; Saunders 2001). ZCTU's support in negotiations with the regime eventually led the Public Service Association to affiliate in September 1996 (Raftopoulos 2000), creating mutual support and cooperation between public and private sector workers from this point onwards (Saunders 2001). However, the role of the rank-and-file workers in expanding ZCTU influence is commonly overlooked. The 1996 strike was driven by an elected, shop-floor strike committee functioning independently from ZCTU, and as the strike progressed, ZCTU leadership struggled to keep up with events, only eventually managing to agree a compromise settlement between the strikers and the regime (Zeilig 2002). The consolidation of union structures and deepening of rank-and-file capacity had therefore acted concurrently to expand ZCTU's struggle across the workforce, and this was set to continue into civil society more broadly.

In November 1997 the Zimbabwean dollar depreciated in value by 74 per cent in four hours (Bond 2010), reflecting a deepening economic crisis and growing unrest in Zimbabwe. ZCTU's increased organisational capacity and facilitation of an empowered rank-and-file formed a central nexus in the explosion of mass actions from 1996 to 1998. ZCTU organised numerous strikes throughout 1997, attended by approximately 1,073,000 workers, culminating in a two-day general strike starting on December 9th, 1997 (Gwisai 2009). It was the largest mass action seen in Zimbabwe, and the threat it posed to the regime was underscored by police brutality in Harare and a vicious attack on Tsvangirai in his ZCTU offices. The mass actions throughout 1997 included not just the workers but also war veterans demanding their pensions, agricultural workers – who themselves hadn't taken industrial action since 1948 – and rural peasants who initiated land acquisitions on white-owned, commercial farms alongside attending demonstrations in Harare (Gwisai 2009). This reflected the expansion of ZCTU influence across civil society, drawing diverse groups into a unified struggle. The role of the rank-and-file was particularly important, with labour forums, worker committees and meetings for grassroots activists across civil society becoming increasingly common (Gwisai 2009). These grassroots committees were encouraged by ZCTU leadership and provided opportunities for the rank-and-file to get their voices heard in ZCTU policy (Gwisai 2009), yet rank-and-file activism consistently pre-empted leadership directions and mobilised outside of its purview (Saunders 2001; Zeilig 2002). Indeed, the leadership's decision to call-off the second day of the general strike and discourage further mass actions was not heeded by the labour multitude. Mobilisation continued into 1998, when riots against high food prices – initiated by Harare housewives – gained strong support across the grassroots of urban civil society (Raftopoulos 2009).

The mass activism of 1996-1998 saw the full fruition of SMU within the labour movement, with ZCTU's strengthened infrastructure facilitating a strong rank-and-file presence and the expansion of union influence into broader civil society, drawing diverse groups into a shared struggle. At the institutional level, ZCTU's relationship with these groups would solidify into a formidable urban movement, including social movements, NGOs, students, intellectuals and churches, centred upon labour's infrastructural and organisational dominance (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010). This 'labour coalition' would later form the institutional apparatus of the MDC support base. Equally however, the explosion of rank-and-file activism played a central role in the mass actions of 1996-1998. The rank-and-file remain interminably linked to ZCTU's leadership and institutional apparatus, yet also retain an independence from it, demonstrating the extent to which the 'labour movement' as a whole is far from a homogenous bloc directed by the leadership. During the mass actions, the rank-and-file stood at the centre of a grassroots civil society movement which commonly ran-away from its institutional representation. Hardt and Negri's (2004) understanding of the 'multitude' is perhaps most enlightening here: in comparison to the equalising homogenisation of the 'masses' or even the 'working class', the multitude delineates a group of actors with noticeable singularities yet whom retain a collective agency which can be forwarded in a mutual struggle. This 'labour multitude' was vital in the mass actions of 1996-1998, and labour's central role in facilitating this grassroots activism evidenced its place at the 'epicentre of organised oppositional politics' (Moyo and Murisa 2008, 85) in Zimbabwe.

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

2.3 Forwarding an Emancipatory Struggle?

ZCTU's SMU model also reflected the second trend noted in the 1980s: the expansion of labour's agenda into the overtly political governance issues of its coalition partners, moving beyond its traditional socio-economic remit. By the end of the 1990s, ZCTU stood at the centre of a civil society movement advocating for an end to authoritarianism and state repression, pursuing a progressive constitution through the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and seeking a democratic future for Zimbabwe in the form of the MDC. NL scholars have mooted the establishment of these organisations as the start of 'social democratic political unionism' (Moyo and Murisa 2008), and labour's capitulation to the externally defined 'good governance' agenda of the IFIs and western powers. This 'good governance' agenda emphasises the importance of democratisation and effective governance for solving the political and economic woes of the global south, yet views democracy only in terms of a neoliberal state which fully accommodates global capital. Democracy therefore does not extend to economic policy, and any mass action or policy deemed anti-property or anti-market is delegitimised as outside of respectable civic norms and is therefore 'uncivil' (Helliker 2011). For the NL, the late 1990s saw the labour movement's focus shift strongly onto domestic governance issues and democratisation, even reflecting an unsophisticated 'regime change' mentality. This also involved labour abandoning its radicalism on economic policy in favour of social-democratic solutions which, whilst advocating for social safety nets and an economic role for the state, nevertheless remained largely compliant to neoliberalism and free market dogma. In light of such a critique and labour's pivotal role in civil society struggles, it appears vital to analyse labour's ideological agenda during the 1990s to see whether it offered an emancipatory struggle against both political authoritarianism and neoliberalism.

ZCTU's seminal economic policy document of 1995 – *Beyond ESAP: framework for a long-term development strategy in Zimbabwe beyond the economic structural adjustment* – is arguably representative of a conciliatory turn by labour, attempting to engage with the government and encourage the modification, if not abandonment, of ESAP to lessen its social impacts (Bond 2001). Yet this argument is somewhat misleading. Firstly, *Beyond ESAP* has to be understood in the context of a union leadership aiming to transform ZCTU 'from a largely vociferous organisation that no one seems to listen to, into a viable political force to be reckoned with' (Alexander 2001, 387). In this sense, *Beyond ESAP* was hugely successful, representing the first time a detailed alternative to the regime's economic policy had been offered and a clear political challenge to both the Mugabe regime and absolute free markets (Yeros 2001). Secondly, *Beyond ESAP* reflected the zenith of a participation and resistance strategy seen in the early 1990s (Alexander 2001), with labour attempting to influence national economic policy by negotiating with the regime through tripartite or consultative bodies, whilst also reserving the ability to launch mass actions when deemed necessary to force the regime's hand and ensure further negotiations (Ncube 2010). *Beyond ESAP* and the mass actions that followed therefore represented a consolidation of strategy rather than a shift in ideology, demonstrating the ZCTU leadership's attempts to openly challenge the regime and offer alternative policy.

