

**Will They Ever Learn?  
Worker Representation in Zimbabwe's  
Manufacturing Industry 1980-1998.**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Objectives .....	1
Structure .....	2
Definition of terms .....	5
Summary .....	7
<b>CHAPTER TWO : SHOPFLOOR WORKER REPRESENTATION IN ZIMBABWE</b> .....	9
Worker representation from 1980 .....	10
Existing literature on Zimbabwe.....	15
Broader literature.....	22
Case study.....	37
Outcomes of case study .....	40
Worker consciousness in Africa.....	51
Summary .....	56
<b>CHAPTER THREE : HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS UP TO 1980</b> .....	61
Theoretical perspectives .....	62
The African context .....	68
Trajectory one : colonial and UDI policy .....	75
Trajectory two : pre-independence black trade unionism .....	78
Trajectory three : nationalist struggle versus worker organization .....	85
Summary .....	88
<b>CHAPTER FOUR : POST INDEPENDENCE WORKER REPRESENTATION</b> .....	92
Labour law and worker representation .....	93
Macro-level trade union organization .....	103
Economic factors, government arrogance and trade unionism.....	106
Micro-level trade union weakness .....	119
Summary .....	126
<b>CHAPTER FIVE : CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	129
New ideas.....	131
Caveats and lessons for Zimbabwe today .....	137
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
Appendix I Workers Committee Guidelines .....	153
Appendix II Research methodology, design and process .....	157
Appendix III Background information on factories and trade union.....	160
Appendix IV Workers questionnaire .....	165
Appendix V Guidelines for semi-structured discussions.....	169
Appendix VI Analysis of questionnaire data .....	170
<b>GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	173

## CHAPTER : ONE

### Introduction

Workers in Zimbabwe have had an unquestionably raw deal, from both the pre-independence and post independence governments. They have also had a tough time from their own trade unions, primarily because of the paucity of rank-and-file organising and strengthening. It is also the case that contemporary workers and their problems have been neglected by the academic community. This dissertation is about highlighting the raw deal that Zimbabwe's workers face, and about filling some gaps in the academic coverage of this issue. In particular, the following pages highlight how Zimbabwean trade unions have failed their members by maintaining the *status quo* at the shopfloor micro-level yet, contradictorily, have acted as an indispensable catalysing structure of social and political change at the national macro-level.

### **Objectives**

This dissertation has five objectives. Firstly, to investigate the nature of the different levels of worker representation in the Zimbabwe manufacturing sector. How, and on what basis are they constituted? What are the structures through which representation takes place and what is the nature and extent of the accountability of these structures? Secondly, we will investigate the limits of this representation and reasons for these limits as well as also investigating who really does, and does not, benefit from these structures of representation. Thirdly, we will also be examining the extent to which workers' interests are really being served, on the micro-level of the shopfloor and at the national macro-level respectively. A fourth objective will be to develop the theoretical literature particularly as it relates to shopfloor micro-level worker representation in Zimbabwe. A further part of this development of that literature will also be to highlight how important it is to have coherent and strong worker representation structures in Zimbabwe to ensure that the government of the day remains accountable to its citizens. A final objective will be to put forward suggestions as to what can be done to strengthen workers themselves and also, therefore, their ability to represent and defend their own interests.

More than twenty years after independence, what are the factors that could help us to explain the state of contemporary worker representation in Zimbabwe? Why does it appear

to be so endemically weak at the micro-level but, contradictorily, growing in strength and stature at the macro-level?

The overall aim of this dissertation then, is to examine the weaknesses in Zimbabwean worker representation in such a way as to provide a constructive framework within which workers could become stronger, not only as workers but also as citizens.

## **Structure**

The dissertation begins by identifying the nature of worker representation in Zimbabwe. It then goes on to examine pre-independence and post-independence events that provide the basis for explaining the current state of worker representation in that country, and is then followed by the conclusions that can be drawn from this. This is done by going through a time-linked series of events, by stepping back and examining the structures of worker representation - particularly since 1980 - and evaluating their usefulness for workers' day-to-day needs as well as their potential as structures for organising change that would benefit workers as a whole.

Following the introductory chapter, the objective of Chapter Two will be to establish the exact nature of worker representation at the shopfloor micro-level. We will do this in two ways: firstly through a survey and analysis of the literature on worker representation and secondly, through a case study of clothing-industry workers from the manufacturing sector.

In the process of analysing how manufacturing-sector workers have been inconsistently served by the different structures of representation (shopfloor Workers Committees and trade unions) we will also examine the changes that have taken place since the carrying out of the baseline case study. Broadly, the original case study confirmed two things. Firstly at the micro-level, that to all intents and purposes the workers committee was simply a communication channel between management and workers. And partly because shopfloor workers' awareness and organisation was weak (because of the virtual day-to-day absence of an effective trade union) it was inevitable that in its operation and function it was completely dominated and influenced by management perspectives, priorities and decisions. Secondly, in relation to shopfloor workers' consciousness in the wider civic and political arena beyond the workplace, the baseline case study also showed similar worker dis-empowerment, ignorance and dis-engagement from their own trade union and from participation in these arenas. But six years after this baseline case study was carried out, a

very different and much worse socio-economic and political context exists in Zimbabwe and workers' organised involvement in the wider civic and political arena has increased dramatically.

Chapter Three builds upon this case study and literature review by providing a historical examination and analysis of labour organisation during the colonial and UDI period<sup>1</sup>. How does the unique nature of Zimbabwean history account for weak worker representation? This chapter charts the overwhelming influence of the pre-independence liberation struggle, on the profile and direction of the trade union movement in Zimbabwe. This historical analysis is necessary to examine the genesis of collective resistance and trade unionism in order to be able to properly assess and analyse the nature of worker representation in contemporary Zimbabwe.

After gathering and analysing this evidence we hope to make clear that the roots of post-independence weakness of shopfloor representation lie in the earlier stages of Zimbabwe's anti-colonialist struggle. These roots lie not only in this struggle's explicitly military direction and emphasis, but also in its anti-grassroots-empowerment and consequently authoritarian approach. This commandist approach essentially formed the framework and basis of the new state's attitudes and functioning, following the attainment of independence in 1980. Thus it was seen as entirely legitimate to subvert any organisations or structures of shopfloor workers, or of other grassroots citizens such as peasants, agricultural labourers, miners etc, for the achievement of state objectives as defined by the ruling elite. In the post-independence period, it was therefore not in the interests of this ruling elite to encourage and enable autonomous and strong grassroots worker organisation structures - just as earlier, it was not in the interests of the military hierarchy who formed this same elite during the liberation struggle, to lay emphasis on, and devote human resources to strengthening urban trade union structures.

Chapter Four follows on in a similar manner from Chapter Two, with an account and analysis of the post-independence period. It describes the developments in worker representation, organisation and activism within a progressively deteriorating economic and political context in Zimbabwe. This chapter thus completes the foundation on which we can make an informed assessment of the current state of worker representation in Zimbabwe.

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<sup>1</sup> Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by which Southern Rhodesia illegally broke away from Britain, the colonial power at the time. The UDI period spans from 1965-1980.

Finally, Chapter Five will then draw all this together by considering how our work has contributed to existing academic knowledge and understanding of worker representation not only in Zimbabwe, but in many other contexts as well. One of the main contributions of this work has been the formulation of a new framework which classifies worker representation in Zimbabwe as occurring at the micro-level and the macro-level. A further contribution is that this framework can also be used as a way of locating, classifying and evaluating the nature and strength of worker representation in many contexts other than those of Zimbabwe. Being able to classify worker representation structures through this framework enables the analyst to have clear pointers as to where areas of weakness may lie and therefore which areas need change and strengthening.

The final chapter will also engage with developments that have taken place in Zimbabwe both at shopfloor and national level since this dissertation's cut-off date of 1998. It will also address important caveats as well as possible solutions that should be taken into account by the trade union movement and also civil society organisations in any future dispensation following the possible removal of the current Zanu PF government in Zimbabwe.

### **Definition of terms**

Since worker representation is such a broad concept and can therefore be open to a variety of interpretations, it would be useful to clarify briefly what is meant in the context of this dissertation by the term 'worker representation'. In the most technical sense, it refers specifically to the structures which exist, at least nominally, to represent, and in some cases defend, shopfloor workers interests. In Zimbabwe there are three structures provided for by law. Two of those structures were and still are state-driven creations: the enterprise-based *Workers Committee* and the sectorally-based *National Employment Council*. The third structure is the sectoral *trade union*. Each of these structures has as one of its ostensibly most important objectives, the protection of the interests of shopfloor-workers. In this dissertation we will be paying particular attention to the nature of representation that takes place at the shopfloor through the workers committee, as well as that which takes place at the national macro-level of the trade unions.

There is a further aspect of 'worker representation' as it applies in this Zimbabwean study and that is the 'overlap' in two concepts which are sometimes seen as being somewhat separate: worker participation and worker representation. One of the narrower perspectives

sees worker participation as consisting only of those activities which provide a channel for workers to participate in the processes exclusively connected with production on the shopfloor. An equally narrow perspective of worker representation, sees it as being purely trade union negotiations at the shopfloor, industrial or national level.

But worker participation and worker representation can be seen as part of a wider concept of industrial democracy and, depending whether it is from the perspective of the worker or the employer, it takes on a difference in emphasis: the emphasis is on representation for workers and (somewhat less clearly) on participation for employers. Thus it is possible for industrial democracy - in the form of cosmetic work humanisation schemes, or incorporation of worker representatives into certain areas of decision-making - to be an important strategy of industrial capital to regain control by sharing it. Conversely, in the sense of workers control of production, industrial democracy may be the ultimate aim of class struggle. Thus there is a certain tension in the different perspectives around what constitutes genuine worker representation and the extent to which worker participation in the representation structures really does lead to the effective forwarding of their interests - and it is no less a preoccupation for this dissertation.

Let us examine briefly the conflation of these two concepts. This is important because the drawbacks and positive aspects relating to worker participation in general, also apply to a large degree to worker representation through participation on the shopfloor, particularly as it applies to the manufacturing sector in Zimbabwe.

Rogers and Streeck (1994) assess worker representation through shopfloor participation as a 'second channel of industrial relations'. This 'second channel' consists of shopfloor-based institutions for worker representation (Workers Committees, for example) that have functions distinct from, though not necessarily in competition with, those of trade unions. In conducting a comparative review of workplace representation in nine countries, Rogers and Streeck highlight the close interconnection between workplace representation and participation, particularly where unions are weak or not (directly) present at the workplace - as is already the case in Zimbabwe. They conclude that these worker representation functions are usually performed by shopfloor structures such as Workers Committees. The purpose of these Workers Committees is to give workers 'a voice in governance of the shopfloor and the firm, and to facilitate communication and cooperation between management and workers on production-related matters'.<sup>i</sup>



In the first days of newly-independent statehood, the Zimbabwe government had apparently lofty aspirations for these shopfloor-based committees, when it expressed its hope that workers participation, through the establishment of shopfloor Workers Committees, would develop into worker self-management. This dissertation will argue that it is impossible for workers to have 'a voice in governance of the firm' through structures that are, at the outset inherently unable to deliver this kind of power or influence. We will also argue that in order for workers to have any meaningful influence or power on the shopfloor they, as a specific constituency have to have uniformly strong structures particularly at the micro-level and the macro-level. And that unless this strength and coherence exists at these levels, a consistent and sustained defence and advancement of their interests is unlikely to take place.

## **Summary**

The central thesis of this dissertation is that the profoundly uneven quality, strength and depth of worker representation in Zimbabwe has roots that can be traced back to destructive colonial and UDI policies. But an equally important factor that has contributed significantly to post-independence weakness of worker representation, was the decision taken during the pre-independence liberation struggle, to concentrate all resources on a rural military war at the expense of building up and mobilising (urban) worker organisation. Both of these factors combined with an aggressively authoritarian post-independence government and, as far as the clothing sub-sector is concerned, a dis-organised trade union have resulted in an abiding weakness at the shopfloor micro-level, of both the workers themselves and of their structures of representation in the sub-sector.

Thus, to summarise: as will be seen in the coming chapters, after identifying the nature of worker representation, and explaining its limitations through historical and contemporary investigation, manufacturing workers at the shopfloor micro-level anyway, have not been well served through their structures of representation. As the final chapter will point out, the only way to begin to rectify this situation is through a radical change of perspective on the part of the trade union hierarchy. This change in perspective requires, among other things, a move away from the trade union's current, excessively bureaucratic approach to one that places the technical and psychological empowerment of the rank-and-file membership at the centre of everything. The resultant strengthening of workers at the shopfloor micro-level could then provide a more solid base from which to complement and buttress the activities of the umbrella trade union body at the national macro-level.

## CHAPTER : TWO

### Shopfloor Worker Representation in Zimbabwe

The focus of this chapter will be worker representation in Zimbabwe from the beginning of the post independence period in 1980. We will be setting out to identify and describe the nature of that representation in Zimbabwe particularly as it relates to the micro-level at the shopfloor, as well as analysing and assessing its strength and depth at this level. The purpose of this analysis is to provide a basis which will enable us later on, to consider possible ways forward in the area of strengthening, at shopfloor level, representation of workers' position as well as the defence of their rights and interests.

We will be doing this firstly by briefly analysing the institutional arrangements concerning worker representation since 1980. Secondly we will be considering the relevant literature on worker representation that has emanated from Zimbabwe itself, so as to establish some perspectives about the specific characteristics of micro-level shopfloor worker representation that exist in Zimbabwe. And we will then go on to review literature and analyses from elsewhere in the world, with the emphasis being on African countries and, more particularly on South Africa. This emphasis on Africa in our literature review is relevant because Zimbabwe's historical experience as one of Britain's African colonies which subsequently became a sovereign state in common with other African states. The specific inclusion of perspectives from South Africa is relevant and appropriate partly because of the physical proximity of Zimbabwe and South Africa and partly because of the marked differences that exist - in spite of a relatively similar context - in the capacity and strength of their respective structures of worker representation, with shopfloor workers in Zimbabwe being markedly weaker, less coherent and therefore significantly less empowered. Our theoretical analysis however does not emerge exclusively from an African context. Rather it is situated in a much less restricted space, both temporally and geographically, ranging from Gramsci's early-twentieth century perspectives to those of British and European analysts and commentators almost a century later.

Finally, in order to develop the analyses from the literature and see if they are supported by the experience of Zimbabwe, as well as to get a more vivid picture of the situation on the shopfloor, we will be considering the outcomes from our own case study from the clothing industry which forms an important part of the manufacturing sector. The case study was carried out over a staggered period beginning with the baseline study in 1996, and which

was followed up at a later stage with updating-interviews with key informants from across the sub-sector. Several years later the socio-economic and political landscape has changed by a significant order of magnitude. Sustained worker organisation and activism has contributed to significant change at the national macro-level of political mobilisation. On the other hand, based on information gathered during the second stage of the case study it seems that the micro-level shopfloor context has remained relatively unchanged.

### **Representation of shopfloor workers in Zimbabwe from 1980**

During the years after independence in 1980, worker representation has taken place at micro-level through Workers Committees on the shopfloor, and through sub-sectoral National Employment Councils (NEC) at the meso-level. This latter structure, staffed by a small secretariat, is composed of trade union officials and employers from the sub-sector. Initially the nature and depth of NEC meetings was severely circumscribed by government's unilateral fixing of minimum and maximum wage levels. Ironically, this government predominance was also buttressed by trade union weakness which failed to exploit the space beyond narrow wage-bargaining issues. The trade unions had neither the clarity nor the coherence to formulate non-wage demands such as subsidised transport and canteens, housing loans and so on. And even if they had had the necessary coherence, they lacked the rank-and-file strength to back up and support these demands.

Zimbabwe was not untypical of African countries at independence in terms of worker organisation. It is by now almost a truism that trade union organisations, particularly in African countries, are expected by the new state to play a dualistic role: primarily that of supporter of the state in whatever development policies it chooses, and secondarily (but still within the latter context) that of representatives of formal sector workers. A study of industrial relations in French-speaking West Africa shows that many disputes are settled within national party structures. Legal strikes are almost non-existent and spontaneous actions are quickly put down by government and union action at top level.<sup>ii</sup> Union leaders have joined in "responsible participation" and the role of the unions is largely to provide workers with education and vocational training. Union power is weakened by the fact that over fifty per cent of workers in French West Africa and Togo are employed in the state and parastatal sector where complex conciliation procedures exist. In these countries the ruling party forced all the unions into a single federation which was then incorporated into the political system. Trade unionists have held important political, legislative and administrative posts in Togo, Benin, Upper Volta, Ivory Coast and Guinea.<sup>iii</sup>

While trade unions in Anglophone countries have more collective bargaining rights than those in Francophone Africa, unionism is also stunted by a combination of incorporation and repression. As West African trade union commentator Wogu Annanaba observed:

Since independence the trade union movement in Africa has had a rough existence. [B]ona fide trade union organisations have ceased to exist in many countries and have been replaced by outfits created or sponsored by governments, politicians or military leaders. Trade unionists have been arrested and jailed without trial, some have been detained for months or years, and some have been shot in cold blood. There are probably more African trade unionists in jail or detention, killed or driven into exile by independent African countries than was the case during the whole period of colonial rule.<sup>iv</sup>

The case of Zimbabwe more or less fits this description, as Musarurwa states, when describing the emergence of the (then new) Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in 1980:

[ZCTU] was in reality a carefully and deliberately modelled product of the new ZANU (PF) government, and marked in every sense the very first attempt by the post-independence government to dominate, blackmail, manipulate and control the labour movement in Zimbabwe, and to secure the unwavering loyalty and obedience to the new regime....of (the) trade union movement.<sup>v</sup>

Keet further amplifies this by correctly describing the systems of labour relations in Zimbabwe as being derived from:

a combination of highly state-regulated industrial relations inherited from the pre-independence regime, with the forms of paternalistic-corporatism typically developed by `marxist-leninist' and many other one-party regimes in Africa.<sup>vi</sup>

This `paternalistic-corporatism' or more accurately `authoritarian corporatism'<sup>vii</sup> has indeed been the hallmark of the state-labour relationship since independence in Zimbabwe, largely because the state has been unwilling to encourage what it has seen as the threat of trade union independence. But an aggravating factor has also been the fact that the trade unions themselves were weak and marginalised at the time of independence, as we will see from a discussion later of the origins and nature of this weakness.

Given the overall pre- and post-independence weakness of organised labour, it is perhaps not surprising that worker representation on the shopfloor, in the form of Workers Committees, has itself been extremely weak. Conceivably, these loci of worker representation could have become strong organs of the trade union on the shopfloor and, as such, mobilisers of workplace organisation for alternative forms of representation and participation as was the case in South Africa in the early seventies.<sup>viii</sup> But in Zimbabwe they did not become strong trade union organs, largely because of a combination of state authoritarian-corporatism and weak trade unions themselves resulting in shopfloor worker representation structures that are far from being able to strongly represent and defend their members' interests.

As we have seen, micro-level worker representation in Zimbabwe takes the form of shopfloor Workers Committees, consisting of representatives elected by the shopfloor on a bi-annual basis. According to the Workers Committee Guidelines "improvements of working and living conditions" and "all matters of mutual interests to the employees and management" are within the remit of the Workers Committee. But the emphasis is clearly on the communication role to prevent and settle disputes. Workers Committees have little legislative backing to challenge management; for example their meetings have to be held outside working hours, and their decisions are not binding on management (see Appendix I for detailed Workers Committee Guidelines).

At the national level, worker representation has proceeded through different phases since the inception of an independent Zimbabwe in 1980. For approximately the first 12 years, until economic restructuring took place around 1990-92, issues relating to worker representation were restricted to discussions about the minimum wage levels set annually by government. These minimum levels were used as a basis for negotiation in the National Employment Councils between the trade union and the employers in each industry. Rarely did the negotiations produce wage agreements that were higher than those set by government. In 1991/92, with the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme and the beginning of trade liberalisation and the deregulation of labour laws, collective bargaining was introduced. Thus employers and workers were "free" to negotiate and set their own wage levels. However this freedom was curtailed by the power vested in the Minister of Finance, in collaboration with the Minister of Labour, to lower or cancel wage agreements deemed to be inflationary.

The deregulation of the labour laws in 1991 introduced a new element into shopfloor worker-representation activities but also undermined the protection that these laws had hitherto afforded. In mid-1992 with the introduction of Statutory Instrument (SI) 391 collective bargaining was limited to enterprise level. Agreements reached on an industry-wide basis by the trade union and National Employment Council were no longer binding on individual employers. It was now left to individual employers or management to negotiate anything from wage levels to retrenchments with the shopfloor-based Workers Committees. These enterprise-based agreements were to take precedence over nationally negotiated agreements, even if the workers came off worse. Formerly, the position was that, in general, the nationally negotiated position would be binding, but if an enterprise-based agreement was more beneficial to workers then that agreement would take precedence. The introduction of SI 391 coincided with an unprecedentedly severe national economic downturn, particularly in the manufacturing sub-sector of the clothing industry where widespread and illegal retrenchments were taking place. These retrenchments were greatly facilitated by weak and intimidated Workers Committees who were not only ignorant of the regulations governing the period of notice and provision of terminal benefits for workers about to be retrenched, but also were hardly in a strong position to stand up to and challenge management decisions, not only because of their own fear of losing their jobs but also because of the disabling power imbalance in the dealings between themselves and management personnel.

Thus, after this brief survey, we have a general picture of an authoritarian-corporatist government in Zimbabwe whose attitudes and policies are significant factors which have undermined the (potential) strengthening of the structures of worker representation and which have, in fact contributed significantly to their weakness at the shopfloor level. We will now go on to a more specific review of the academic literature concerning worker representation in Zimbabwe.

### **Existing literature on worker representation in Zimbabwe**

If we are to uncover the nature of worker representation in Zimbabwe, our first starting point should be a survey of the existing literature. The issue of contemporary worker representation in Zimbabwe has barely featured in any of the international literature relating to African labour studies. Nor has it featured prominently in Zimbabwe itself where recent literature and research has been concentrated on the cultural and historical context of workers' lives. The whole issue of contested terrain at the workplace does not have a high profile in the academic literature of Zimbabwe since the attainment of independence in 1980. More specifically in relation to worker representation on the shopfloor, as has been observed in the 1984 Report of the National Trade Union Survey, 'a thorough analysis of Workers Committees has yet to be carried out'.<sup>ix</sup>

Perhaps in response to this comment, several empirical studies concerning Workers Committees in Zimbabwe were carried out within two or three years following the publishing of this report. Most of these studies have as their frame of reference, one that adopts a traditional industrial relations approach whose central preoccupation is the establishment and maintenance of an optimal environment for the enhancement of maximum profits - and from the dominant, managerial perspective, 'labour' constitutes a major and problematic element in achieving and maintaining that optimal environment.

There is a certain significance in the timing of these studies concerning Workers Committees. It reflects an interest in these 'novel' workplace structures that had been introduced by Zimbabwe's newly independent government. The questions that guided these studies partly related to whether the existence of 'harmonious' working relations on the shopfloor were enhanced by the existence of Workers Committees and partly to the issue of the role that they could actually play in creating industrial democracy at the workplace. Most of these studies also started from a position which was sympathetic to the (new) government's expressed intention that Workers Committees would be the vehicles through which worker participation could develop into worker self-management.<sup>x</sup> It is noteworthy however that none of these studies appears to have questioned the realism of the basic premise that this type of worker participation could in itself deliver a scenario where worker self management would predominate. These studies were also surprisingly uncritical of government's attitude and behaviour towards its public project of strengthening shopfloor workers, and by implication therefore, of their trade unions. After all as we will see in subsequent chapters, the government went on the offensive against workers very soon after it came into office. Perhaps its repressive response to the initial avalanche of strikes could be understood and forgiven as the reactions of a newly independent government caught unawares; but its subsequent actions, which have consistently reinforced the repression of its early days, were clearly telling an entirely different story.

Thus we have four studies of Workers Committees - two concerning a large state-owned parastatal organisation and the others relating to privately-owned mining concerns - all of which were carried out during the first decade after independence.

One of the studies is that of Mutizwa-Mangiza whose concern was to analyse the efficacy of worker participation in decision-making at a state-owned dairy production company. Her aim was to assess the ability of worker participation organs to bring about better worker-management communication, increased productivity, effective handling of grievances, industrial peace and industrial.<sup>xi</sup> Mutizwa-Mangiza concludes that Workers Committees have

succeeded in 'achieving all the governments instructions about enhancing industrial relations in the parastatal' while also stating with some irritation that 'even management's manipulative strategies were successful only because of the Workers Committees'.<sup>xii</sup> According to Mutizwa-Mangiza better worker-management had led to higher productivity and the use of Workers Committees as channels of information and informal grievance-settling machinery had deflected potential conflict which could have resulted in disruption of production. She also observed that worker-management relations were good because the members of the Workers Committees were 'not sufficiently knowledgeable to question management's decisions' nor were they able to understand many of the technical and financial issues 'thus lessening the risk of acrimony'.<sup>xiii</sup>

Thus Mutizwa-Mangiza concludes that ten years after independence, because of 'the government's lack of political commitment to socialism' worker participation organs are still in place but little progress has been made towards worker self-management. 'No incremental changes have been effected to the worker participation organs to give workers a more meaningful role in decision making at enterprise level. Thus instead of worker participation organs leading the transformation to worker self-management, they are now supplementing weak trade unions'.<sup>xiv</sup>

Another study is an examination of Zimbabwe's industrial relations by Maphosa based on his academic research during the period 1981-5 in a mining company north of the capital city, as well as on his own hands-on work knowledge and experience in the sphere of human resources management. His concern is not so much with its history 'nor with the theoretical models on which the government's policy of industrial democracy has been based, but on 'the viability of the Workers Committees and Works Councils in terms of their effectiveness in democratising decision-making in Zimbabwean industry'.<sup>xv</sup> Not surprisingly Maphosa arrives at findings very similar to those of Mutizwa-Mangiza. He found widespread evidence of the problems arising from poor education on the part of members of Workers Committees. In one study that he carried out in 1985 he documents that out of a total of 40 representatives in the Workers Committee, only five had had any secondary schooling, while twenty had not proceeded beyond primary education and fifteen had no formal schooling at all. This relatively low level of education among workers' representatives made it almost impossible for them to understand, let alone challenge, financial and other decisions made by the company's management.<sup>xvi</sup>

During his research in 1981-2 while worker participation was still being introduced, Maphosa found that 'workers' desire for participation and influence was considerably higher than



management's acceptance of such participation and was also higher than the government guidelines permitted.' Most workers and Workers Committees wanted to participate in management decision-making particularly affecting salaries and wages and working conditions, while management `tended to want to limit worker participation to issues relating to the maintenance of discipline and ways and means of improving communication and mutual understanding between management and workers.'<sup>xvii</sup> For Maphosa it was clear that management perspectives have had their way, greatly assisted by an authoritarian government whose fear and hostility towards strengthening worker organisation became pronounced soon after independence. This is obviously disappointing to Maphosa who seems to have believed that capitalism in Zimbabwe was actually at the bottom of it all because `during the first ten years of post-independence Zimbabwe, the government's flirtation with socialism seemed destined to overturn the country's capitalist institutions of ownership and control and its attendant labour relations system but...[o]perating within a capitalist economy resulted in the Zimbabwean `socialist' government coming terms with the capitalist order.'<sup>xviii</sup>

Another study was carried out in 1986 by Shadur, a management studies specialist. While giving a broad view of contemporary labour relations, Shadur investigated Workers Committees largely from a management perspective and not from the perspective of the worker. His analysis saw `workers and management as having fundamental conflicts of interests', which is a somewhat simplistic truism.<sup>xix</sup> Shadur makes no attempt to acknowledge, or integrate into his analysis, the marked power inequity between a well-resourced management which has the ultimate right to `hire and fire' and the weak, disorganised, poorly resourced and ill-informed shopfloor workforce whose only weapon is strike action – which is in any case illegal in terms of the Labour Relations Act (1985). In fact, the bulk of Shadur's investigation concentrates on the attitudes and practices of management as perceived by management itself and pays much less attention to the perceptions of the members of Workers Committees.

In Shadur's study, the central thesis is that the government's paternalistic labour strategy has had a major and beneficial impact on national labour relations. Shadur disagrees with accounts 'that suggest that the Mugabe government acted on behalf of capital to repress strikes, control trade unions and regulate labour relations to the benefit of employers'. On the contrary, he believes that 'the government attempted to benefit workers, but its policies also took into account goals for national economic growth'.<sup>xx</sup>

Shadur also sees Workers Committees as a constructive alternative to direct trade union involvement because, according to his perspective, the main factor undermining Workers Committees is the slow-performing, external macro-economic context. Trade union training, strengthening and worker empowerment do not enter his frame of reference at all. And from this perspective, as well as being combined with economic problems, he sees these workers as being in eternal, (unfair) but weak conflict with management over impossible demands for higher wages and fringe benefits. In Shadur's view, the Workers Committee is condemned to continuing weakness until the economy improves and until its members gain some specific technical expertise.

It is doubtful as Phimister witheringly observes, whether the incremental gains in scholarly understanding [emerging from Shadur's research] are sufficient to balance Shadur's 'retreat from an overall appreciation of Zimbabwe's political economy'. His perspective which 'views corporatism as a middle way between capitalism and socialism hardly begins to capture the reality of a largely powerless working class whose numbers and real wages are smaller now than at independence in 1980'. Phimister correctly draws attention to the fact that the problems inherent in this stance are compounded by Shadur's failure 'to specify the nature of the state in Zimbabwe and...to analyse the balance of class forces and how these changed over time. He goes on to conclude that Shadur's attempt to invoke 'a vacuous comparison with patriarchy [in an effort to explain the state's barely disguised authoritarianism] is a self-serving ideology which might not appeal to ordinary men, never mind women, and which apparently the author has never considered'.<sup>xxi</sup>

Nangati shares Phimister's class-oriented perspective when he argues that the government policy to create a 'favourable investment climate' (quoting from Republic of Zimbabwe, Transitional Development Plan, 1982) entailed the maintenance of industrial peace 'which means control of the workers in their struggles 'against capital'. Workers Committees are unable therefore to challenge existing relations of production, and this means that 'the new participatory institutions serve as instruments for the exploitation of the worker' and that 'Workers Committees in enterprises that are not yet organized tend to weaken the influence of the trade union'.<sup>xxii</sup> Several other commentators share this view that not only have Workers Committees achieved little in terms of democratising the workplace, they have also tended to undermine the trade unions.<sup>xxiii</sup> Shadur's reply to this is that Workers Committees in Zimbabwe were never capable of achieving much in terms of worker representation or participation in management decision-making 'because they were not designed to achieve this', their primary function being that of industrial relations bodies'. Shadur further disagrees that they undermined trade unions, asserting instead that Workers Committees played an

important supplementary role to trade unions which were weak and unable to adequately represent their members, or workers in general.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Taking this theme slightly further, an editorial comment in a Zimbabwean personnel and industrial relations journal describes the purpose of Workers Committees (somewhat idealistically) as 'seeking to redress worker alienation - a major cause of industrial unrest and diminished productivity - and to promote human dignity within a framework of free enterprise and social justice'.<sup>xxv</sup> Later in the same journal on the subject of industrial democracy and Workers Committees, a comment is made that in Zimbabwe 'participation [in these Workers Committees] is largely confined to worker / management communication and grievance handling...[T]he defect resides in the fact that the government has initiated Workers Committees, but it has allowed managers the right to sanction decisions without intervention. Workers in Zimbabwe have the unenviable task of being required to negotiate within a legal framework that denies them the right to participate in decision-making and the right to strike without the approval of the Minister of Labour'.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Another empirical study carried out in Zimbabwe by Nyoka in 1985, focused on Workers Committees as 'instruments of worker participation and involvement in enterprise decision-making'. Nyoka's study had a different emphasis to that of Shadur's, in its concern that the Workers Committee system does not deliver industrial democracy.<sup>xxvii</sup> His findings however were much the same as those of Mutizwa-Mangiza<sup>xxviii</sup> and Maphosa.<sup>xxix</sup> Specifically he found that the works council chairman, a manager, could manipulate meetings, because of exclusive access to technical information among other things, to management's advantage. He also found that workers were aware that the Workers Committee could be manipulated by management and that the committee could be used by management to cushion it against direct militancy and demands from the shopfloor. But most members of Workers Committees had little formal education, and lacked specific technical education and felt unable to counteract management's superior power.<sup>xxx</sup>

Mitchell's view, in contrast to Nyoka and others, could be said to be a somewhat naïve and unrealistic assessment when he states,

In the absence of rank and file participation in unions, Workers Committees have provided the only experience of workplace democracy for the majority of the working class. But, because of their isolation, they are unable to consolidate and generalise the individual gains. Only the trade unions can provide a basis for the working class to shift the balance of class forces decisively in its favour. The historic role that the

Workers Committee can play is the regeneration of the unions to enable them to fulfil this task.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Other commentators see shopfloor worker representation issues as just another aspect of management-worker relations. As one labour analyst and lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe opined: 'labour unrest is not a spontaneous isolated incident but rather a sequential result of poor communication between the employer and the employees...(often) the employer fails to communicate effectively with the employees by withholding certain information'.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Thus, emerging from our review of the literature on worker representation in Zimbabwe we have several different research studies - some undertaken from differing theoretical standpoints - all enabling us to arrive at a similar conclusion: that the Workers Committee in Zimbabwe is not the robust structure of representation that some would like it to be. Far from it. It is, instead, clear that the Workers Committee merely fulfils its overt function of being a channel of communication between management and workers and, at a less obvious level, fulfils another function by the fact that, in the absence of a coherent trade union, it is the only structure through which workers can even remotely attempt to have their basic grievances dealt with. Keeping this reality of the Zimbabwean shopfloor worker in mind, we now move on to examine broader perspectives and analyses of worker representation.