That being said, by largely accepting the necessity of some form of structural adjustment, *Beyond ESAP* certainly acquiesced to a number of neoliberal axioms – indicative of the social-democratic orientation of the leadership. In doing so, ZCTU arguably contributed to the 'good governance' discourse, utilising buzzwords such as 'participation', 'ownership' and 'pro-poor growth'; themselves commonly used as a discursive facade for neoliberal policies which are anything but participatory (Harrison 2010). This charge is justified for many of the western-NGOs working in Zimbabwe, who have showcased astonishingly undemocratic structures (Rich Dorman 2001) to the detriment of romanticised IL perceptions of progressive, urban civil society. However, in many ways the labour movement had adopted the original potential of these ideas far better than its NGO allies, evidenced in its facilitation of rank-and-file activism and attempts to include them in union strategising and policy making (Yeros 2001). Furthermore, this participatory approach enabled the rank-and-file to mobilise strongly behind *Beyond ESAP*, and the labour multitude proved highly supportive of this direct challenge to the regime and demands for 'clear practical responses from government' (Raftopoulos 2000, 272), most notably in the mass actions of 1997. As such, the rank-and-file and broader labour multitude provided popular, domestic legitimacy for a politicised ZCTU offering a direct challenge to the regime – complicating suggestions of a western-defined, good governance agenda.

The participatory approach fostered by the ZCTU not only facilitated and received popular legitimacy for labour struggles but also cemented socio-economic and governance concerns into a 'dual agenda' which developed

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

organically within the labour movement. The regime's use of political authoritarianism to enforce ESAP and the concomitant growth in state corruption that neoliberalism engendered (Bond and Saunders 2005) had revealed anti-authoritarian and anti-neoliberal activism to form integral parts of the same struggle. This connection was recognised and synthesised through the labour movement's participatory approach, evidenced in the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI), which aimed to assess the impacts of structural adjustment and to 'enhance broad-based civic participation in economic policy making' (McCandless 2011, 41). Despite lack of donor support, SAPRI delivered a damning verdict on the impacts of ESAP, forcing a moderate climb-down from the World Bank (Yeros 2001), and its contents integrated governance issues into its critique of neoliberal economic policy. Furthermore, minutes from the labour forums and worker committees during the mid-1990s illustrate how political issues – such as the size of the cabinet – had equally come to sit alongside traditional socio-economic concerns in the rank-and-file's agenda (Gwisai 2009). This dual agenda was apparent as early as the 1980s, with ZCTU's support of the student protests, and its development is clearly indicative of the 'organic nature of governance concerns for labor unions' (McCandless 2011, 72) not a western-defined, good governance agenda.

ZCTU's dual agenda and its participatory approach fostered popular support within the rank-and-file, yet they not only supported but actively radicalised this agenda, receiving broader support within the labour multitude during the mass actions of 1996-1998. The role of groups such as the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) is notable in this period, although often ignored by both IL and NL scholars, as they were influential in encouraging the creation of grassroots strike committees and spread the idea of labour activism outside the purview of the union bureaucracy (Gwisai 2009; Zeilig 2002). This rank-and-file activism not only frequently pre-empted and mobilised outside the purview of the labour centre (Bond 2001), but actually pressured the social-democratic leadership into following a more radical course of action (Gwisai 2009). In the midst of nation-wide riots and strikes in 1998, labour leadership recognised the potential of a militant approach (Gwisai 2009); Tsvangirai nearly lost his job over an unauthorised call for another general strike (Zeilig 2002) and he led an unprecedented walk-out from the tripartite National Economic Consultative Forum (Bond 2001), consenting to further mass action instead of negotiation. The radical mass actions driven by the labour multitude – including strikes, demonstrations and anti-IMF riots – represented a direct threat to the regime and a rejection of authoritarianism and the malevolent consequences of neoliberalism. The labour movement therefore appeared at its most essential and harnessed the greatest emancipatory potential when the labour multitude was driving forward its dual-agenda through radical activism.

The importance of this strong presence from the labour multitude was made all the more vital by the wavering radicalism of the social-democratic oriented leadership. As has been noted, *Beyond ESAP* largely acquiesced to free market dogma and was anti-neoliberal only to the extent that it provided an active challenge to state economic policy, garnering rank-and-file support which drove forward a more radicalised agenda. Unfortunately, the leadership retained an ambiguous relationship with this radicalism and in 1998 they exerted their influence and were eventually successful in moving activism away from strikes and demonstrations towards stay-aways. Whilst reducing state violence, stay-aways dampened the effectiveness and vitality of grassroots activism (Gwisai 2009), and the concurrent shift towards institutionalisation in the late 1990s demonstrated the labour leadership reigning in a rank-and-file which had grown increasingly autonomous and prone to questioning ZCTU direction (Gwisai 2009). The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) was established in 1998, aiming to facilitate a participatory review of the constitution in order to rationalise the spread of power amongst different arms of the government and state and in particular, curb the ever-extending powers of the Executive Presidency (McCandless 2011). The NCA's agenda was therefore governance oriented, and with Tsvangirai at its head, the urban labour coalition had formed a 'formidable political alliance' (Raftopoulos 2000), centred upon ZCTU and the social-democratic ideology of its leadership. The institutionalisation of labour's political agenda could therefore be seen as the moderate leadership co-opting the 'grassroots urban muscle' (Moyo and Murisa 2008, 98) of the labour multitude into their moderate, neoliberal-compliant agenda.

However, much of the impetus towards institutionalisation came from the rank-and-file (Saunders 2001). The need for a workers' party became a common theme in the labour forums during 1998, and the leadership's resistance to these calls – despite its clearly politicised agenda – betrayed their concerns over the radical form a rank-and-file supported party might take if not properly controlled by the labour centre (Zeilig 2002). Nevertheless, the leadership's participatory approach again facilitated the radical dual agenda of the rank-and-file, organising a

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

National Working People's Convention for February 1999 which brought together a wide range of urban and rural actors to debate a manifesto for opposition. Another convention in May saw ZCTU gain a mandate to facilitate the creation of a political party, culminating in the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) being born in September 1999, again centred upon labour and with Tsvangirai at its head. Labour's internal tensions continually surfaced throughout this process, with the ISO refused entrance to the NWPC (Gwisai 2009), and the dominance of the labour bureaucracy's over the formation of the MDC ensuring that the avowedly left-leaning resolution of the NWPC surfaced in a far more moderate fashion in the party's manifesto (Alexander 2001). The MDC certainly represents a failure to create a radical worker party, yet the rank-and-file and broader labour multitude played a willing role in its establishment, facilitated by the ZCTU leadership, and carried their radical agenda into the party – with even the ISO gaining a place within its ranks. As such, despite continued internal contradictions, the labour multitude ensured the new MDC opposition continued to represent the central axis of emancipatory potential in Zimbabwe.

2.4 Labour and 'Uncivil' Society

Despite internal contradictions, labour demonstrated expansive influence and an organically-developed dual agenda in the 1990s, yet its ability to forward an emancipatory, de-polarised struggle was not without its limitations. As noted, the mass actions of 1997 included protests by the war veterans under the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA), who charged the government with not providing the pensions and financial support they were due (Alexander 2001). The leader of the war veterans, Chenjerai Hunzvi, originally struck a deal with Tsvangirai and the ZCTU, who agreed to back the veterans in their fight for pensions (Moore 2004). Yet in response to veteran demands, the Mugabe regime created 'a 5 per cent surtax which would hurt workers' (Moore 2004, 408), resulting in the agreement being broken. This surtax formed a major catalyst for the general strike in 1997 and reveals clear divisions within civil society in Zimbabwe. Indeed, during the general strike, Hunzvi joined Mugabe in accusing Tsvangirai of siding with 'anti-party (ZANU-PF) whites' (Kriger 2000, 444), and the ZNLWVA has consistently disassociated itself from the urban civil society struggles centred on the labour movement (McCandless 2011). The IL has commonly used this to portray war veteran's as 'uncivil' actors and mindless foot-soldiers of the regime, but in reality they have consistently acted to further their own interests, even when these have been at odds with ZANU-PF (Kriger 2003). It is clear that urban civil society was far from unitary, and the war veteran's active disassociation from opposition struggles was an early sign of division and eventual polarisation, with the labour movement unable to broach this divide.

The war veterans were not the only civil society actors who held an ambiguous relationship with the mass actions. Farm workers were present during the mass action in 1997, yet organisation under the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) was weak in the rural areas of Zimbabwe, made difficult by the great distances between farms and rural settlements, and the scarce resources that comes with being the poorest paid workers in the country (Chambati and Magaramombe 2008; Rutherford 2001). Rural workers were not entirely unaffected by the influence of the mass uprisings in urban centres, with activism among farm workers near Harare evident during 1997 (Tandon 2001), yet in the wake of institutional failure, even rank-and-file, grassroots activism failed to connect these urban and rural struggles. The labour movements' failure to achieve organisational depth in the countryside reveals a serious weakness within union organisation, especially when considering that farm workers constitute the largest group of formal sector workers in Zimbabwe, representing approximately 20 per cent of the workforce (Chambati and Magaramombe 2008).

Clear urban-rural connections were evident which could have enabled the connection of rural struggles to urban-based activism – potentially alleviating the impact of Mugabe's later attempts to polarise society. Reductions in health and education spending impacted rural areas strongly, and alongside the failure of neoliberal 'willing-buyer, willing-seller' land reform policies, demonstrate the extent to which spontaneous peasant land acquisitions and activism were connected to disenchantment with state neoliberalism (Rutherford 2001). Furthermore, the huge percentage of urban workers who retained rural homes offered a clear bridge with which to forge such a connection, and the fluid line between farm workers and peasants – often altering on a seasonal basis – reveals how greater efforts to strengthen farm worker unionism could have borne considerable fruit (Tandon 2001). Labour's failure to link the 'mutual interconnections and influences' (Raftopoulos 2006, 214) of urban and rural struggles evidenced a failure to harness the emancipatory potential of 'uncivil' rural land struggles, leaving space for the regime to polarise the

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

struggle. The strength of the urban opposition movement, centred upon the radical activism and dual agenda of the rank-and-file and broader labour multitude, ensured that the onus of emancipatory struggle remained in urban areas, yet its separation from rural struggles would create problems in the polarised politics of post-2000 Zimbabwe – challenging labour's ability to forward opposition to both political authoritarianism and neoliberalism.

3. Labour in 21st Century Zimbabwe: De-Polarising Possibilities

The new millennium witnessed a deepening economic crisis in Zimbabwe, aided and exacerbated by the twin forces of political authoritarianism and neoliberalism. However, whilst these two forces had previously acted in concert, by the end of the 1990s they began to diverge. The decisive break occurred in February 2000, when pushed by the pressure created by the NCA, the regime held a referendum on its own amended constitution which continued to shore up the power of the presidency (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010). The regime's constitution was defeated by 55 percent to 45 per cent; representing its first defeat in a national poll and the clear electoral challenge posed by the MDC (Bond and Saunders 2005). In response, the regime shifted towards anti-imperialist rhetoric, land reform and repression of the opposition as it attempted to assure its political hegemony. Political polarisation led to further division between urban and rural struggles (Ncube 2010) whilst creating the perception of two competing blocs in Zimbabwean politics and society.

The labour multitude's radical dual-agenda against both neoliberalism and political authoritarianism therefore became more problematic, as these two malignant forces had now diverged to some extent and retrenched a polarisation which appeared to split rights-based and redistribution-based struggles. The central role of the rank-and-file and the labour multitude has been emphasised, and this chapter will therefore consider the extent to which ZCTU leadership encouraged or disempowered the labour multitude in its struggles against both political authoritarianism and neoliberalism within the polarisation of the 2000s.

To do so, the ideological nature of the MDC will be analysed alongside its relationship with the labour movement as part of the opposition movement – or 'MDC-bloc'. Equally, considering the emancipatory necessity of land redistribution within the anti-neoliberal struggle, it is vital to analyse the labour movement's relationship with land reform and rural struggles, particularly in light of its previous failures in this regard.