### **Broader literature on worker representation and participation**

In seeking to explain the nature of worker representation, we will be drawing from a wide body of analysis on this subject, ranging from the theoretical insights of Marx to the work of contemporary African(ist) researchers as well as that of other labour activists and commentators. These authors add another dimension that helps explain worker representation in Zimbabwe.

At a theoretical level worker representation, through participation in structures such as shopfloor Workers Committees, can be viewed in diametrically opposed ways: either as a means to significantly challenge capital with the ultimate possibility of laying the foundations for future worker control or, on the other hand, simply as an instrument of worker co-option by capital through a mechanism which gives the appearance of equality but which in reality achieves exactly the opposite .

Let us begin with the rationale in favour of worker participation which is put forward on three grounds. First is the principle of *efficiency*. This focuses on the economic and financial gains

which worker participation may bring about by raising the productivity of labour and efficiency. This rationale has been used by different ideological tendencies.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

According to Marx, following the transition from feudalism to capitalism it was necessary to transform the relations of production that had evolved under a developed capitalism. These existing capitalist relations of production - for example capitalist organisation at work - acted as 'authoritarian' and 'despotic' fetters to the further development of productive forces and had thus to be transformed. According to Marx, the liberation of human work is tantamount to the liberation and thus advancement, of general productive forces as well as wealth and prosperity. As an alternative to 'factory despotism', which reduces workers to appendages of tools 'draining them of will and judgement', a regime of industrial democracy would provide the proper conditions for 'self-determination' and 'self-actualisation', and for the development and freedom of working people.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In this context, industrial democracy as an alternative form of the organisation of work is seen as providing a basis upon which to achieve higher productivity. The positive impact of workers' participation on productivity is defended on three grounds. First, drawing on a Marxist framework, some socialist social scientists in Britain<sup>xxxv</sup> have argued that worker participation allows for an administrative arrangement which uses not the expertise of a few managers but the initiative of many workers who are deeply involved and familiar with the technicalities of production and administration. Second, it is argued that worker participation tends to create an atmosphere of collectivity and community. By working in such an environment workers will act more responsibly.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Third, participation increases the sense of job satisfaction and thus productivity.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The *socio-political* argument in support of worker participation is that it is a means by which democracy is extended to the sphere of industry which operates autocratically, even under liberal democratic political systems. Industrial democracy is then the general programme and mechanism through which a broader democratisation is to be achieved.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Using the same conceptual framework, some writers have equated industry with a country. Just as the citizens of a country have the right to elect their representatives in the government to manage the country, so the workers in an industry should have the same right to elect their representatives in management.<sup>xxxix</sup>

In the same vein Edwards believes that democracy should be defended by demanding its application at all levels and in all spheres of society. For him the central theme of all socialist

programmes is that 'the defence of political democracy is simply the logical corollary to the demand for democracy at the workplace and social control of the production process'. Once workers raise a challenge 'to the existing system of control on the enterprise, they will through their experience be led to see the common content of these struggles.'<sup>xi</sup>

Salaman's perspective of conventional worker participation schemes is that it generally leads to worker co-optation. He describes what he calls direct and indirect forms of shopfloor participation. These direct forms of participation - for example consultative meetings between employees and their supervisors (more open style of management) - focus attention on the individual employee or work group and is therefore task centred. Salaman also refers to it as 'descending participation' because it is invariably initiated by management for its own purposes; thus participation is confined largely to the implementation of operational decisions already made by management and there is therefore little scope for meaningful worker representation.

However, indirect forms of participation, such as widening the content of collective bargaining, the creation of Works Councils and the appointment of worker directors, focus attention on the balance of power between management and employees in the decision making process. Salaman refers to this as 'ascending participation' because it is primarily concerned with extending employee influence and also representation, through the process of negotiation and joint regulation, into the areas of policy and major organisational planning which would previously have been the sole prerogative of management.<sup>xii</sup>

When we look at the early experience for black South African workers, it can be seen as similar to this 'direct' form of participation, in that it was entirely management/state initiated. In 1973 the Black Labour Relations Regulations Act was passed. One of its measures was to introduce *Liaison Committees*, which were simply a more restrictive variation of the *Works Committees* provided for in the 1953 Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act. This Act (1953) was passed after a commission of inquiry had recommended that unions be granted controlled, official bargaining rights; but the government rejected this and instead introduced factory *Works Committees*, stressing that the intention behind these committees was to elbow unions out of the factories. However, by 1973 as Friedman points out, even though (some of) these *Works Committees* were 'at best, harmless safety valves for worker frustrations' they were 'at least chosen by workers alone'.<sup>xiii</sup> But with the introduction in 1973 of *Liaison Committees*, employers could appoint the chairman and half the members. *Works Committees* had some negotiating rights whereas *Liaison Committees* were supposed only 'to make recommendations' to employers. It was easier for management to dominate them

and they later became known as "tea and toilet committees" because they discussed only minor grievances `which posed no threat to employer decision-making'; indeed Friedman derides both the liaison and Works Committees as being equivalent to `a toy telephone'.<sup>xliii</sup>

But different worker organisations had varying attitudes towards these committees. The Natal Trade Union Advisory and Coordinating Council (TUACC) at first attacked any form of participation in these committees, arguing that `unions should have no truck with bodies designed to destroy them'.<sup>xliiv</sup> But the Western Province Workers Advisory Board (Capetown) adopted a strategy from the start to form statutory *Works Committees* and to exert pressure on management to recognise and negotiate with the *Works Committees*.<sup>xliiv</sup> Additionally, the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Witwatersrand) placed a great emphasis on `worker participation in decision-making right from the start and strove to gain direct recognition of the union from management'.<sup>xlivi</sup>

Thus the tiny space for organised (organising) labour, opened up by the `toy telephones' did actually create new opportunities. Weak and pliable committees might currently have been workers' only platforms in the factories, but before 1973 they had virtually no platform at all, it was argued. *Works Committees*, provided they were backed by the resources of a union or similar body, could help workers organise. Even TUACC, who had failed to make any headway against managerial refusal to recognise the unions, went `on the offensive' and revised their strategy to one of participating in *Liaison* or *Works Committees* when it was considered tactically advantageous to the unions.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Thus we have seen from the above examples that there are different perspectives on worker participation in shopfloor (representation) structures, and that these perspectives depend on the prevailing circumstances. In other words, the issue in relation to worker representation through participation, is not that workers have to make a once-for-all choice between autonomy from, or incorporation by capital - which was the initial position of TUACC. What is important is `the form of bargain that labour makes with capital' through such participation. The struggle consists of trying to minimise the power inequity between capital and labour and to actively confront the `line of compromise between worker interests in institutionalised representation and collective voice, and employer interests in workforce cooperation and communication to enhance performance'.<sup>xlviii</sup>

But in the instance of Zimbabwe, micro-level worker representation through shopfloor Workers Committees, has not posed any challenge to capital nor has it laid down any foundations for future worker control. Nor can it even be seen as having been an instrument

of co-option, because this co-option could only have taken place if there were a threat of powerful worker organisation at shopfloor level; as we shall see from the case study in the clothing industry this is hardly the case. In reality worker participation, in the form of the shopfloor-based Workers Committees, has not amounted to anything more than a channel of communication between management and workers, government rhetoric about Workers Committees being fledgling organs of worker control to the contrary.<sup>xlix</sup> In spite of this, the continuing reality for workers, in the absence of coherent trade union organisation on the shopfloor, is that Workers Committees are often the only structure that has any day-to-day relevance for them, even though participation in it offers no real change in their position of weakness and subservience.

The Zimbabwean experience to some extent fits Bayat's formulation of what he calls the 'corporatist' approach, where the main role of shopfloor worker representation and participation is to maintain peaceful cooperation between the state (government), capital (management) and labour (workers' organisations).<sup>i</sup> The manner in which this 'peace' is maintained can be illustrated by the attitudes and principles of one of its most influential and powerful proponents, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which comprises the labour section of the United Nations. The ILO's basic understanding of shopfloor worker representation through participation from the very outset has been one of tripartite (government-management-labour) organisation; and thus the ILO sees collective bargaining as the best strategy to maintain industrial 'peace'. According to the ILO, this kind of collective bargaining serves to:

improve the quality of employees' working life by allowing them greater influence and involvement in work, and secure the mutual cooperation of employers and employees in achieving industrial peace, greater efficiency and productivity in the interest of the enterprise, the workers, the consumers and the nation.<sup>ii</sup>

One of the main problems with the ILO approach is that its assumption of economic and social equality between capital and labour is illusory. Capital and labour are viewed as having an equal position, being engaged in free agreement; the state acts as a neutral arbitrator between the two, uninfluenced by the general socio-economic context within which they all operate.<sup>iii</sup>

Another problem with this 'corporatist' framework as Bayat states, is that shopfloor worker participation is viewed as 'separate from the politico-economic structure within which it is developing. In addition, corporatists seem to believe that workers' representation through



participation is not so much a struggle from below...as a concession from above...it is therefore predictable that the ILO literature on industrial democracy concerns itself ...[largely] with content analysis of industrial and labour legislation.<sup>liii</sup>

On the more localised level of the shopfloor, this 'corporatist' approach is reflected by the perception that communication and consultation between management and workers is, in itself, a valid form of worker representation and participation. This perception is misguided, according to Pateman when she states that the reason for interest in this kind of participation is that it is just another management technique in pursuit of the main company objective: efficiency.<sup>liv</sup>

In this Pateman is echoing an analysis put forward several decades earlier by Antonio Gramsci:

The capitalists, for industrial reasons, cannot want all forms of organization to be destroyed. In the factory, discipline and the smooth flow of production is only possible if there exists at least a minimum degree of constitutionality, a minimum degree of consent on the part of the workers.<sup>lv</sup>

Taking a long-term historical view, Ramsey has argued that management (or the state) is attracted to shopfloor worker representation in the form of worker participation schemes, 'particularly when they have experienced a challenge to their authority from below'.<sup>lvi</sup> The aim of this management-initiated worker representation, according to Munck, 'is to achieve a pre-emptive integration of workers or to defuse a challenge to the sacrosanct principles of capitalist control'<sup>lvii</sup>. Sachikonye puts it more prosaically when he says that 'essentially Workers Committees ...operate to the advantage of companies in vetting grievances, discussing them with management and de-fusing shopfloor crises wherever they occur'.<sup>lviii</sup>

Maller agrees with this assessment when she states that worker participation 'must be understood as part of a continuum of management strategies used to ensure the transformation of labour power into actual labour, ranging from coercion through to consent'.<sup>lix</sup>

Leftist commentators in the early 1970s seem however to have been much more idealistic in their view of worker participation. Bosquet for example, somewhat unrealistically saw worker participation or what was called, job enrichment, as potentially being able to endanger capitalist authority. 'Job enrichment...spells the end of authority and despotic power for

bosses great and small'. He continues, in parody of the bosses but apparently in agreement with them too 'the more you give [the workers] the more they want. Give them a bit of power and they want it all.' Thus Bosquet thought that workers should take advantage of the bosses' attempts in seeking to *engage* workers' labour-power more fully, through worker participation or job enrichment schemes.<sup>lx</sup> The reasoning behind this was one that has been typical among British managers and advisers: 'the problem...is not a lack of native capacity in the (British) working population so much as the failure to draw out their energies and skill to anything like their full potential.'<sup>lxi</sup> There were significant management fears that a worker participation programme could boomerang on capital - but whether this would happen depended on several factors: the nature and extent of the programme introduced, the technology and work organisation, the character of the trade union concerned and the political consciousness of the workers.<sup>lxii</sup>

From a more prosaic perspective, Nichols convincingly exposes the reality of these worker participation or job enrichment schemes by quoting the words of a worker at ChemCo, a factory where he was carrying out research. 'You move from one boring, dirty, monotonous job to another boring, dirty, monotonous job' he said. 'And somehow you're supposed to come out of it all "enriched". But I never feel "enriched" - I just feel knackered.'<sup>lxiii</sup>

The words of this worker sound dispiritingly cynical when we consider Rogers and Streeck's (1994) rosy assessment of the benefits of this kind of participation. Somewhat benignly, they see worker participation in the form of Works Councils as being mixed institutions, varying along a line of compromise between worker interests in institutionalised representation and collective voice, and employer interests in work force cooperation and communication to enhance performance. But they also acknowledge that, depending on the power distribution between capital and labour and also between national labour relations policies, the substance of that compromise differs across countries and over time.<sup>lxiv</sup>

For Rogers and Streeck, Works Councils exist and function well, to the extent that work forces are persuaded to contribute to efficiency in exchange for representation and managements are persuaded to accept workers' voice as a condition for cooperation. Councils generate economic benefits by mobilising for economic purposes what one may call the "productivity" of democracy. Through its existence in the firm a Works Council legitimates a plurality of interests within the firm and gives workers a secure status as industrial citizens, with quasi-constitutional rights to participate in decision making at their place of employment that parallel the rights of citizens in political communities.<sup>lxv</sup> Thus, according to them, industrial citizenship of this kind can benefit democracy in society at large

as well as within firms, and can improve national economic performance. It can also enlist industrial citizenship in the service of general public goals in workplace regulation.

From Rogers and Streeck's perspective then, Works Councils are a substantive form of democratic participation as is evident from workers' involvement in them. Regular Works Council election give workers a chance to express their views on the representation provided to them by their unions. German Works Councils for example, are elected every four years on a nationwide election day, with opposing slates of candidates in each workplace that has a Council and turnout averaging 90 per cent.<sup>lxvi</sup> Further benefits for democracy result from the difference a Works Council makes for the relationship between workers and their superiors. Works Councils provide employees with a safe institution in which to raise concerns and complaints without fear of sanctions. Because they are in continuous discussions and negotiations with the employer, Works Council members can easily take up minor worker complaints with management and settle them without undue bureaucracy.<sup>lxvii</sup>

Thus for Rogers and Streeck, if the Works Council did not exist grievances would rarely be redressed, especially if they were more than trivial. The consequence can be a sense of powerlessness and inferiority on the part of workers that may disable their performance as workers and as citizens. Reciprocally, much benefit rebounds, in public arenas as well as private ones, from permitting people to express discontent without fear.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Rogers and Streeck's optimism mirrors to some degree, that of Antonio Gramsci. Admittedly they are strange bedfellows in that they have very different aspirations for Works Councils, with the former waxing enthusiastic about their contribution to good working relationships between management and workers as well as to shopfloor democracy. Gramsci on the other hand, ambitiously saw them as having the ability to 'limit the power of the capitalist in the factory and perform functions of arbitration and discipline. Tomorrow, developed and enriched, they must be the organs of proletarian power, replacing the capitalist in all his useful functions of management and administration.'<sup>lxix</sup>

In the early 1920s the establishment of Factory Councils spread throughout the factories in Italy's industrial center in Turin.<sup>lxx</sup> In contrast with Italian trade unions at the time, the Factory Councils were unashamedly aggressive and offensive institutions, seeking to augment workers' control within the factory and ultimately to render the capitalist superfluous. By 1921 Gramsci conceived of the Factory Councils not simply as 'organs of proletarian power' but as the focal point of an anti-capitalist struggle around which would cluster 'all popular forces in revolt against the capitalist regime.'<sup>lxxi</sup>

But the life span of these Factory Councils was relatively short due largely to a dis-united trade union movement. Thus when the government issued a credible threat of using armed force to enable the factory owners to re-occupy the factories, at the same time offering negotiations on various industrial relations issues, the `organs of proletarian power' were left in the cold and were finally destroyed.