3.1 ZCTU and the MDC

The labour movement played the central role in the establishment of the MDC. ZCTU had been charged with facilitating the rise of a political party, and its offices and regional centres were soon being utilised as 'de facto MDC provincial structures' (Gwisai 2009, 241). A number of ZCTU leaders transitioned into the MDC leadership, with Morgan Tsvangirai taking the reins at the head of the new party, signifying his long dominance of the urban labour coalition. The 'facilitative role' (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010, 117) played by the union bureaucracy was bolstered by the rank-and-file who, having driven the impetus behind a new party, created grassroots party structures in the factories (Gwisai 2009), helping to ensure widespread support for the MDC among the labour multitude. However, this institutional closeness also led to perceptions of an 'organic link' (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010, 11) between the two institutions, with polarisation entrenching the idea of the labour movement as forming part of a homogenous MDC bloc.

Despite labour's central role in the establishment of the MDC, the party reflected the diversity of the urban labour coalition and was also home to commercial farmers and business interests who backed calls for a new regime and were haunted by the prospects of radical, state-driven land reform. Indeed, the MDC's early funders included white farmers and even British Tories, yet also held the likes of Munyaradzi Gwisai within its ranks – the leader of the Trotskyist ISO who would later become an MP (Alexander 2001). As Dansereau (2001, 411) states: 'the movement is clearly not a workerist party, but a common front of different political and economic interests'. The MDC was highly multitudinous in nature, yet its early manifesto – influenced by the radical agenda of the NWPC – reflected a shared social-democratic platform which emphasised 'popular participation to reclaim "peoples' power" and economic justice' (Dansereau 2003, 185). Whilst the MDC manifesto certainly reflected the governance orientation identified within the labour leadership and its urban coalition partners, particularly emphasising the need for a participatory

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

constitutional commission, it nevertheless entailed 'quite expansive socio-economic visions' (Bond 2001, 34), including a tripartite labour commission and increased social spending (Dansereau 2001); indicative of labour's influence and its continued concern for socio-economic redistribution within its dual agenda.

Unfortunately, the radical agenda of the rank-and-file was not strongly evident in MDC policy (Choto 2009) due to the dominance of more moderate, middle-class figures like Tsvangirai (Gwisai 2009); yet even the labour leadership soon found itself a relatively marginal force within the party it had created, constituting only 20% of candidates in the June 2000 elections and commonly placed in unsafe rural constituencies (Gwisai 2009). Neoliberal elements of the MDC soon gained a significant influence upon the party's economic policy consensus (Bond 2001), with white farmers and industrialists such as Eddie Cross prominent in this process, claiming: 'we believe in the free market...we are in favour of reduced taxation' and 'we are going to fast track privatisation' (Bond 2001, 42-43). The MDC's avid anti-FTLRP stance in the run-up to the 2002 Presidential Election aided polarisation, and electoral failure strengthened its rightward movement, with union and labour members slowly replaced by more neoliberal compliant figures (ISO Zimbabwe 2006). An economic policy consensus of 'social market economics' (Alexander 2001) had been formed, but its ideological content is best identified by the resounding approval it was met with by the World Bank (Alexander 2001). The incipient neoliberalism within the MDC arguably distanced it from its worker base, leading to much electoral apathy among the labour multitude (Gwisai 2009). Responding to this failure, Tsvangirai called for non-participation in the 2005 elections and a return to mass grassroots action, leading to an MDC split between a dominant MDC-Tsvangirai faction and MDC-Mutambara (Ncube 2010). The worker base remained loyal to the MDC-T, which has arguably returned to a more social-democratic tone under the power-sharing government – even criticising foreign sanctions against Zimbabwe (Tendi 2012) – yet the MDC's manifesto retains its onus on 'policies consistent with normal international practices' which would 'boost confidence' and not 'scare investors' (MDC N/D), illustrating how the MDC remains far from anti-neoliberal.

Neoliberalism has also asserted itself more prominently within the urban labour coalition, in the form of the 'good governance' agenda. Since 2000, an increase in foreign funding for democracy and human rights organisations has strengthened the presence of governance NGOs in civil society role with a regime change mentality (Ncube 2010). Arguably labour has also reflected this trend, seeing its agenda submerged into the MDC's political campaigns and regime change strategy, to the detriment of economic and labour policy advocacy (Moyo and Murisa 2008). Further adding to this charge, labour's consistent funding shortfalls have, despite some moderately successful initiatives (Sachikonye 2001), seen ZCTU remain reliant upon international union partners such as the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU) for its financial viability (Yeros 2001). This 'western labour aristocracy' (Moyo and Yeros 2007b, 176) encourages a 'market-friendly labour internationalism' (Moyo and Yeros 2007b, 193) which offers social-democratic policies aimed at moderating the worst impacts of globalisation. Therefore, ZCTU's relationship with the MDC and northern-dominated, international labour has purportedly seen it renege upon its commitment to socio-economic rights, working alongside an MDC-bloc in forwarding a regime-change agenda largely compliant to global capital. This perception has reinforced the regime's polarising narrative (Raftopoulos 2006).

However, such a portrayal of the urban labour coalition is misleading in its allusions to both a homogenous MDC-bloc and excessive donor influence upon it. First of all, it is Zimbabwe's economic crisis more than ideological consensus which has forced the union movement to remain reliant upon the ICFTU. Mass unemployment and impoverishment in Zimbabwe have created insurmountable domestic funding shortfalls and the 2009 dollarisation of the economy wiped out the savings of ZCTU and its affiliates (Shoko 2010). Furthermore, the ZCTU leadership in 2005 resolved that pro-globalisation strategies should be abandoned in favour of 'solidarity based regional integration' (Bond and Saunders 2005, 54) – putting the leadership at odds with their ICFTU funders (Yeros 2001). Additionally, the donor-funded NCA has taken a noticeably leftward turn since 2000 and has actively criticised the MDC's neoliberal policies (Zeilig 2002), illustrating the ambiguities of donor influence and the differentiated nature of the groups categorised under the MDC-bloc. It is clear therefore, that the perception of a homogenous MDC-bloc united under a donor-defined, good governance agenda is driven more by polarised rhetoric than evidence.

Importantly, these flaws in the polarised rhetoric are particularly evident with regards to the labour movement and its relationship with the MDC. Whilst the social-democratic stance of the labour leadership has been well-documented,

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

ZCTU statements indicate very real concerns regarding the possibility of an inchoate neoliberalism which could reach full fruition if the MDC gained power – a narrative with precedence in the labour-backed Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) in Zambia (Kriger 2000). By only 2001, the ZCTU Congress under the new leadership of Wellington Chibebe was already warning the MDC not to forget labour's role in its formation (Dansereau 2001), and he further lamented the MDC's rightward shift and the demotion of prominent unionists in 2007 (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010). In response to the MDC's rightward shift and the regime's relative 'normalisation' with global capital (Moyo and Yeros 2007a, 113), 2003-2004 saw further mass actions with ZCTU 'pressing demands for social and economic rights' and 'mapping out policy terrain and strategies that are independent of, and on occasion at odds with, those of the MDC—notably on issues of economic policy' (Bond and Saunders 2005, 49-50). The establishment of the Labour and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe (LEDRI) in 2003, has seen ZCTU advocating for an interventionist 'developmental state' (Kanyenze et al. 2011, 58) encouraging 'development based on the sharing of resources, equality and solidarity' backed by 'a dynamic, participatory and radical democracy built from below' (Kanyenze et al. 2011, 109); illustrating the leadership's continued emphasis on participatory policy. The labour leadership has not been radicalised, yet a division between its social-democratic ideology and the more free market oriented social-liberalism of the MDC is evident, standing in stark contrast with suggestions of a labour movement co-opted into the MDC's agenda.

These ideological divides were facilitated by labour's continued institutional autonomy from the MDC. Meetings of the ZCTU congress in the early 2000s witnessed heated debates about labour's relationship with the MDC, culminating in a decision to work cooperatively but retain labour's 'own institutional personality and autonomy' (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010, 122). This can be evidenced in labour's collective bargaining and negotiating strategy, with ZCTU negotiating independently with both the MDC and the Mugabe regime, and even continuing to engage with the state during the frequent break-downs in ZANU-PF-MDC negotiations in the early and mid-2000s (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010). Such engagement is not evident within the rest of the MDC's civil society allies, who have followed a strategy of 'outright non-engagement' (Ncube 2010, 167), consistently over-emphasising the negatives of the regime whilst failing to grasp opportunities for positive engagement, resulting in an abysmal lack of policy influence and entrenching polarisation (Ncube 2010). In following an autonomous route, ZCTU has maintained its commitment to offering alternative economic policies notably to the left of the MDCs, reflecting labour's attempts to transcend the polarised politics of post-2000 Zimbabwe.

Despite this, ZCTU has maintained its position within the MDC fold, participating in the 2008 People's Charter initiative alongside the MDC and urban civil society groups, providing strong input on debt, labour and economic injustice alongside the governance concerns emphasised (Ncube 2010). This cooperation reflects labour's continued commitment to its dual agenda of socio-economic and political/civic rights concerns developed during the 1990s, supporting the democratising impulses of the MDC against the political authoritarianism of the Mugabe regime, whilst also opposing its nascent neoliberalism. However, the Global Political Agreement (GPA) of 2008, which installed the power-sharing government, was strongly resisted by ZCTU, who argued that this pact between politicians would not create a people's government and decried the decision to delay a participatory constitutional process until after the creation of the ZANU-PF-MDC government (Chibebe 2008). ZCTU's continued commitment to pro-poor, participatory practice and policy has clearly not been matched by the MDC, who earned the chagrin of numerous civil society groups for 'betraying the struggle for a democratic social change' (Ncube 2010, 149). The labour movement has therefore revealed itself to maintain a dual agenda that transcends the ascension of the MDC into government, nullifying suggestions of a regime-change mentality, and evidencing continued de-polarising, emancipatory potential within the independent labour movement.

3.2 Land Reform and the Labour Multitude: Emergent Possibilities

ZCTU's institutional autonomy from the MDC and its continued dual agenda are positive signs for continued struggles against political authoritarianism and neoliberalism, yet it must be considered that the social-democratic tendencies of the leadership remain whom, whilst undoubtedly to the left of the MDC leadership, nevertheless retain their compliance to neoliberalism first evidenced in the 1990s. Yet by retaining this critical autonomy and their participatory ideals, the labour leadership has ensured the ZCTU remains the institution from which the labour multitude has the greatest potential to offer emancipatory struggle. Interestingly, the majority of the labour multitude

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

has provided continued electoral support for the MDC throughout the 2000s, regardless of their concerns over the incipient neoliberalism evident within the party. To an extent, MDC support from the labour multitude evidences 'the politics of short-term interest as perceived by the majority of workers' (Alexander 2001, 398), in that many perceive the drop in violence that could be gained from the fall of Mugabe. Yet continued grassroots activism suggests that whilst the MDC does not offer a solution to Zimbabwe's problems, for the labour multitude it offers a 'crucial repository of their hope for social change' (Zeilig 2002), underlying the important role ideologically moderate institutions can play in galvanising grassroots activism.

However, the labour movement's continued habitation within the MDC fold has not aided its fraught relationship with land reform and rural struggles. Condemnation of the FTLRP formed a central part of the MDC's early manifesto, and it has offered little beyond a commission to identify unused arable land, itself reflective of earlier ineffective neoliberal policies (Bond 2001). Furthermore, calls from Munyaradzi Gwisai and the ISO for the MDC to lead from the front with radical land reform policies saw him publicly disciplined by Tsvangirai (Gwisai 2009). Labour's association with the MDC has therefore made building rural connections difficult, not least of all because the FTLRP has been violently politicised, with violence against MDC supporters common in rural areas (Dansereau 2001). At the policy level ZCTU has echoed much of the MDC condemnation of the FTLRP, yet it has also attempted to engage constructively with it, emphasising the negative impact land reform had on farm workers, many of whom lost their livelihoods and were treated like 'traitors' for working on white farms (Felisizwe Silundika and Besada 2012). Unfortunately the organisational failures of unionism among farm workers noted previously has left ZCTU unable to strengthen solidarity with farm workers, with the 2000s seeing GAPWUZ fragment into a number of small, financially unviable organisations (Tandon 2001). As such, with the onset of polarisation, labour's inability to connect urban and rural struggles in the 1990s appears to have beset further problems for such initiatives in the new millennium.