In re-appraising the Factory Councils, Kelly correctly observes that the limitations of the Factory Councils in Italy in 1920 were lodged in the production process itself, in the economy rather than civil society proper, and, in organising only the industrial working class, they were vulnerable on two fronts: they could not easily challenge the hegemony of the ruling class in the wider society (though they began that challenge in the factory); and they were susceptible to counter attack by other subordinate groups, notably the peasantry who, acting under the sway of Roman Catholicism provided willing recruits for the armed forces sent to quell the factory occupations.<sup>lxxii</sup> Nor could these problems have been overcome merely by an armed assault on the State for as Gramsci observed, the Italian state was incomparably stronger than its Russian counterpart which fell so easily to the Bolsheviks.

In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West there was a proper relationship between State and civil society, and when the state trembled a sturdy structure was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one state to the next.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

On the other hand the strength of the Factory Councils, as compared to trade unions, was that at least they had begun the ideological struggle at the point of production, and did not confine themselves to bargaining over terms and conditions of employment.

Gramsci explained the failure of the Factory Councils thus: `the main reason for the defeat of the Italian revolutionary parties is: not to have had an ideology; not to have disseminated it among the masses; not to have strengthened the consciousness of their militants with certitudes of a moral and psychological character.'<sup>lxxiv</sup>

This was the key point to Gramsci's argument. The most important and integral part of a revolutionary strategy was the ideological struggle to develop political consciousness amongst the majority *before* the struggle. This is an argument which has no less resonance many decades later, for the context in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Thus in liberal democratic societies, for Gramsci, state power lies not simply in the state apparatus, but also in *the economy* and in *civil society*.<sup>lxxv</sup> Therefore to break state power, in a sense means breaking the hegemony of the state in both the economy and society by establishing an alternative, working class hegemony. Workers' Councils then, are the institutional embodiment of that hegemony which must be set in place before the change or seizure of the state apparatus.

Thus Rogers and Streeck's wholesomely positive assessment of the democratising potential of worker participation in Works Councils is at odds not only with Gramsci's subsequent discoveries but also with the on-the-ground experiences of it in southern Africa.

It may be true however that worker participation of Rogers and Streeck's sort can only aspire to these kind of empowering and democratic credentials in an already-existing socio-political context where the power of organised labour is well established and entrenched. But, as has already emerged from the Zimbabwean literature and as we will see from our Zimbabwean case study it would be difficult to discern any democratising influence arising from the existence and / or operation of the Works Councils.

In her survey of shopfloor workers in South Africa, Torres correctly draws attention to the potential hypocrisy of Workers Committees and other similar management-initiated schemes, when she comments that '...it all sounds nice and may well be meaningful for some of the people involved. But does it imply worker influence on decision-making?'<sup>lxxvi</sup> An illustration of this caveat is provided by the experience of the Paper, Printing, Wood & Allied Union (PPWAWU) members and management at PG Bison Ltd. which was seen as taking the lead in building 'a kind of partnership [between management and workers]...that may well be the way forward'.<sup>lxxvii</sup> A year later this partnership had virtually ceased to function largely due to middle-management resistance and racist intransigence. However there was a somewhat remarkable outcome from the conflict that arose from this impasse. PPWAWU, through a research process, clarified and defined its terms for participating with the employer, adopting an approach that they called 'adversarial participation'. This approach advocates 'engaging with participation schemes by extending [the] collective bargaining agenda [will] advance workers' control over the labour process, the labour market and investment decisions'. The specific outcome of using such an approach resulted in the employer and PPWAWU reaching a constructive consensus at the end of 1993.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Thus we can see that, as Ntshangase and Solomons describe, the union has three options in responding to a participative scheme: 'to stand back and let it happen, to obstruct or to become centrally involved'. They opted for involvement in the third alternative with the proviso that the union be 'part and parcel of the very process of defining participative structures'.<sup>lxxxix</sup> As we have already seen their union (PPAWU) has made significant steps in this particular process. Yet another union, the National Union of Mineworkers, also perceives a positive aspect in worker participation because:

it is beginning to challenge managerial prerogative in the production process...over what they believed was their exclusive right - setting targets, setting the production plan...[the] agreement arms workers with an instrument to say you must talk to us...[So] you participate in order to achieve control. It's a process.<sup>lxxx</sup>

From an equally down-to-earth perspective Von Holdt reflects the views of Unilever shopstewards in Durban when he comments that

in the grind of day to day struggle it is easy to forget how great the achievements are (wage negotiations, maternity leave, a clear grading system, an end to favouritism) and how they were won through courage, hard work and solidarity. If many managers are now talking about...the participation of workers, it is because the unions fought hard and bitter struggles to establish themselves.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Which brings us to the issue of how far can or should worker representation through shopfloor participation go? Can or should it lead to worker control? For those who reject the 'incorporation approach' the correct response would be complete refusal to get involved because the only possible result is not 'workers' control of production' but workers' control of production for production's sake, a pseudo-control that only serves to smash any autonomy the workers' movement has.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

The opposite argument is put forward by what Bayat calls the 'aggressive encroachment approach'; this views workers' control as a means to a gradual but aggressive encroachment on the power of capital, both at the point of production and in society at large. It is thus, according to Bayat, a way of genuinely reforming capitalism.<sup>lxxxiiii</sup> But this aggressive encroachment approach is susceptible to the obvious criticism that workers' control cannot be realised, under capitalism, as long as capital is dominant in the economic, political and ideological spheres. Instead struggles for workers' control are bound to result in the illusion of participation and the co-option of the working class into the capitalist management. We

have already seen ample evidence for this in the Zimbabwean experience with Works Councils.

However as Maller points out, neither of these approaches has been particularly successful in strengthening worker representation or even control at the workplace. She suggests another approach in which unionism would be 'afforded a central place' and which would focus on the nature of organisation on the shopfloor.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> And central to that organisation would be a trade union that retains its independence and refuses to assume joint responsibility for running the factory. Maller goes on to state correctly that

labour needs to take advantage of capital's contradictory needs in the workplace so as to benefit workers. Participation may open up space for **organised** struggles to change the way in which work is done, to...(change) structures of workplace decision making, as well as improving the material conditions of workers.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

It may also enable stronger representation of workers' interests in the wider economic arena, through the trade unions participating, as equal partners, with the government and employers in crucial areas such as the formulation of national economic policies, for example.

But in order to be strong enough to 'take advantage of capital's contradictory needs', labour and its different structures of representation (the Workers Committee and the trade union) have to be properly and coherently organised at all levels but most particularly on the shopfloor. And nowhere is this clearer than in the context of the Zimbabwe manufacturing sector, as has emerged from our case study set in the clothing sub-sector which now follows.

### **Case study of workers in the clothing sub-sector**

In the preceding sections we have discussed the literature and analysis of worker representation and more specifically micro-level worker representation on the shopfloor. As part of this workplace-focused discussion and investigation into worker representation, we have carried out a case study to assemble a picture of shopfloor workers' perceptions and expectations of the different structures of worker representation, and also of the nature and extent of workers' involvement in their trade union. The value of this case study is that it provides some insight into a sample of shopfloor workers' understanding of the different structures of representation, as well as their expectations and criticisms of their trade union.

The outcomes of the case study at the same time, expose the considerable gaps and areas of weakness in that trade union's ability to organise and empower its members. This is the first time that these issues have been subject to empirical research in Zimbabwe.

This survey has performed a useful function in that it has provided a baseline from which over time, we can observe and evaluate the current state of manufacturing-sector worker representation in Zimbabwe. For example, what was striking from the baseline case study was the marked disengagement of and by, workers from any organised structures and/or activity related to change either on the micro-level of shopfloor conditions, the meso-level of bettering the conditions of their immediate community, or the macro-level of working for constructive economic and political change.

At the time of carrying out the baseline study, the challenge was to try to explain the apparent collusion by most workers, even if by default, with oppressive practices and behaviour on almost all levels that affected workers: workplace management, trade union secretariats, national government. It was clear that this situation had been prevailing since independence in 1980, but of concern was that even under the massive shocks delivered by the combined effects of a ruthlessly implemented Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and of the worst-ever drought in Zimbabwe, there appeared to be no perceptible changes in workers' attitudes towards becoming more involved in organising for change. On the contrary one research survey carried out first in 1991 and then again in 1992 found that as the situation worsened from one year to the next, attendance at church services appeared to have increased but there was no other sign of any greater involvement in activities that might lead to change, be it through trade union, community grouping or even political party activities.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

The manufacturing sector was selected for the case study because, as far as the formal sector is concerned, it employed the highest percentage of people in the industrial sector as a whole. In 1996 when this study was done, the manufacturing sector employed an average of 68 per cent of the total industrial-sector labour force.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> The manufacturing sector was also chosen because, since we are analysing the nature and limits of worker representation, then it is best, in principle, to select the formal sector (rather than for example, the informal sector or agricultural sector) because it is here that structures of representation have been statutorily established since 1980 and it therefore follows that the selection of the manufacturing sector provides a credible and appropriate framework, via our case study, within which to examine the effectiveness of representation of workers' interests which could then be generalised to the sector as a whole.



And the clothing sub-sector was chosen in turn, because the workers in this industry reflect the features that appear reasonably typical of Zimbabwean manufacturing-sector workers in terms of education levels, levels of pay, living conditions and so on. In addition, clothing was the second largest in the manufacturing sector in terms of employment and output (at the time of the baseline study) and is largely owned by national capital. The bulk of clothing workers are semi-skilled with a relatively small minority being classified as skilled.

### *Summary of Research Methods*

A number of research methods were used in this process to suit the different research aspects that were to be addressed, including administering of questionnaires, carrying out semi-structured interviews with key informants, study of archival documents as well as participant observation.

The first phase of the research was based on interviews and participant observation carried out at two selected clothing factories and also with the sole trade union in the clothing sub-sector the National Union of the Clothing Industry.

For the latter part of the case study, further updating semi-structured discussions were held with several key informants, who were drawn from the original shopfloor sample, in order to establish the nature of the changes (if any) that may have taken place in the original shopfloor perspectives.

### *Selected factories*

The case study focused on workers in two medium-sized clothing factories, Concorde (Pvt) Ltd and Bravette (Pvt) Ltd in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Each of the factories involved in the case study was selected on the basis of its size and the extent to which its workforce had been unionised. Both factories were medium sized (a total of 300 - 450 workers), but one had more than half the workforce unionised and the other had substantially less than half the workforce unionised. The rationale behind this was to investigate whether there was a significant difference between the factories, in the respondents' attitude to, and understanding of worker representation on the shopfloor and whether this possible difference was connected with the extent to which the workforce was unionised.

### *Sample Selection*

A purposive sample, comprising 100 respondents, was used. This purposive sample was chosen to suit the particular needs of this case study, which did not aim to provide data that could be necessarily be generalized throughout the economically active universe of Zimbabwe. Rather, it was intended that the study of the two factories would provide trends from which generalisations could perhaps be made about worker representation within the manufacturing sector and reasons for weaknesses and strengths within the trade union(s).

The survey sample was stratified for skill, gender and union membership and thereafter a total of 100 respondents, 50 from each factory, were randomly selected from a list provided by the management, of skilled, semi-skilled and general-grade employees.

Half of the respondents were union members and the other half were non-unionized. The reason for the division into unionized and non-unionized categories was that there are workers who choose not to belong to a union and those who do. This research seeks to understand which 'institution' workers see as being their most effective form of representation and protection and why. Is it the trade union or the workers committee? After all, the workers committees can and do operate as a parallel (and sometimes competing) structure to that of the trade union, however the reverse situation (of direct union representation from the shopfloor to management, excluding the workers committee) cannot take place, because it would be against labour regulations.

Thus, a group of non-unionised shopfloor workers was surveyed to (a) assess their views as to the real effectiveness of the workers committee and (b) to establish why they had chosen not to become union members.

Eliciting assessments about workers committees was central to both groups, as was the general question of union membership. What was specific to the unionised respondents however, was their view of the relative influence of the workers committee and the union in relation to (unionised) workers' interests.

### *Shopfloor survey*

The primary method for the shopfloor survey was a combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaires were designed with two main objectives:

- to ascertain the respondents' assessments of the workers committee and the trade union respectively, in terms of effectiveness in looking after their shopfloor interests;
- to gain an insight into the effect of shopfloor organisation on workers' lives.

The administration of the questionnaires and carrying out of the semi-structured interviews was done by the researcher with the assistance of a fluent Shona-speaking person, partly for translation purposes and partly as a measure against possible bias in the respondents' responses which could have been caused by the sole interviewer being white.

The use of semi-structured interviews was particularly useful and appropriate not only in providing a method that was complementary to the use of questionnaires, in gathering information about workers' attitudes, but also for gathering information through oral accounts of the history of NUCI. There is, as yet, no written history of this trade union. However, there were two long standing union members who had strong memories and recollections of how the union developed and of the significant influences and events since its inception. The researcher met with these two informants for two separate sessions, each lasting approximately three hours, during which the informants gave their accounts of events that had happened during their working lives.

Participant observation in each of the two selected factories, of at least three workers committee meetings and one works council (workers committee and management representatives) meeting was carried out in order to assess **a)** the type of matters that were raised for discussion by both workers and management and **b)** the manner in which these matters were dealt with.

Put slightly differently, it was considered important to observe the effects of the balance of power between workers and management, inasmuch as they weaken or strengthen the workers' ability to represent themselves in these works council meetings.

In seeking to compile an outline of the contemporary political and economic context, a study and review of available documents and records was made. These documents comprised mainly of the few records that were available from the trade union, industrial relations legislation and press cuttings for the period under review.

*Access to Factories and Trade Union*

Management and workers committees in the two selected factories as well as the trade union were generally cooperative during the first phase of the research process. However it proved impossible to carry out a comprehensive follow-up survey, because of the prevailing widespread sense of insecurity and vulnerability emanating from the extremely tense political climate in Zimbabwe.

Details of the context and background information on the factories and the National Union of the Clothing Industry appear in Appendix II. The research questionnaire appears in Appendix III followed by Appendix IV which contains a list of key informants and guidelines for semi-structured, updating discussions with these informants. A Data Analysis Table appears in Appendix V.

## **Outcomes of case study**

### *Summary*

The general picture that emerges from this survey (see Appendix V), is of a sample of workers who have no awareness or experience of strong and/or independent worker organisation. The majority identify the Workers Committee as the only structure that has any day-to-day significance for them. The trade union is a distant entity which they see as either providing insurance against potential misfortunes at the workplace or as a reservoir of expertise in national wage negotiations. It is clear that the workers do not have any sense that they should or could have more strength, power or responsibility; in fact there is a marked apathy towards organising and agitating for change. None of those involved in the survey could see any alternative to the status quo of hamstrung Workers Committees and a distanced trade union. Under the circumstances, with continuing trade union ineptitude and shopfloor weakness it perhaps not surprising that workers' deepest commitment is not to their urban situation but rather, seems fixed on their rural homes.

The first striking observation is that so few of the respondents in this survey either knew about, or had even considered, different forms of shopfloor worker representation. Nor was there any awareness of trade union functions that went beyond the limits of narrow collective bargaining. What was clear however, was that all the respondents held the view that if there was no Workers Committee, then there would be no channel of communication with management - "we can't all go to management at the same time". So it is in the context of

this overall perception - that the most important function of Workers Committees is that of communication with management - that any positive attitudes about these committees, should be assessed.