Despite these problems, labour policy and its pragmatic positioning as a critical partner within the MDC opposition movement proffers some potential for de-polarisation and the integration of rural and urban struggles. In 2011, LEDRIZ released an update on *Beyond ESAP* entitled *Beyond the Enclave: Towards a Pro-Poor and Inclusive Development Strategy for Zimbabwe*, in which the ZCTU researchers proffer support for continued land reform, albeit in a different form to the FTLRP. Acquiescing to much academic critique of the FTLRP, *Beyond the Enclave* suggests that future 'agrarian-reform strategy must be supported by a social-protection programme', arguing for an 'inclusive, holistic, decentralized and sustainable' completion of land redistribution with a particular emphasis on farm workers and women (Kanyenze et al, 2011, 109-118). ZCTU has therefore proven itself willing to engage with land reform debates after the FTLRP, and the spread of MDC support has facilitated its increased access to rural areas. Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 saw the Mugabe regime forcibly remove vast numbers of informal workers from urban squats (Raftopoulos 2009), yet had the inadvertent consequence of forcing many informal workers back into rural areas, helping to facilitate the spread of MDC support into ZANU-PF's traditional homeland (Olende 2008). Key MDC wins in rural areas during the 2008 elections indicated the level of discontent towards regime authoritarianism among the rural populace with young voters in particular beginning to represent a pro-MDC generation stretching across the urban-rural divide (Zeilig 2008). ZCTU involvement in the ISO-led Zimbabwe Social Forum, which connects urban and rural actors under a radical agenda (Moyo and Murisa 2008), further demonstrates labour's greater openness to land reform issues than the MDC, and growing opposition support in rural areas provides opportunities for an expanded and de-polarised labour multitude. This vindicates the ZCTU leadership's critical alliance with the MDC, potentiating radical struggle from within the opposition movement.

3.3 Conclusion

From the mid-1990s, ZCTU represented the most influential civil society organisation in Zimbabwe, embodying a Social Movement Unionism which drew together urban civil society groups into a formidable urban labour coalition, and facilitated the rise of an empowered rank-and-file which drove forward radical activism and a dual-agenda against political authoritarianism and neoliberalism as part of a broader labour multitude. The internal tensions within ZCTU contributed to an endlessly shifting dynamic, yet both the rank-and-file and the leadership played a central role in the establishment of the MDC and came to be seen as part of the MDC-bloc. However, the neoliberal turn of the new party saw labour forge a critical distance from the MDC, both ideologically and institutionally, whilst retaining its place within the fold of the opposition movement, allowing it to retain its dual-agenda and remain critical of

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

authoritarian and neoliberal tendencies within both political parties. Tensions within civil society and labour's failure to connect urban and rural struggles had limited its emancipatory potential, yet labour's greater openness to rural struggles and its continued place within the opposition movement in the 2000s have offered opportunities for it to capitalise on the expansion of MDC support within rural areas. It has been noted that the emancipatory struggle in Zimbabwe is most evident within a radicalised labour multitude, and the leadership's retention of its participatory approach and principled dual-agenda, alongside the expanding MDC support base, may well help ensure the continuation of this emancipatory struggle into the new millennium.

4. The Labour Multitude: Challenges and Prospects

It is apparent that the greatest potential for emancipatory struggle in Zimbabwe lies with an expanded labour multitude, reaching into rural areas and engaging in radical mass activism against political authoritarianism and neoliberalism. However, despite this potential and the promising steps towards it taken by the labour leadership, the twin forces of political authoritarianism and neoliberalism have acted to stymie labour-based activism, and may prevent the labour multitude forwarding an emancipatory struggle. It is therefore necessary to consider the challenges posed by these two malignant forces upon the labour movement, and its potential for overcoming them. Trade unions across the world are commonly argued to be in crisis, with declining union membership, fragmented class identities and anti-union legislation representing hallmarks of the neoliberal era (Munck 2004). Particularly in the global south, this neoliberal attack on labour has commonly been accompanied by violent political repression, making effective union organising and grassroots activism appear all the more difficult. The Zimbabwean labour movement can therefore act as a contemporary case study of labour activism in a neoliberal and authoritarian setting, evidencing the ways in which labour movements can adapt and remain relevant even in the most difficult circumstances in the global south, whilst offering an emancipatory struggle against both domestic political authoritarianism and neoliberalism.

4.1 Political Authoritarianism – Solidarity against State Repression

Polarisation in Zimbabwe saw an exponential increase in state repression against opposition forces. The state has been fundamentally restructured and militarised, with any civil or public servants deemed supporters of the opposition threatened, removed and replaced – commonly by military personnel (Raftopoulos 2009) – whilst the Central Intelligence Office (CIO) has meted out 'detentions, beating and threats' (Bond and Saunders 2005, 50; Felisizwe Silundika and Besada 2012) against opposition figures, including labour leaders (Pollack 2011). Continued mass activism by the labour multitude has become increasingly problematic, with successive legislation – including the Political Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in 2002 – used to prohibit labour forums and meetings, restrict access to and presentation of politically volatile information and legitimise the arrest, detention and torture of numerous opposition activists (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010; McCandless 2011). Such activities continue under the power-sharing government (ITUC 2012). Zimbabwe's laws already made it practically impossible for legal strikes to take place (Madhuku 2001), but the systematic violence enacted during the 2000s has worn down the opposition with mass activism only seeming to increase the severity of the regime's response, resulting in a loss of impetus behind mass activism and a drop in attendance levels (Raftopoulos 2009; McCandless 2011). By the mid-2000s therefore, 'the public strikes and stay-aways deployed so effectively in the 1990s became much more difficult to organise' (Raftopoulos 2009, 226) and the labour movement appeared to have lost much of its impetus.