Thus it would be reasonable to say that where workers' attitudes towards management are positive, then their attitude to the Workers Committee (as a grievance-management structure) is likely to be equally positive. Therefore Workers Committees are virtual instruments of management effectiveness rather than acting as a 'motor' for unionisation.

In keeping with the correlation between positive attitudes towards management and therefore towards the Workers Committee as well, 80 per cent of respondents from Concorde stated that they were satisfied with the Workers Committee system and held equally positive attitudes about management.

At Bravette the picture was somewhat reversed with less than half saying that they were satisfied with the Workers Committee system, but only as a means of communication. But more than half said that they were dissatisfied with the Workers Committee system simply because it repeatedly failed to deal with their needs as workers on the shopfloor.

It also appears that those who are dissatisfied with the Workers Committee are much more favourable towards the trade union, and vice versa. At Bravette, even though fewer workers were members of the National Union of the Clothing Industry, there was a much more positive view of the union, precisely because workers were so negative about the Workers Committee. Thus at Bravette 86 per cent chose the trade union because "the union knows workers' rights and they have the knowledge of defending workers", while at Concorde only 59 per cent did so. Those who chose the Workers Committee said that "it is always in the factory and they are near the workers" and that the Workers Committee is in touch with their problems on a day-to-day basis. Those who chose the trade union did so because it not only had expertise but it was also detached from the shopfloor and was therefore in a stronger position vis-a-vis management.

When questioned in more detail about respondents' attitudes towards the Workers Committee, towards their own grievances and the procedures for raising these grievances, it became clear that there was a striking difference in the responses from the two factories. Where the attitude towards management was positive, so the perception of the Workers Committee and grievance procedures was equally positive, as was the case with Concorde. Thus in answer to a question about their opinions of management, 78 per cent of respondents at Concorde replied positively and 11 were either negative or ambivalent (22 per cent). Also 47 per cent of respondents had referred grievances to the Workers

Committee and approximately half (48 per cent) of those respondents were satisfied at the outcome.

However, the reverse situation seemed to apply at Bravette where only 24 per cent of respondents were positive in their attitudes towards management and 76 per cent were either negative or ambivalent. There was an equally negative view of the Workers Committee as a method for solving workers' problems, with only 22 per cent of respondents having taken any grievances to the Workers Committee and a small proportion (27 per cent) of those respondents reporting any satisfaction at the outcome: as several respondents said "the Workers Committee is a one-way traffic; our grievances are not being dealt with".... "the Workers Committee simply has no power"..."the Workers Committee is no good because they take our requests and grievances but make decisions that we never agreed to"..."the Workers Committee are being intimidated by management".

The general concept of workers participating in the management of the enterprise was one which was completely unfamiliar to all the respondents. When this idea was raised, the initial reaction of most respondents was one of great perplexity because they had neither heard of, nor ever given any consideration to, such an idea. After some consideration, however, most respondents felt that workers could not participate in the management of their factories because they were neither educated enough and therefore not competent enough "...to sit in the same chairs as management". Others added that anyway "we have a Workers Committee; isn't that a kind of participation?" None of the respondents said, of their own accord, that there should be an effective programme of training and education for workers so that, as soon as possible, they might be able to begin to share in some of the management activities.

Although they were lacking in this formal information about the Workers Committee and Works Council, few respondents saw this as a problem. As they perceived it, the only information that had any relevance for them was, that the Workers Committee was the only means through which their day-to-day grievances and requests could be put before management. The trade union's role was that of national wage negotiator for its members and workers in the industry, repository of technical information about labour regulations and also that of mediator in shopfloor labour crises where the Workers Committee and management could not reach agreement.

The general picture that emerges, following the discussions and interviews, is one of workers who see the Workers Committee as the only structure which has any day-to-day relevance for them. Notwithstanding this perception, in general, few respondents from either of the factories were clear about the specific structure of either the Workers Committee or the Works Council - i.e. how many elected members there should be and what the ratio

should be of management to worker members, how often meetings should or could be held and so on. However, almost all the respondents from both factories knew the name of the chairperson of the Workers Committee (see Appendix II).

### *Organisational Weakness within the National Union of the Clothing Industry*

A majority (61 per cent) of the total labour force is unionised at Concorde as compared to the minority (39 per cent) of unionised workers at Bravette.

The reasons that workers from both factories gave for joining the trade union were very much focused on protection and insurance for the future. When unionised respondents were asked why they belonged to the trade union, the response was almost universally that the union would provide protection in the event of unfair dismissal or pension problems in the future. As one female respondent put it "the union is our father and our mother". This description shows that the union is conceptualised as something 'out there' - an institution that is separate and sometimes, above, the workers themselves.

On the broader question as to the main function or purpose of a trade union most replied that it was "...to protect workers' rights". But when pressed further, none of the respondents said anything more specific than that workers should be protected from unfair dismissal and that the union should get the highest possible wages for their members.

That the respondents' replies, in relation to the trade union, should seem so narrow and restricted only to wages and allied matters should not be surprising. Their day-to-day experience since independence in 1980 has been that most contact and negotiation that directly affects them (i.e. working conditions) on the shopfloor, takes place between the management and the Workers Committee. From my own participant observation of the National Union of the Clothing Industry over five years, it is an unfortunate reality that the union rarely shows its presence at the shopfloor, other than when a strike is threatened (i.e. the Workers Committee has exhausted all its negotiating possibilities) and the union is summoned (usually by management) to mediate between the two parties. The reality, then, is that workers have to rely on their Workers Committees to negotiate, protect and (try to) maintain the workers' position on the shopfloor. The fact that the Workers Committee members are usually union members as well is an extremely secondary issue. Most respondents saw the role of the union as being a source of expertise on labour regulations, that should be passed on to the Workers Committee in order to make them stronger in their dealings with management.

Those respondents who were not members of the trade union gave replies that were similar to those who were members. However, when asked why they did not join the trade union the answer was either that they could not afford the subscription or that nobody had told them how to join; a few also said that they did not see any benefit in joining the trade union. And it is true that as matters currently stand, non-members lose very little, if anything at all, through their non-membership. Until early 1992, wage agreements were negotiated in national bargaining forums (the employers organisation and the trade union) and these agreements were applicable to all workers regardless of union membership. Since late 1992, changes in legislation have decreed that enterprise-level 'collective bargaining' will take precedence over any nationally-negotiated wages and conditions of service, thus further reinforcing the emphasis on Workers Committees as the *de facto* primary representatives of workers on the shopfloor and, thereby, further marginalising the trade union in the daily lives of their members.

However, in spite of the fact that respondents showed minimal awareness about other forms of workers' representation and seemed to be strongly oriented towards Workers Committees as the only structure which workers could use on a day-to-day basis, and in spite of their view of the trade union being their 'distant protector', it is striking that when given a choice of four possibilities as to who should be responsible for the overall defence of workers' rights (the government, workers themselves, Workers Committees or the trade union) the same majority in each factory (88 per cent) chose the trade union. This once again reflects workers' perception of the trade union being the only body that has the expertise as well as workers' general interests at the forefront - as opposed to the government, which has the expertise but which clearly does not prioritise workers' interests.

In response to a question as to whether only trade unionists should be members of the Workers Committee, the majority of respondents in both factories felt that this should be the case, because "unionists can interpret labour laws and help workers know their rights"...and..."the Workers Committee members can go to the (union) office and attend training seminars...because the union knows how to defend workers".

However, it is again striking how such statements can be made when such extensive ignorance exists among workers - and the trade union is largely to blame. It was clear from the survey that there was a serious lack of information amongst respondents about any labour regulations, even those that affected shopfloor workers most particularly - such as the amendments to the regulations that were enacted in the latter half of 1992. Until 1990 wage



levels were set by government decree and other conditions of service were negotiated by the employers' organisation and the trade union, on a national basis. There then followed a period up to 1992, during which wages and conditions of service were negotiated through a collective bargaining process which involved the national employers' organisation, the trade union and the government. However in late 1992, an extremely important amendment to the Labour Relations Act (1985) was introduced. This amendment was enacted (as part of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme) in the context of a rapidly declining economic environment in which massive retrenchments were beginning to take place and in which unfair dismissals were being made on a frequent basis, according to complaints received by the National Union for the Clothing Industry. The substance of this amendment was to remove the legal primacy of agreements reached through national negotiations about wages, conditions of service, retrenchment packages and workers' grievances. That primacy was now given to Workers Committees in each individual enterprise. In other words, whatever agreement was reached between management and the Workers Committee, was binding in that particular enterprise, even if it was less favourable than that negotiated at the national level; i.e. enterprise level bargaining now had legal precedence over national collective bargaining.

When these changes in regulation first became known there were protests from both the employers' organisations and the umbrella body of the trade unions, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. But as we have seen from the survey the information appears not to have found its way to most of the shopfloor workers in the clothing industry.

Nevertheless, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions organised a public march and demonstration against these changes in 1992. In the event the demonstration was poorly attended partly because of lack of thorough preparation (making unionists and workers aware of the changes in regulations and of the detailed implications of these changes) and partly because of the strong intimidatory tactics employed by the state. According to The Herald newspaper the Minister of Home Affairs banned all workers' protest demonstrations planned by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, citing the potential for violence, disruption of essential services, and alleged political motives of the labour body. "The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions will not be allowed to demonstrate and conduct any strike action in these times of dire necessity for food, law and order" (sic) the Minister told the newspaper. The next day, in a front page newspaper headline "Police Urge Workers Not To Demonstrate Against Government" the police warned that demonstrations would be unlawful and that anybody who took part in them would be dealt with "firmly" and would "only have themselves to blame for any consequences that may arise".<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

To return to the outcomes of the case study, the very limited vision of worker representation on the shopfloor is completely in keeping with the equally limited perceptions about trade unionism. Few of the respondents felt that they had any capacity or power to do anything more than be in the supplicatory position of always being forced to negotiate with management from a position of weakness. They certainly did not view the trade union as a structure through which they could strengthen and transform themselves into a workers' movement which might eventually have the power not only to precipitate change in the way workplaces are run and controlled, but also might put the workers' movement on a level of equality with the state and the owners of capital.

This limited view of trade unionism was further underlined by responses to a question about whether the trade union should be active outside the workplace. Once again most respondents were clearly perplexed by the question, but finally answered 'no'. Others said that the trade union should make sure that workers get reasonable retrenchment packages and pension payments. Not a single respondent suggested that the trade union should become involved in community issues that were not directly related to wages and factory working conditions.

The level of ignorance of their own trade union was very marked: not a single respondent was able to describe the structure of the trade union and it was clear that it was a question that had previously never been considered by the majority of the respondents. Closely related to this ignorance about the structure, was the further ignorance as to the names of the trade union's general secretary and president. No respondent in either factory knew the name of the general secretary, but at Concorde, 22 respondents (85 per cent) knew the name of the president - probably because he was the personnel assistant in their factory. At Bravette none of the respondents knew the president's name.

When asked whether they had any criticisms or suggestions to offer the trade union, the majority of respondents in both factories (64 per cent) said that the union organisers should come to the factories on a regular basis and that they should come much more frequently than once a year, as has hitherto been the case. They also said that the union should start training programmes so that workers can learn about their statutory rights. Approximately a third of respondents said that they had no criticisms at all of the union.

The respondents' lack of involvement in, and lack of 'ownership' of their trade union is striking. It seems even clearer that a vision of the trade union as an organ for development

and change is not one that has any applicability at all for them. For these respondents (and there is no reason to regard their attitudes as being untypical of the majority of workers in the manufacturing sector throughout Zimbabwe) the National Union for the Clothing Industry is seen exclusively as a reservoir of technical expertise and therefore the purpose of trade union membership is to gain insurance against possible future maltreatment or injustice on the part of employers. Latterly, on the macro-level however, it has also been seen as being an entity which 'plugs in' the workers to national mass-actions organised by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

### *Urban living and workers' rural links*

In the questionnaire administered to the sample of 100 workers, some questions were included asking how often (if at all) the worker travelled to his/her rural home, what they did during their time there and whether and how regularly s/he sent money or goods to the rural home. The purpose of these questions was to get an idea of where these workers' sense of commitment lay - was it largely with the extended family at the rural home or was it to something less easily defined, in the urban area? A less well-defined intention behind these questions was also to try and gauge whether any of the worker consciousness concepts could be applied to our analysis of the current state of worker representation in Zimbabwe.

All respondents, without exception, had strong links with the rural areas in that each of them had nuclear and/or extended family living in their rural home area. All said that they sent money or goods to their rural families as often as they could afford. Sixty three per cent managed to send money at least once a month, while the remaining 20 per cent sent money or food, either on public holidays or at the beginning of school terms when school fees were needed. All respondents clearly felt a strong commitment to their rural homes and families. This can be seen not only from the regularity of financial and material support but also because all the respondents said that they went home to the rural areas as often as they could afford - some went once a month, others went when the family agricultural activities needed extra pairs of hands or only on public holidays. One 48 year-old female respondent said "I try to go home every fortnight. My mother, kids and mother-in-law are there and I go and do washing and help as much as I can. I sometimes also take groceries". Another respondent whose wife lived in the rural home: "I go home as often as I can, so I can see my wife and kids and help with the ploughing. During the school holidays my wife comes to town - there is always a family member there who will look after things while she is away". All respondents stated clearly that if they could afford it they would go more frequently to their

rural homes - saying that as recently as three years ago many of them went *ku musha* (to the rural home) every weekend. As a 23 year-old respondent put it "I used to go home as often as I like but now I go less than once a month - ESAP (economic structural adjustment programme) is bad!".

It can be seen then, that there are extremely strong links between urban workers and their families in the rural areas. This is an important factor when considering the issue of weak worker organisation in Zimbabwe. Even from this micro-survey, there are strong indications that many workers, whether or not they belong to a trade union, see their urban existence as a (relatively) temporary one, and therefore are either unwilling or unable to invest a significant part of their lives to any struggle that centre on this urban existence - i.e. what happens at the workplace. On the contrary virtually all the respondents perceived their urban, working lives as being necessary to support their families in their rural homes. This overwhelming rural orientation, coupled as it seems to be with the perception that the worker's life in an urban area as being something of a transitory necessity, has implications for developing the kind of consciousness and commitment necessary for effective shopfloor worker organisation.

Thus the close and constantly renewed ties between both urban and rural peasants impedes full proletarianisation and the emergence of a conscious, strong and independent working class. As Sachikonye comments in his survey of worker mobilisation since independence in 1980,

'...the proletarianisation process is still partial...[A] considerable proportion of workers still have peasant roots in so far as they still have access to the ownership of some land in the countryside. A recent survey of union members showed that about 66 per cent of those interviewed maintained rural homes. Thus labour migration into towns and return to retirement in the peasant sector at the end of one's working career is still a common experience amongst workers. The oscillation of such workers between the capitalist industrial sector and the under-developed peasant sector cannot fail to have some impact on their 'consciousness' as workers and capacity for effective unionism.<sup>1xxxix</sup>

The issue for consideration then is the extent to which workers, in the manufacturing sector at least, are proletarianised - by which we mean, to what extent are their hearts and minds or, more broadly, their consciousness, committed to the struggles and challenges of urban existence, beyond those of everyday survival. And perhaps this is one of the key concepts

that should provide the framework within which to examine this issue of extreme distance and lack of engagement of the workers and/or members in the National Union for the Clothing Industry. Because, in the end, the obvious question arises: why do these workers appear so 'inactive', so loath to move beyond the oppressive boundaries of the restrictions imposed by everyday factory-work experience? Why, in the end, is a corrupt, incompetent and distanced union leadership and administration allowed to continue more-or-less unchecked? Where, in the end, does the worker's commitment and priority lie? Similar questions have recently been central to the issue of the conceptualising of working class and worker consciousness, and the connection between this consciousness and the strengthening of worker (political) organisation in Africa.

### **Worker consciousness and action elsewhere in Africa**

According to Bonnin 'consciousness formation is a process with no fixed beginning or end.' It is dynamic and changes according to prevailing concrete conditions. Bonnin is dissatisfied with much of the theoretical work on class consciousness because 'there has been little attempt to understand the process of consciousness formation', particularly through the concepts of human agency and experience in addition to the concepts of 'grassroots intellectuals, structural conditions and tradition.'<sup>xc</sup> This view is reinforced by Beinart who holds that in the southern African context, workers (have) organised themselves by means of rural, ethnic, and migrant 'networks and layers' and that these are 'intrinsic to the development of worker consciousness.'<sup>xcii</sup>

Taking the issue further and linking worker consciousness with action, Przeworski provides a sharp insight when he makes the observation that 'workers act collectively only if they are organised - that is, only if some organisation has the capacity to prevent individual workers from pursuing their interests. The power of the trade unions is due to this capacity: the ability to persuade or coerce individual workers not to work for less even at the cost of unemployment and perhaps the ability to control the effort of individual workers in production.'<sup>xcii</sup> Thus, in the instance of the current study, the weakness of the National Union for the Clothing Industry is the reason for its members weakness. Ergo, if this trade union were strong then the workers would also be strong. But there is a problem with this 'formula' - the workers and the union are not mutually exclusive; the union is largely composed of its worker members and it is from the cohesiveness and solidarity of the membership that the union should derive its strength and power in the 'political' arena; this power should not reside exclusively in the slim echelons containing the general secretary and his staff or those elected to a high position such as union president.

In other parts of Africa, the issue of the link between worker consciousness and action has been used by some as a measure of the extent of that consciousness and, by implication, the state of worker organisation. Crisp, in his history of mineworkers in Ghana (Gold Coast), assesses worker consciousness in terms of collective action of the labour force. Between 1930 and 1940 the strengthening of mining capital was matched by sharp increases in collective action. There were at least 12 major strikes during this period. According to Crisp these examples of collective resistance were also more successful than earlier stoppages, and more than half the stoppages forced management to grant concessions to the workers.<sup>xci</sup>

But Sandbrook points out that urban workers in Africa are much more populist in their actions than they are revolutionary; his view is that this is not working-class consciousness. Rather, it is an 'oppositional mentality in which popular resentment is limited to a vague notion of a powerful and corrupt "they" who advance themselves by cheating "we" the people.' He goes on to caution that this populism must be distinguished from 'radical working-class consciousness, which should at least include the identification of a common, economically-dominant class enemy', and a recognition that 'only the control or transformation of certain economic and political institutions through collective action would bring beneficial change.'<sup>xcii</sup> In defining populism, Sandbrook undermines-with-faint-praise, when he observes that in some parts of Africa, segments of workers have evolved 'at least a "populist", if non-revolutionary, political consciousness that transcends economism.' He describes this populism as being a 'mentality of the underprivileged as a whole who no longer accept the legitimacy of the existing distribution of power and wealth, and who hold a corrupt and supercilious elite personally responsible for an inequalitarian and oppressive social order.'<sup>xci</sup>

It seems somewhat academic as to whether this does or does not amount to pure revolutionary worker consciousness. In the Zimbabwean context at least, the fact that workers have arrived at an explicit position that holds responsible a 'corrupt and supercilious elite' for most of the nations problems - populism or no - is creditable and constructive. Even more important is the fact that this 'populist' position has provided the framework for a series of well-organised worker actions - the most significant of which were the general strikes of 1997 and 1998 - to try to control or even remove this corrupt elite.

The un-evenness and variability in worker consciousness is not exclusive to African workers as can be seen from Allen's assessments of the 1972 and 1974 British miners' strikes:

The quality of the consciousness of the miners made the 1972 and 1974 strikes historic ones but it would be a mistake to see revolutionary implications in them. The miners wanted only wage increases on both occasions. They did not aim to threaten the government, nor did they blame the institution of government ...[T]he miner's consciousness did not rise to a consistently higher permanent political plane. Consciousness does not work like that. It goes up and down with circumstances.<sup>xcvi</sup>

Konings, in his survey of Ghanaian workers in the Ashanti Goldfields in 1975, came to a similar conclusion. He observed that the mine workers had a keen sense of deprivation relative to the dominant classes but that such feelings gave rise to a reformist consciousness rather than a revolutionary one:

Miners do not want to seize political power; they do not even possess a vision of alternative socio-political order unless through some vague notions of a more democratic and more prosperous society. Quite a few workers and union leaders told me that workers in Ghana do not bother much what kind of government Ghana has, socialist or capitalist or anything else, as long as the politicians are honest, prepared to listen to workers' grievances and demands and to 'deliver the goods'.<sup>xcvii</sup>

But Ranger, writing about Zimbabwe, perceives the abovementioned consciousness scenario as being incomplete because it lacks any parallel discussion of peasant consciousness, thus giving the impression that 'there has emerged a proletarian activism in Zimbabwe, while the peasantry have remained 'un-modernised' and 'apolitical'.<sup>xcviii</sup> Since migrant workers are (and have made up) this 'proletariat' Ranger insists that there cannot be any discussion of worker consciousness without the same attention being paid to peasant consciousness, since they are both sides of the same coin.<sup>xcix</sup> To support this view, Ranger cites a study of worker history carried out in Kenya by Stichter, who points out that 'so intimate were the connections between peasant and migrant strategies that the establishment of a successful system of peasant farming might depend upon the investment of capital obtained by labour migrancy, and that the continuation of successful peasant farming might depend on exporting some of those resident upon the land in the form of migrant labour.'<sup>c</sup>

Thus it can be seen that the attempt to use the concept of worker consciousness to measure or assess the extent of worker activism is not an un-problematic one. But maybe it should also be said that the problems surrounding this attempt to establish the (extent of)

manifestation(s) of worker activism as evidence for the depth (or shallowness) of worker consciousness are being unnecessarily generated by purist, ivory-tower intellectuals whose insistence on allocating to workers, the almost messianic role of unique architects and enforcers of change is self-defeating and profoundly out of touch with reality.

All the evidence points towards the fact that 'workers' are no different from other members of the human race. They react when, according to their own perceptions, the pressure becomes unbearable. And the form that their reaction takes is moulded by the socio-economic and political contexts in which they find themselves.

However, having delivered such a sharp rebuke against the imposition of organised labour's messianic role, we must also acknowledge an unavoidable reality. In many African countries there appears to be no other organised structure around which agitation and activism for change, can take place. It is therefore understandable that workers and their organisations - in the absence of any other similar, organised entity - (have) become the focus of such hope. The conundrum however, is to what extent can workers' organisations realise these hopes for such far-reaching changes that extend into the political and social spheres, considerably beyond the more traditional (and economic) purview of pay scales, general conditions of services and allied issues?

From the available evidence of the African context it seems in general, that workers' organisations can and do act as powerful **catalysts** for change. But anything more profound and long-lasting has not yet occurred.

## **Summary**

In this chapter we have investigated through a literature review and our own case study, issues surrounding worker representation in post-independence Zimbabwe. More specifically we have reviewed perspectives concerning micro-level shopfloor Workers Committees - their capacity and / or potential not only to defend and promote workers' interests but also to make inroads into, or at least impose limits on the power of employers (capital) at the workplace.

The nature of contemporary worker representation in Zimbabwe is extremely uneven. The macro level structure of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions appears to be gaining in coherence and strength but at the micro-level of the shopfloor it is fatally weak and in



general, operates against the fundamental interests of the workers. Gramsci's analysis and explanation of the failure of the Factory Councils in Italy in 1920 has direct relevance for Zimbabwe today - that they did not have a specific 'ideology' nor did they disseminate it among the masses and, most importantly they did not 'strengthen the consciousness of their militants with certitudes of a moral and psychological character'.<sup>ci</sup> In the Zimbabwean context this can fruitfully be applied to the trade unions failure exploit the opportunity offered by the shopfloor-based Workers Committees to organise and empower their rank-and-file membership.

Our case study bears this out in that it demonstrates that at the shopfloor micro-level, the structure of representation that has the most day-to-day relevance for workers – the Workers Committee – actually does not defend their interests *per se*. It does nothing to build workers' technical expertise; nothing to strengthen their ability to encounter management on a basis of reasonable equality; nothing to strengthen their organisational capacity as workers and citizens, so that they can bring some influence to bear in their urban community (decent housing, education, health and other social services). It simply serves as a limited channel of communication between management and workers.

But even if the Workers Committee does not deliver the strengthening activities and support at the micro-level of the shopfloor, then the reasonable assumption would be that this might anyway be happening (in our case study) under the auspices of the National Union for the Clothing Industry, but the evidence is clear that it is not happening. There is absolutely no evidence that this trade union actively shares the perspective of their colleagues in the South African National Union of Mineworkers that it is (potentially) useful for workers to participate at the micro-level in shopfloor worker representation structures in order to 'challenge managerial prerogative and also to achieve some control'.<sup>cii</sup>

However, in contrast to this micro-level absence of trade union organising by NUCI, at the macro-level the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions has figured prominently in these same workers' lives in terms of providing structures for national consultation and organising which has subsequently led to successful mass action in support of specific socio-economic demands. It was illuminating that, during the case study process many of the shopfloor respondents thought that the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions was their particular union and that Morgan Tsvangirai (the general secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions) was the president of their 'own union'; the respondents were not explicitly aware of the existence of the National Union of the Clothing Industry as an entity in itself which had its own president elected by its clothing-industry members. Latterly however, some workers had

become aware that NUCI was the channel through which they were linked to national mass-actions organised by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

An obvious question arises as to why this contemporary weakness in micro-level worker representation should exist at all, as well as appear to be so enduring. In order to investigate this question and to arrive at some kind of understanding of the answers, it is necessary first to have a proper understanding of historical developments in nascent worker organisation as well as of the struggles to undermine and later, overthrow the colonial and UDI governments. These developments from the late nineteenth century and leading up to the birth of an independent Zimbabwe form the substance of the next chapter. And from there we can offer some suggestions for strengthening present day worker representation in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER : THREE

### **Historical Foundations up to 1980**

We have, in the last chapter, described and highlighted the somewhat fragile nature of worker representation in Zimbabwe. At the micro-level of the shopfloor, this representation is particularly weak. We now come to the discussion as to what has given rise to this situation. In other words what are the elements in Zimbabwean history that can account for this continuing weakness of worker organisation of the shopfloor micro-level? It is important to be able to identify these historical elements of the pre-1980 period, so as to enable us to identify specific solutions to current problems which we will be doing in later chapters.

In the present chapter however, we will be examining key trajectories in Zimbabwe's historical background which formed the basis for, and which also influenced the direction of, future worker organisation in that country. These trajectories also provide the basis for explaining the prolonged weaknesses in this worker organisation in post-independent Zimbabwe. At the same time, by way of providing a framework for this examination, we will also be considering the theoretical perspectives of some seminal thinkers on the subject of the role of trade unions and of workers in bringing about revolutionary change. There are three key trajectories within Zimbabwe's historical development that can help us understand the contemporary reality and micro-level weakness of the structures of worker representation, as well as helping us understand the perceptions of workers themselves as to the usefulness and strength derived from these structures. We shall examine each of these trajectories to show how, in combination, they have made up the main determinants of the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary worker organisation and representation. These trajectories are firstly, the colonial and UDI context and policies towards black workers. The evidence in this chapter will show a direct relation between the authoritarian nature of minority rule and the lack of micro level representation today. The second trajectory is comprised of the worker actions precipitated by those policies and the emerging structures resulting from that activism – in other words, the origins of the development of a black trade union movement in Zimbabwe. This will show the promising beginnings or worker activism and strength at the micro-level. And the third trajectory consists of the timing and emphasis of the strategic direction taken by the nationalist struggle which exerted a defining influence, effectively sidelining the independent progress of a nascent workers movement. But before we examine each of these trajectories in detail, we should consider the theoretical framework within which we will be analysing these trajectories.

## Theoretical Perspectives

The nature and degree of strength of post-independence worker representation has been heavily influenced by Zimbabwe's colonial background and experience and this therefore necessitates an examination of the 'impact of capitalist penetration on the various strategies of labour extraction and the response of that labour'.<sup>ciii</sup> In other words we will be tracing early post-independence manifestations of worker organisation and seeing what elements gave it impetus and what pointers these manifestations provide to understanding the nature of worker representation in Zimbabwe nearly a century later.

We have seen in the previous chapter, perspectives from different parts of Africa which show that worker activism should not necessarily be equated with workers having become fully proletarianised and thus having arrived at full worker consciousness – an academically neat concept but extremely problematic when applied to real-life situations.

There is a danger that rigidly applied, this kind of concept will be too mechanistic and therefore leads to a somewhat artificial, linear process of development which assumes that all early African colonial labour history follows a typical path:

Cultivators and artisans are deprived of access to the means of production, they flock to cities or industrial centres or are forced into insecure wage labour jobs on mines or farms, their skills are devalued and ever tighter forms of managerial control are devised. Meanwhile workers acquire a sense of their collective identity as sellers of labour power, they form organisations, they go on strike and they collectively challenge capital, either forcing it to deflect its rush towards increasingly massive capital accumulation or to bring about a revolutionary situation.<sup>civ</sup>

Of course this baldly-stated process strikes us now as being absurdly simplistic. But some scholars are still prone to this kind of generalisation, leading to rather mechanistic conclusions. In the following sections we will seek to avoid falling into this kind of mechanistic trap by referring to early Marxist analyses (including also Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Gramsci) as well as those of contemporary thinkers, which have provided a welcome framework for those activists and intellectuals who have sought to understand as well as to explain some of the negative achievements and 'failures' of those very institutions and social actors on which they had pinned their hopes for revolutionary change: the workers themselves and (their) trade unions. We will thus be using these theoretical insights

to illuminate general developments in worker organisation in Africa and then more specifically in Zimbabwe.

Let us start with the role of trade unions. In the broadest possible sense Marx was correct when he described them as *organisng centres*, centres for the collecting of the forces of the workers, organisations for giving the workers an elementary class training. Scattered workers, competing with one another, were now beginning to close ranks with one another, were now beginning to close ranks and come out jointly. Marx and Engels repeatedly refer in their works to the idea that the trade unions are schools of solidarity, schools for socialism.<sup>cv</sup>

As documented by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, competition between workers would prevent trade unions from raising wages above a minimum subsistence level, and as instruments of economic improvement strikes were therefore useless. It was precisely because unions were **not** economically effective that they would be forced to engage in political struggles against the wages system. In the meantime the spread of trade unions and the prosecution of strikes would prepare workers for the major confrontation that was to come: hence Engels description of trade unions as 'schools of war'.

Marx saw the inequity between capital and labour when he observed that:

Capital is concentrated social power, while the worker has only his individual labour power at his disposal. Therefore the agreement between capital and labour can never be based on just terms. [T]he only social force possessed by the workers is their numerical strength. This force, however, is impaired by the absence of unity. The lack of unity among workers is caused by the inevitable competition among themselves and is maintained by it. The trade unions developed originally out of the spontaneous attempts of the workers to do away with this competition, or at least restrict it, for the purpose of obtaining at least such contractual conditions as would raise them above the status of bare slaves.<sup>cvi</sup>

The immediate aims of the trade unions, therefore was limited to waging the day-to-day struggle against capital, as a means of defence against the continuous abuses of the latter i.e. questions concerning wages and working hours.

[But also] the trade unions, without being aware of it, became the focal points for the organisation of the working class. If trade unions have become indispensable for the

guerrilla fight between capital and labour, they are even more important as organised bodies to promote the abolition of the very system of wage labour <sup>cvii</sup>

But Marx did not limit himself to the past and present of trade unions. In this resolution he says the following about the future:

In addition to their original tasks, the trade unions must now learn how to act consciously as focal points for organising the working class in the greater interests of its complete emancipation. They must support every social and political movement directed towards this aim. By considering themselves champions and representatives of the whole working class, and acting accordingly, the trade unions must succeed in rallying round themselves all workers still outside their ranks. They must carefully safeguard the interests of the workers in the poorest-paid trade as, for example, the farm labourers, who due to special circumstances have been deprived of their power of resistance. They must convince the whole world that their efforts are far from narrow and egoistic, but on the contrary, are directed towards the emancipation of the downtrodden masses. <sup>cviii</sup>

Here it is necessary to call attention to the fact that Marx again stresses the significance of the trade unions as organising centre of the working class. It is extremely important to note that the tasks set before the trade unions are: the struggle for the complete emancipation of the working class, the support of every socio-political movement of the proletariat and the drawing of all workers into their ranks. <sup>cix</sup>

This insistence on the defining significance of the trade unions' role in the empowerment or emancipation of *all* dis-empowered sectors of the population, including peasants and those who are not employed in the formal sector, has powerful resonance for African countries in general and Zimbabwe in particular. As we will see later on, pre-independence resistance struggles were initially focused on fledgling worker actions which later developed into organised trade union activism which, in turn provided middle and upper-level personnel for a fully fledged guerilla war of independence.