Furthermore, the regime's authoritarian tendencies also extended to more insidious attempts to fracture the opposition movement. In 2000, the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU) was registered by the regime as an alternative labour centre, intended as 'a vehicle for anti-ZCTU campaigning' (Rich Dorman 2003, 860) from within labour's ranks. Pro-ZANU-PF figures had been evident within ZCTU (Rich Dorman 2003), and ZFTU was able to create a number of splinter unions despite its reliance upon state funding and weak shop-floor presence (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010). The possibility of even a small minority of the rank-and-file turning towards authoritarian government to appease their grievances reflects the very real need for ZCTU to 'prevent both externally and internally induced fragmentation and to maintain internal cohesion' (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010, 127). Whilst ZCTU has certainly weathered the threat of the ZFTU, remaining by far the largest labour centre and the largest civic

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

organisation in Zimbabwe (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010), a contested leadership transition at the 2011 Congress saw ex-President Lovemore Matombo set up an independent ZCTU Congress, creating a rift within organised labour (ZCTU 2012). The internal factionalism apparent within the ZCTU is indicative of the pressure that political authoritarianism has created, widening internal fault-lines through consistent violence and ongoing crisis. However, rank-and-file support has remained with the official congress under Japhet Moyo, and Matombo's case for unfair dismissal was roundly dismissed by the High Court, who ordered him to desist referring to his splinter-union activities as ZCTU (ZCTU 2012). Internal labour cohesion has therefore remained relatively resolute, represented best in labour's unified condemnation of the 2008 Global Political Agreement and the power-sharing government. Considering the interdependent relationship of the ZCTU and the labour multitude, this maintenance of solidarity within a strong labour centre is particularly important.

The panicked repression of the regime has undoubtedly stymied activism at the grassroots, but the largely flawed transitional government has 'created a new operational context for civil society' (McCandless 2011, 196), with current reports suggesting an improvement in the humanitarian situation and reduced political violence (OCHA 2012; McCandless 2011). This context has allowed a cautious broadening of space for activism. However, the power-sharing government has also begun a gradual normalisation with global capital, and when considering Zimbabwe's industrialised economy, 'there is likely to be an unholy rush back to a country very recently excoriated in almost ritualistic terms' (Chan 2012). Nevertheless, as O'Brien adroitly explains: 'if the expected benefits of political stabilisation and taming hyperinflation do not reach quickly Zimbabwe's long-suffering people, then Tsvangirai may very well have his own crisis of legitimacy' (O'Brien 2008), and the labour movement has placed itself well to drive resistance. Indeed, the global financial crisis has revitalised the neoliberal critique in many parts of the world (Beckman and Sachikonye 2010), and the anti-neoliberal/anti-authoritarian uprisings of the Arab Spring have given both the labour multitude and the Zimbabwean elite food for thought. Gwisai and prominent members of the ISO were arrested in 2011 for holding a meeting in which they watched and discussed footage from the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings; their arrests, torture and subsequent convictions for 'conspiracy to commit public violence' (Olende 2012) attest to the government's fear of internal dissent. Equally, the strong support for the six ISO figures during their trials is indicative of a renewed activism at the grassroots, with protests occurring against both these blatant acts of illiberal, authoritarian government and the continued negative consequences of Zimbabwe's neoliberal revolution – such as seen in a recent five-day civil service strike (Socialist Worker 2012).

The potential for renewed activism from the labour multitude is further strengthened by significant ties to the union movement in South Africa. As the most dominant economy in the Southern African region, South Africa has long boasted a powerful union movement in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) which has been politically tied to the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party in a Tripartite Alliance since the end of apartheid. Solidarity with ZCTU has been strong from COSATU who have held numerous protests on the border and sent delegations in 2004 and 2005, both of which were forcibly expelled (Bond and Saunders 2005). COSATU's engagement with ZCTU's struggle was met with ridicule from a South African government that has remained cautiously supportive of the Mugabe regime, reflecting a growing alienation between the labour centre and the government in South Africa (Larmer 2008). COSATU's distance from and attempts to pressure the government on this issue is particularly important when considering South Africa's leading role as a mediator in Zimbabwe through the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Furthermore, not only labour but social movements in Zimbabwe have forged ties with South Africa, reflecting 'strenuous...efforts to build regional solidarity amongst trade unions and social movements in solidarity with Zimbabwean counterparts' during the 2000s (Larmer 2008). COSATU has long reflected the SMU model seen in Zimbabwe and whilst labour remains central to South Africa's grassroots activism, it has facilitated ties with a broader labour multitude within civil society, a number of which have embraced Zimbabwe's struggle – most noticeably the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum in South Africa (ZSF-SA 2009).

Predictions of an Arab spring style uprising across Southern Africa remain wildly optimistic, but it is nevertheless true that the region holds perhaps the greatest potential for sustained mass activism and regional solidarity in sub-Saharan Africa (Campbell 2008). Union and civil society power is uneven across Southern Africa, yet it has witnessed a strengthening of independent social movements in the past decade (Larmer 2008) creating opportunities for regional solidarity which became particularly evident in the Arms Shipment Campaign of 2008. On the 14th April

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

2008, in the midst of violent elections in Zimbabwe, a Chinese container ship docked in Durban holding 77 tonnes of armaments headed for Zimbabwe. In an impressive show of solidarity, the rank-and-file dockworkers of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) refused to handle the goods, and a civil society campaign soon ensued – backed by the International Transport Workers' Federation (IFT) and the International Network on Small Arms (IANSA) – which ensured the arms could not travel across South Africa. Following the ship's departure, the IFT mobilised its resources to track the ship, and an array of unions, social movements and NGOs in Mozambique, Namibia and Angola acted to prevent the armaments being unloaded. International unions and civil society campaigns aided this cause, yet most vital was the grassroots activism of workers and civil society campaigners who maintained local control over the campaign (Larmer 2008). The ZCTU leadership has long advocated regional solidarity (Yeros 2001) and this holds real possibilities for facilitating rank-and-file solidarity across Southern Africa with fruitful links to a wider labour multitude within the ranks of social movements, churches, students and NGOs.

4.2 Neoliberalism – Informality and Labour Activism

The cumulative impact of liberalisation and economic crisis has led to serious poverty and hardship for the majority of the Zimbabwean population, connected to the informalisation of the economy. The informal economy refers to 'all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements' (ILO 2009, III), including subsistence agriculture, home-based manufacturing and even workers on short-term, casualised contracts in the formal sector. All of these forms of informal economic activity have become increasingly common across the global south in the neoliberal era, connected to mass retrenchments, economic retraction and the casualisation of formal employment, and are dominated by women and young people (ILO 2009). Whilst informal workers are not necessarily worse off than formal sector employees (Barchiesi 2010), especially in a situation where formal sector workers are poor themselves, informalisation is commonly connected to high poverty levels. Ascertaining poverty levels is a fraught exercise in Zimbabwe, but recent figures suggest that approximately 10 of the 13 million Zimbabweans are living in poverty (Mpofu 2011). Furthermore, working in the *kukiya-kiya* (informal) economy has become not only common but a widely accepted reality (Mpofu 2011) with only 6% of the population in formal sector employment (Kanyenze et al. 2011).

Informalisation creates serious problems for the labour movement, whose rank-and-file is constituted of dwindling numbers of formal sector workers. It is worth noting that only around 16 per cent of the workforce was unionised at the height of labour activism in the late-1990s, yet the first two decades since independence had seen a steadily increasing number of unionised workers (Sachikonye 2001) – a trend reversed by informalisation. The neoliberal era has made it a necessity for unions to engage with informal workers (Gallin 2001), as this appears to be the only way to ensure mass, grassroots activism and the continued influence of unions. But informal economic activities are often viewed as a survival mechanism, making mass activism difficult as the poor are focussed on attempts to shore up their livelihoods (Raftopoulos 2009). Any resistance activity from actors in the informal economy is commonly seen as either singular and atomised, or resigned to defensive, unorganised mob action against state repression (Bayat 1997; Bayat 2000). However, this understanding of informal actors has come under scrutiny, with Lindell's (2010a) research demonstrating organised, collective action amongst informal workers across Africa, signifying a strong current of activism within the informal sector stretching from the local to the transnational. When considering the long history of activism in Zimbabwe and the contemporary evidence of this noted, there is ample reason to assume that activism equally exists in Zimbabwe's extensive informal economy.

However, the potential for activism among informal workers does not automatically mean they will mobilise within the labour multitude. The informal economy entails 'a multiplicity of class formations, not a unified class around a single contradiction between capital and labour' (Lindell 2010b, 210). This point has been noted by ZCTU, who singled out the lack of separation between employer and employee in the informal sector as a major stumbling block towards labour organising (Chitambara 2006). This means that 'formal and informal workers...have different—or even opposing—interests that may be difficult to reconcile' (Lindell 2010b, 214), suggesting that even if effective organising were possible, workers in the informal economy may not be prepared to engage in union, or broader opposition activities. These problems are further compounded by labour's ambiguous relationship with the informal economy. Unions in Africa have commonly perceived the informal economy as a transitory phenomenon, adopting

The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

strategies aimed at the re-formalisation of labour (Chinguno 2011). These attempts have not been particularly successful (Friedman 2012), as the re-formalisation approach sees unions insist on organising the informal sector and integrating it into formal-sector union concerns. These strategies are 'irrelevant in the African context where the informal economy is both dominant and a permanent aspect of the economic landscape' (Chinguno 2011, 382).

Nevertheless, many informal organisations, particularly at the grassroots level, are identified as lacking in mass resistance capacity; being without the institutional strength to offer a larger-scale challenge to governments and global capital (Lindell 2010a). These difficulties could well be rectified by unions, with their greater organisational capacity and experience in mobilisation (Heidenreich 2007). Efforts to seek cooperation with existing informal sector organisations or to establish and work cooperatively with specific institutions designed to represent informal worker issues within the labour movement could therefore bear positive results. ZCTU's early attempts at engaging with the informal economy were largely aimed at re-formalisation (Chitambara 2006), yet a workshop with the ILO led to the creation of the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA) in 2004. ZCIEA aims to 'bridge the gap between the trade union movement and informal economy workers and to build the capacity of informal workers to secure economic and social justice' (Chinguno 2011, 379), and a claimed membership of approximately 2 million suggests it is the largest mass-based organisation in Zimbabwe (Chinguno 2011). A memorandum of understanding exists between ZCIEA and ZCTU, consolidating a bipartite relationship signifying cooperation as opposed to co-optation (Chitambara 2006). The informal workers of the ZCIEA have access to ZCTU's resources, including lobbyists and the strength of affiliate unions, alongside ZCTU's research arm LEDRIZ, which has provided education and training on socio-economic rights to informal workers and added its research strength to their campaigns (Pollack 2011; Pollack and Nierenberg 2010). Evidence suggests that the ZCIEA is creating greater opportunities, particularly for women, to take part in civic campaigning and activism despite their commonly abject circumstances (Wilson 2010). The ZCIEA-ZCTU cooperative therefore holds great potential for mass activism from an expanded labour multitude in Zimbabwe.

5. Conclusion

The labour movement remains not only a viable, but a vital force within Zimbabwe. The continued activism of a radicalised rank-and-file connected to a broader labour multitude has been emphasised as vital for emancipatory struggle in Zimbabwe, and despite the challenges posed by political authoritarianism and neoliberalism, there are a number of encouraging signs. Labour has retained its internal cohesion whilst fostering greater solidarity across the Southern African region, with the continued presence of rank-and-file activism even during the horrific repression of the 2000s offering hope for continued struggles in the more peaceful climate of the power-sharing government. Equally, ZCTU has proven itself uniquely adept at fostering further solidarity within the expansive informal sector, facilitating the empowerment of informal sector workers even in the most abject of circumstances.

The Zimbabwean labour movement is certainly battered and bruised, and its own internal contradictions between a social-democratic leadership and the radical agenda of the rank-and-file may yet create problems. The elections of 2013 (Tendi 2012) may spell further bruises for the labour movement and its allies, and if the MDC wins it is possible that it may attempt to forge a social contract agreement with ZCTU leadership. This is of course conjecture, but an MDC government would create another new operating context for labour and civil society and would require further research into labour's role and influence. Nevertheless, if ZCTU fails to mount a radical challenge to the MDC's neoliberalism and the economic abjection of the multitude continues, then this marginalisation may lead to a rank-and-file movement operating outside of the labour centre. Yet for the time being, the strength of ZCTU as an organising structure, and the hopes the labour multitude have attached to the MDC place these organisations at the centre of activism from the labour multitude, providing the greatest potential for emancipatory struggle and a democratic, anti-neoliberal Zimbabwe.

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[1] The Nationalist Left is most synonymous with the works of Sam Moyo, Paris Yeros and Tendai Murisa.

[2] The Internationalist Left is synonymous with the works of Brian Raftopoulos, Patrick Bond and David Moore.

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About the author:

Joe Sutcliffe is an Associate Editor of e-IR. He holds a BA (Hons) in International History and International Politics from the University of Sheffield and an MA in Global Development from the University of Leeds. His research interests include sub-Saharan Africa, social and labour movements in the global south, and global development.