Studies of unions and politics have mostly focused on unions as collective organisations and agents for political change. However, unions can also work as important areas or laboratories for individual political learning. By disseminating ideas and creating consensus amongst their members, organisations become the basis for conflict between organisations rather than between individuals or between the individual and the state. Lipset, O'Donnell, Schmitter & Whitehead accredit unions with a more radical or "revolutionary" potential. <sup>cx</sup>

They state that the greatest challenge to authoritarian rule is likely to come from the new or revived identities and the capacities of collective action by the working class. Through union participation, workers internalise new knowledge and experience. On this basis, unions influence members' political values and participation in a direction which will directly influence the pace and direction of political change.<sup>cxix</sup>

Can trade unions work as agents for democracy in society at large? O'Donnell et al accredit unions as learning areas for individual political ideas with radical potential. The new or revived identities and capacities of collective actions by the working class are, in their opinion, the greatest challenge to authoritarian rule.<sup>cxix</sup>

But what identities and which political ideas form the content of these new identities? There are at least three groups of answers.

*Instrumentalists* argue that unions do not affect workers' attitudes to politics; or to the moderate degree that they do, union learning will create or enforce workers' support for a (regulated / moderated) free market and for unions as independent of politics. They argue that workers join unions for economic reasons and their attitudes towards unions are instrumental. They recognise the need for unions to engage in political activities in a limited short-term period, in defence of long-term economic interests.

*Radicals* on the left will argue for the revolutionary potential of unions through working class mobilisation and collective conscientisation of class interests. In their opinion, support for and identification with collective class interests will increase as workers become exposed to the practices of unionism.

According to *participatory democrats*, participation in decisions in working life and unions will teach the individual worker the values and instruments of democracy. Union engagement will teach the workers how decisions are made, how to influence them and through democratic conflict-solving teach workers the value of political participation, the collective interests of the community and democratic tolerance.<sup>cxix</sup>

In fact as far as the Zimbabwean context is concerned, it seems that trade unions have had a combination of effects on its members - though not necessarily through members' explicit experiences of day-to-day membership but, more probably, through the trade unions being able to put to good use their organizational ability and structures so as to act as effective catalysts when the wider political context required it. Thus at the macro-level anyway, the

trade unions have made efforts to act to satisfy their members *instrumental* needs through, for example engaging in national and sectoral collective bargaining activities. Again at the macro-level trade unions have latterly, at least, worked systematically to mobilize their members as well as workers in general, to take mass action in pursuance of *radical* political change in Zimbabwe. As we shall see in the next chapter there is less clarity on whether workers have been able to have meaningful opportunities to become *participatory democrats* in the process of these different struggles.

In evaluating the effects of these aforementioned trade union actions for example, it is useful to take into account Marx and Engels' concept of 'complex economic determinism'. Their central point was that in order to explain a particular phenomenon, let us say the level of working-class consciousness, it was not sufficient to examine the state of the economy, the level of wages or the imminence of the economic crisis. Working class consciousness was *also* determined by specifically political and ideological factors such as the presence, size, policies and influence of working class parties; the character of the political system; the policies of the ruling class; the types of alliance forged between political forces. The economy was determinant 'in the final analysis', but short of that fact many other factors were important.<sup>cxiv</sup>

Although Marx used the terms 'class' and 'political' interchangeably he was making an extremely important point about the heights trade unionism could reach, which were far beyond the humdrum economic battles:

...the attempt by strikes etc in a particular factory or even in a particular trade union to compel individual capitalists to reduce the working day is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force through an eight hour day, etc *law* is a *political* movement, that is to say a *class* movement, with the object of enforcing its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, socially coercive force.<sup>cxv</sup>

In contemporary Zimbabwe we have a similar instance for this 'political' distinction in trade union activity (although our particular example is markedly more 'political' than the trade union simply moving beyond basic economism). Since the mid-1990s the trade union movement in Zimbabwe has provided the vehicle and leadership for protest and activism against disastrous national economic policies. But it has recently graduated, in collaboration with civic organizations, to acting as midwife to the birth of a credible political party. As we will see in a subsequent chapter, this party has become the popular focus of hope on the



part of major sectors of the population, to unseat the current government whose policies and activities have devastated many peoples lives, be they workers or not.

But before we return to our local historical situation in Zimbabwe, it will be instructive to first look at the African continent as a whole.

### **The African context**

It was a striking feature of the immediate post-independence years, that much of the literature on African workers quickly moved to focus on one institution, the trade union. This institution appeared to have the capacity not only to control, discipline and develop workers but also potentially to be the greatest single political force in African countries. The social struggle often seems reduced in these studies to a universally applied model, the one-way street of 'modernisation' that would sweep Africa forward along a route long since pioneered by the industrial nations. The real battle was for the union and who would lead it.<sup>cxvi</sup>

The intensification of cash networks and new demands from capital eventually brought about the emergence of a completely landless proletariat in different parts of Africa which, particularly from the 1940s, began to organise trade unions and influence politics, proving indeed what radical thrust the nationalist movement could muster. Thus a `radical challenge [emerged] which insisted on the classic revolutionary thrust of the proletariat as its historic task in Africa.<sup>cxvii</sup>

Giovanni Arrighi's work on Rhodesia played a particularly seminal role because of the attention that he gave to class formation. Workers needs were restored to a fundamental place in the comprehension of how and why colonialism operated. The main thrust of Southern Rhodesian legislation, particularly land legislation, had as its aim the establishment of a substantial and inexpensive army of African workers prepared to labour on the mines and farms of the settlers. His writings came to have an influence particularly among scholars of southern Africa.<sup>cxviii</sup>

In the late 1970s two important collections of research work from, among others, Robin Cohen, Richard Sandbrook and Peter Gutkind were pivotal in establishing a new radical thinking which situated labour primarily as an object of study not of anthropology but of history (and to a lesser extent sociology) in Africa. The colonial period was reinterpreted as the era of capitalist penetration and, in varying degrees, the introduction into Africa of capitalist production. This in turn required the creation of a proletariat, which in African

conditions where few peasants were made landless, was overwhelmingly migrant in nature.<sup>cxix</sup>

Thus the preoccupation arose around the extent to which a `real' working class had formed in various parts of Africa. There are as Marx, Lenin and others have noted, degrees of class cohesion. Teodor Shanin in his study of the peasantry as a political factor, has contended that the peasantry, for a number of well known reasons, evinces a `low classness'.<sup>cxx</sup> Urban workers on the other hand, are in a better position to develop `high classness' – owing to their concentration in large numbers, the ease of communications, and the need to cooperate in production. It is perhaps useful to identify three levels of class consciousness. The most elementary form requires simply the acceptance by a group of workers of their common identity based on similar roles in the production process. A more developed consciousness includes a recognition that workers have common economic interests as a class which need to be protected through collective organisation against the opposing claims of other classes. Historically workers have spontaneously attained this `trade union consciousness' without the leadership of outside intellectuals or socialist parties.<sup>cxxi</sup>

This “trade union consciousness” apparently makes no connections between the generic socio-political grievances and workers' specific industrial grievances and protests. The explanation of this politically quiescent and even conservative behaviour has often been phrased in terms of the “labour aristocracy thesis” where *skilled workers* act as a labour aristocracy. These thesis had its origins among late nineteenth century revolutionaries influenced by Marx. Socialists, in their efforts to explain workers repeated failure to rise against capital, developed the notion of a labour aristocracy. They argued that a section of the working class had forsaken its revolutionary destiny and made common cause with the class enemy to maintain the status quo. The labour aristocracy was seen as either benefiting directly from, or being co-conspirators in, capitalist exploitation. This understanding became a core component in twentieth century marxists approach to trade unions more generally, which were seen as deeply implicated in the capitalist system and either unamenable to revolution or deeply counter-revolutionary.<sup>cxxii</sup>

The labour aristocracy thesis gained a new lease of life on the left with the development of nationalist independence movements at the end of the colonial era.<sup>cxxiii</sup> In this context, characterised by a small and apparently privileged urban wage labour force, the labour aristocracy thesis was redeployed to account for the gap between urban workers and the mass of poor peasants, and for the inability of the former to lead a progressive movement in the interests of the latter.<sup>cxxiv</sup>

As a consequence African Marxists (including those in pre-independence Zimbabwe) favoured peasant-led movements of national liberation. In the hands of authors such as Fanon, the idea of a labour aristocracy was used not only as an empirical argument to criticise urban workers and trade unions' apparent material rewards from colonialism, but as a part of moral critique emphasising these actors' deep economic, political and cultural collaboration with the colonial oppressors. More strictly economic arguments, such as those advanced by Arrighi and Saul, saw the urban proletariat as benefiting directly from the surplus extracted from the peasantry, and thereby as co-participants along with colonial bureaucrats and expatriate entrepreneurs in the peasants' exploitation.<sup>cxxv</sup>

Such interpretations had an unexpected and unusually devoted following among liberal analysts in the 1960s and 1970s. These writers adopted the perspective of an urban bias in development, rooted in a coalition of vested urban interests not dramatically different from those identified by marxists. In this formulation, workers formed an integral part of an urban coalition devoted to transferring resources from the countryside to the cities to the detriment of peasants. For these writers, the entire project of national development was a not-so-hidden form of class domination in which urban elites – owners and workers – developed policies that purposely favoured the cities and manufacturing at the expense of agriculture.

Incidentally, the labour aristocracy thesis not only influenced the diagnosis of the crisis, it also defined the cure. Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were ultimately aimed at breaking up the urban coalition by reversing policies favouring them. Budget cuts, privatisation, currency devaluation, and price and tariff liberalisation were designed to achieve this goal (The most forthright statement of this position came in the notorious World Bank document known as the `Berg Report' authored by Elliot Berg, an early advocate for the labour aristocracy thesis. See World Bank, 1981). These policies hit wage-earners particularly hard, directly through de-industrialisation and increased unemployment, and indirectly through budget cuts that reduced transfer payments formerly boosting household incomes (Stein 1992, Gibbon 1992, Walton and Seddon 1994). `The World Bank portrayed itself as the champion of the wretched of the earth – peasants, the unemployed, and workers in the informal sector – all of whom were supposedly prejudiced by the practices of the labour aristocracy. SAPs were seen as delivering justice to the poor, particularly the rural poor.<sup>cxxvi</sup>

In general terms, one can only observe that skilled workers appear to be neither unduly privileged nor enhancing their relative position. According to those studies whose central

focus has been African workers' political action as distinguished by skill level, skilled workers are not portrayed either as politically quiescent or conservative. On the contrary, the skilled workers have indeed often served either as informal leaders of radical political action or at least as participants.<sup>cxxvii</sup>

Thus two serious criticisms have been mounted against the labour aristocracy thesis as deployed in Africa in both its marxist and neo-liberal formulations. First it grossly overstates the real income levels of urban workers and the degree of difference between African workers and peasants, while neglecting the more marked discrepancies between property owners and the property-less – whether in cities or countryside. In particular, by dividing the labour market into urban insiders and rural outsiders, it seriously neglects the many bonds of interdependence and mutual support between urban and rural life. In times of industrial expansion, urban wages may supplement rural incomes, while rural subsistence production may bolster sagging urban incomes during economic crises. Second, it misunderstands the political orientations of African workers, who are more likely to be in opposition to the elites rather than act in concert with them.<sup>cxxviii</sup>

The labour aristocracy thesis is both empirically wrong and simplistic in its characterisation of workers' real living conditions. Moreover it is inaccurate and simplistic in its reading of the political ramifications of the position of workers.

But where, as Freund asks, does all this theoretical agonising and analysis lead to? Will the working class in Africa commit itself to socialism (or at least to driving the forces for constructive change) as well as the re-organisation of state and the economy? Where is the happy revolutionary ending which is now long overdue? Do we not need to explain (instead) why African workers are what they are and do what they do and think what they think rather than what they seem not quite yet to be?<sup>cxxix</sup>

Clearly the answer to Freund's last question is "yes". The in-applicability of an overly simplistic and mechanistic proletarianisation process is underlined by Thornton's historical study of migrant workers in Bulawayo (Southern Rhodesia) in the 1940-50s in which he follows Freund's suggestion in trying to 'explain what African workers do and why'.<sup>cxxx</sup>

He points out that, discernible expressions of worker consciousness appeared more often than not, to be erratic, vacillating and frequently contradictory. In the instance of Southern Rhodesia, there was little evidence of a gradual growth in intensity of the protests in the 1940s and 1950s in the town of Bulawayo. Industries with little previous unrest could suddenly break out into serious confrontation whilst apparently well-developed worker

organisation backed by considerable mass support could disappear as rapidly as it had arisen. In short according to Thornton, though the more permanent working class was able to develop more effective structures to challenge the system, there is evidence that its members were inclined rather towards economism and towards a compromise with the status-quo rather than militancy and solidarity with their migrant-worker colleagues.

Thus worker consciousness does not evolve in a regular manner, but 'explodes' in specific historical circumstances, leading to momentary material gains for the working class and perhaps to a deepening of that consciousness. Or as Przeworski would have it:

Individuals do not congeal into ready-made political actors, either in workplaces, markets, churches, or anywhere else, but collective identity – that identity on the basis of which people act in collective life – is continually generated, destroyed and moulded anew in the course of conflicts.<sup>cxxxii</sup>

In areas of the Third World where migrant labour has become institutionalised, the growth of such consciousness according to Thornton, has been shown to be a rare occurrence. Brought together for only short periods as a working class, with ossified social relations of a pre-capitalist mode of production artificially retained by both regular physical movement from town to country and back, and by the imposition of a ruling class ideology which gave emphasis to the essentially beneficial nature of the process and to the definition of 'home' as being in the rural areas, political action by such workers has seemed rarely the result of any clearly conceived conception of themselves as a class, let alone as part of a coherent pattern of activity designed to further the interests of a class acting in Marx's sense 'for itself'.<sup>cxxxiii</sup> There has been however a well documented persistence of spontaneous and localised action by workers, the examination of which allows the historian to piece together patterns of events which although not apparent to the actors themselves, shows at the very least the emergence of forms of corporate consciousness based on an awareness of a conflict of interests between employer and worker within the confines of a specific workplace, however fleeting and however geographically or temporally isolated.<sup>cxxxiii</sup>

Thus in terms of activism as a barometer of worker consciousness, we cannot be mechanistic because as we have seen, incidents of worker activism occur in distinctly un-mechanistic and unpredictable ways. And in keeping with a non-mechanistic approach, it also follows that any episode of worker activism does not necessarily herald the beginning of a revolution. More likely, it represents another, catalysing step towards some kind of future change about which it is impossible to be prescriptive. It is important to bear in mind these foregoing caveats concerning the uneven and inconsistent nature of worker activism because it provides us with a realistic framework within which to assess key landmark events in Zimbabwe's early economic and labour history.

Looking at our three trajectories, we can see how the seeds were sown for weak shopfloor worker representation, despite a successful nationalist liberation campaign which had its fledgling origins in early trade union activism.

### **Trajectory One : Colonial and UDI policy towards black workers**

In Southern Rhodesia (as Zimbabwe was then known) the earliest state efforts to regulate and control workers were implemented through the establishment of provincial labour offices in 1895, which were then amalgamated under the Labour Board of Southern Rhodesia in 1899 which finally became the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau. These measures were necessitated, in the main, by mine owners who were the biggest employers, but who at the same time had great difficulty in achieving a constant supply of cheap labour. Resistance took the form of desertion, boycott and sometimes violence.<sup>cxxxiv</sup> But there were also struggles on the part of labour to force improvements in pay and conditions of work, some of which were successful: between 1896 and 1903 mine owners were forced to improve pay and conditions of work and real wages rose consistently, if only minimally.<sup>cxxxv</sup>

By 1902, however, mine owners were facing a crisis because of a marked paucity of available cheap labour. Conditions were still so harsh and unpleasant that many workers simply refused to be recruited, preferring to rely on their own agricultural activities to make a living. The state's solution to this problem was to implement mechanisms for the creation of a cheap supply of labour. As early as 1894 a hut tax was introduced with the effect of forcing "natives" to seek work for a cash income.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Peasant agriculture was subsequently strangled by the effects of the Maize Control Act (1931) together with measures to forcibly remove and 'ghetto-ise' peasants to areas of the country where the soil was barren and unproductive.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> However, even with these measures, there was still a shortage of people who were willing to act as 'virtual slave labourers' on the mines.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> Thus a formal forced labour system was introduced: mine owners, with state assistance, formed the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) whose sole purpose was to secure for the mines 'a nucleus of natives contracted to work for twelve months at a definite minimum wage'.<sup>cxxxix</sup> This enabled the mine owners to actually lower wages between 1906 and 1908 while expanding the labour supply. Peasants who refused to sign the RNLB contracts were sometimes whipped or had their grain stores burned down.<sup>cxl</sup>

Mine labourers were housed in closed barracks or compounds and were completely isolated from their own means of production and subsistence. The intention of the compound system

was to restrict the free sale of labour power in the market. And in keeping workers apart from the general population, it was also intended, as one observer points out, to 'check the development of worker consciousness, solidarity and organisation'.<sup>cxli</sup>

Government legal measures had a significant impact on the coherence of worker activism. The passing of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934 further contributed to the undermining of black worker organisation, by creating provisions that applied to, and benefited white (skilled) workers only. The Industrial Conciliation Act entrenched the privileges of white workers by legalising the formation of white trade unions while making black trade unions illegal. Two other laws were introduced which further undermined black worker and political organisation: the Sedition Act (1936) which sought to stop the spread of black newspapers and journals and the Native Registration Act (1936) which stated that every male African worker in town had to carry two passes - a government-issued *situpa* (registration card), and a pass which indicated that the carrier was lawfully in town as a jobseeker or that he was in town with the permission of his employer.

A few years prior to the Industrial Conciliation Act (1934) white wage labour was becoming increasingly apprehensive that they would be replaced by cheaper (skilled) black labour in certain positions. The militancy of 'this white petty bourgeoisie...forced the government to pass the Public Service Act (1931) banning blacks from employment in the civil service and public works programmes'.<sup>cxlii</sup> In the same year that the Public Service Act was passed, the Land Apportionment Act (1931) also came into effect. By dividing the country into mutually exclusive white and black areas, it deprived (relatively wealthy) blacks of their right to purchase land anywhere outside the "reserves". Instead they were allotted special Native Purchase Areas where land could be bought on individual tenure. These Areas were often in desolate and low-lying regions which lay along the borders of the country and in some cases were infested with tsetse fly.<sup>cxliii</sup> These effective apartheid measures threw up further powerful constraints to the consolidation of fledgling worker-organisation structures for some years to come.

Another important factor that hampered the development of trade unionism between 1965, the year of the illegal government's unilateral declaration of independence and the time of its defeat in 1979, was the increasingly sharp state repression and clampdown on political activity which led to many workers being imprisoned. Trade unions, as well as other organisations therefore assumed 'a para-political character',<sup>cxliv</sup> and their leaders, admittedly on their way to becoming nationalist leaders as well, began secretly to address themselves

to a wide range of issues such as housing, education, residential segregation, "tribal trust lands" development and other broad concerns.

In terms of evidence, little exists in the way of comprehensive assessment of the state of worker organisation on the eve of independence in the mid to late 1970s. But the repression of labour can be gauged from the fact that the number of work stoppages recorded by the Department of Labour fell from one hundred and thirty eight in 1965 to only nineteen in 1971.<sup>cxlv</sup> Additionally, there was not a single recorded legal strike since the passing of the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1959. Labour actions were dealt with by the repressive security legislation and the emergency powers of the state - e.g. the crushing of the work-to-rule by railway workers in 1969 and the Harare (Salisbury) bus drivers' strike in 1972 by state security agents.<sup>cxlvi</sup> That this repression by the state was clearly aimed at preventing effective worker organisation, can be seen in that anybody who was convicted under the Unlawful Organisations Act (1970) was liable to a minimum sentence of three months imprisonment and was at the same time prohibited from holding any trade union position for seven years.

Thus it can be seen that the severe policies of the early colonial state, built upon by those of the brutally repressive UDI government, managed to successfully undermine any lasting attempts at maintaining unity and strength in organising workers. At the same time, it also has to be acknowledged that there were some important achievements in organising black trade unionism, which gained a small foothold even in the face of successive governments' lethal opposition, and through which some foundations were laid and a history of organised resistance established. It is to these events and achievements that we will now turn.

### **Trajectory Two : The nature of black trade unionism in the pre-independence period**

We have seen how workers were intensely exploited by their employers as well as being harassed, intimidated and oppressed by the government. However, in spite of all these attempts to prevent their organising, from as early as 1911 workers were driven into a wave of protests which culminated in the Hwange Colliery Strike of 1912. The reason for this strike was that, since 1904, the mine owners had been repeatedly lowering wages. This strike was brutally put down by the mine owners with active state help and many workers were arrested, flogged and/or dismissed.

The first strike outside the mining sector was the railway workers strike in 1919, (by members of the Rhodesia Railways Workers Union which was a white trade union) who were temporarily supported by black railway workers in Bulawayo. Both white and black



workers had common grievances about wages, conditions of work, and payments of World War I bonuses. The employers reacted by making some concessions to the white labour section while dismissing some black workers from employment - thus dividing and weakening a potential labour movement.<sup>cxlvii</sup>

But, as observed in a recent assessment by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, this struggle did not necessarily bring any positive change for several reasons. Firstly, the power of the white settlers created a repressive situation where open resistance was almost suicidal. Secondly, workers themselves were still thinking in a traditional and feudal way; loyalty was 'to the tribe first and not to the workers as a class', so that employers could, and did use divide-and-rule tactics. Finally, there was no organised means of communication between and with workers in other parts of the country.<sup>cxlviii</sup>

However in 1927, in spite of these constraints black workers organised a trade union for the first time - the independent Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), which was, according to one observer, inspired by developments in the labour movement in South Africa.<sup>cxlix</sup> There was an important new aspect, however, to the ICU which was that it was not based in the mining enclaves but rather in the industrial and urban centres of Harare and Bulawayo. Its first congress was held in Bulawayo in 1931. The ICU was most active between 1927 and 1934 when it developed thirteen branches and reached a membership of approximately five thousand workers. The membership included farm workers, domestic workers, construction workers and workers in commercial firms and small mines.<sup>cl</sup> The response of the state to this workers' union was to harass, infiltrate and try to suppress the ICU; all the leading officials were, at one time or another arrested and detained. This, together with the debilitating effects on the economy of the world depression between 1935 and 1938, resulted in very low levels of workers' activism. Another illustration of the uneven nature of worker activism manifesting at one time, a promising strength and coherence and at another, quite the opposite depending on the prevailing context.<sup>cli</sup>

In 1944 black workers formed their first industrial trade union, the Rhodesia Railways African Employees Association (RRAEA) ("association" because the Masters & Servants Ordinance (1901) forbade black trade unions). The RRAEA was formed out of a benefit society dating back to the 1920s.<sup>clii</sup> This was followed in 1945 by a Milling Employees Association based in Bulawayo.

In the instance of the clothing and textile sub-sector, the oral-history testimonies of two retired clothing workers who were also trade union members of long standing given a rich

picture of their own experiences of developments of that time.<sup>cliii</sup> Before 1946 there were few clothing or textile factories but even so, according to the primary informant, the first clothing workers organisation was formed in 1944 and was formally registered as the Rhodesia Tailors and Garment Workers Union in 1962 under the provisions of the revised Industrial Conciliation Act (1959).<sup>cliv</sup> Under the same provisions the textile workers established their own union, separate from that of the clothing workers.

From the informants' testimonies of the way in which the trade union developed - from the time of the first mass meeting in Bulawayo's Stanley Square in September 1958 - it is clear that nationalist sentiments were closely interwoven with urban workers' struggles for higher wages and better living conditions. As one of the respondents recounted; "at the time of Stanley Square we were all talking revolutionary language...like...'we would rather die than continue in this situation'...this was especially because we lost our land through the Land Apportionment Act". Many of the people who attended and/or addressed the mass meetings were not necessarily workers in the clothing and textile industry. Some of them were residents from the same township as the workers and others were political activists seeking to link up with such urban protests in order to strengthen their own cause. As one observer has pointed out, in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) 'the links between nationalism and trade unionism are difficult to disentangle'.<sup>clv</sup> And Sachikonye expands on this when he points out how difficult it was 'to separate economic struggles from political struggles' and that 'under colonialism the convergence between the two was quicker than under normal conditions of capitalism and post-colonial struggles'.<sup>clvi</sup>

An illustration of this 'convergence' can be seen in the strike that was undertaken by black railway workers in 1945. Their trade union, the RRAEA, had confronted its management in mid-1944 calling for recognition of the union and for an inquiry into workers' grievances. The management responded by worsening the workers conditions and also cutting meat rations. In October 1945, the union called a strike which mobilised two thousand workers, the figure rising to eight thousand as word spread along the rail lines reaching Zambia (the Northern Rhodesia), thus bringing to a standstill the transport lifeline of Central Africa.<sup>clvii</sup> The strike was a great organisational success; even hostile observers praised the efficient organisation, non-violence, sobriety and inter-ethnic unity of the strikers.<sup>clviii</sup>

This action on the part of the workers, forced management and the government to meet with the union representatives and conduct a full inquiry under the auspices of the Tredgold Commission into railway workers' conditions. The Commission's report in November 1945, in essence, blamed the strike on the management. The Commission recommended the

introduction of Labour Boards for urban black workers (except for those in public or domestic service) which would determine levels of minimum wages and of grading skills.<sup>clix</sup>

In 1946 the Bulawayo-based Federation of African Workers Union (FAWU) was formed. The leader of the new movement was Jasper Savanhu, who had been the driving force behind a strikers' relief committee during the rail strike. He was also the General Secretary of the Southern Rhodesia Bantu Congress (SRBC).<sup>clx</sup>

Within a year the number of organised black unionists in Bulawayo rose from a few hundred members of the RRAEA, to about six thousand workers organised in a number of FAWU trade unions covering sectors ranging from milling to retail to municipal workers.<sup>clxi</sup> In Harare (then Salisbury) a most significant development occurred when the "African Branch" of the Labour Party dissolved itself in order to become the Reformed Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (RICU). The union was led by Charles Mzingeli who became the undisputed leader of the black population of Harare (Salisbury) for about a decade.<sup>clxii</sup> But RICU's national organisational achievements were limited; in 1949, at the height of Mzingeli's influence, it claimed only four hundred members.<sup>clxiii</sup>

As a result of the successful strike in 1945, FAWU and RICU took up the Tredgold Commission's recommendations and called for Labour Boards to meet without delay. Wage demands were also put forward. The unions acted more determinedly, calling for wage increases, Labour Boards and union recognition. Strikes were threatened. When in July 1947, the three and a half thousand strong RRAEA threatened to call a strike over the non-implementation of the Tredgold recommendations, the government quickly set up the first Native Labour Board for Railways and even hinted at recognition of the RRAEA.<sup>clxiv</sup> Labour Boards were thus an institution won by labour in its struggles. The Labour Board that was set up awarded minimum wages, overtime increases and longer holidays with pay. Although this was not a total success for the RRAEA, significant gains had been made.

When in April 1948 the Chamber of Commerce announced minimum wages below those of railway labour, militant workers forced the hesitant FAWU leaders to call for a general strike which began several days later. There was massive support for the strike in Bulawayo, followed by the towns of Gweru, Kadoma, Harare and Mutare. The government at last agreed to meet with the strikers. This offer of a meeting, combined as it was with the threat of armed intervention, persuaded the strikers to return to work. A National Native Labour Board was convened the next month and produced the 1949 Labour Regulations.<sup>clxv</sup> The

Board recommended minimum wages and conditions similar to those of railway workers and measures for job grading, improved housing and social welfare.

However, repression of black workers continued with the passing of the Subversive Activities Act in 1950 which gave the state even wider powers to control unions and other political activity. This heightened repression did not, however, stop approximately twenty FAWU or RICU affiliated unions from fighting and gaining de facto recognition in the early 1950s.<sup>clxvi</sup>

By 1953, when the RRAEA affiliated with FAWU, relations between FAWU and RICU had become very lukewarm. This distancing between the two organisations could be seen when, catalysed by the general demands for union recognition and establishment of Labour Boards, nine thousand Hwange miners went on strike in 1954. The strike, which was broken at gun point, was massively supported by FAWU members with RICU remaining indifferent, and thus leading to its near-eclipse. The strike achieved the establishment of the Hwange Labour Board, a rise in wages and a proposed 'works committee' system for airing grievances. Mine owners were quick to see these 'committees' as useful instruments for controlling labour and adopted their use extensively in the mines.<sup>clxvii</sup>

On many occasions, workers' struggles forced capital to erect institutional structures which on the one hand became achievements for labour but, on the other, became capital's instrument for the containment of labour. Thus the militancy of Bulawayo textile workers was tamed by the setting up of a Labour Board while a threatened strike by railway workers forced the appointment of the Arbitration Board.<sup>clxviii</sup>

There is an uncomfortable sense of *déjà vu* when we realise that nearly fifty years later, similar mechanisms are being employed by employers and the government for the same purpose - the micro-level undermining and demobilisation of shopfloor worker organisation - even though the contemporary justification for these structures is wrapped up in jargon that contains red-herring expressions such as 'worker participation' and 'industrial democracy' which from the workers perspective, as we have already seen, are as empty as they are hypocritical. But the existence of these structures cannot be exclusively blamed for undermining workers and their organisations. Then, as now, the trade unions themselves or rather their officials, also bear some responsibility. The labour movement in the mid 1950s and early 1960s came to be 'riddled with splits as the petty bourgeois leadership vied for union leadership, also using the unions as a base for political ascendancy in nationalist politics.'<sup>clxix</sup>

In 1954, FAWU called an emergency congress which established the Southern Rhodesian Trade Union Congress (SRTUC). Earlier, an African Trade Union Congress (ATUC) had been formed without the participation of RICU. The SRTUC had in its leadership, some of the RICU and FAWU in its executive. However these developments signified splits in the labour movement, which further weakened them vis-a-vis employers and the colonial government. In mid-1954 the government proceeded to set up Labour Boards for a whole series of main industries. The SRTUC executive in Bulawayo was banned from addressing meetings for five months.<sup>clxx</sup>

In 1959, in response to the report of the Todd Commission, the Industrial Conciliation Act was amended. The effect of the new Act was to repeal the Native Labour Board Act and in its place to provide for the setting up of "non political" and "financially solvent" trade unions which could be registered only with the specific agreement of the employers. By 1973 only nineteen unions were registered and thirteen were unregistered. These unregistered unions were tolerated but monitored.<sup>clxxi</sup>

The amended Industrial Conciliation Act (1959) introduced direct union-management regulation for mainly white skilled workers through Industrial Councils (but only if management agreed to do so), while the wages of most other (black) workers were regulated by Industrial Boards which had no direct representation. It was indeed an Act which was divisive; black mining, agricultural and domestic workers were denied any rights under it; occupational rather than industrial unions were encouraged; there was explicit provision for 'the protection of "skilled minority" interests, which allowed vote weighting in favour of white sections of multiracial unions'.<sup>clxxii</sup> Also, as we have noted earlier, the procedures of the Industrial Conciliation Act (1959) delaying recourse to strike action were so elaborate that it is doubtful that a single legal strike ever took place under it.<sup>clxxiii</sup>

Thus the development and strengthening of (urban) workers and their trade unions was hamstrung and hampered not only by its traditional adversaries - the colonial and UDI government and employers - but also ironically, by trade union officials who claimed only to have workers interests at heart, but who were in reality much more interested in gaining influence, through their trade union positions, in the developing nationalist liberation struggle. The combination of these two factors dealt a very heavy and long-lasting blow to the development of honest and robust trade unionism in Zimbabwe as we shall see in the following section. Again, it is a case of trade union development at the macro level hindering, in a way, that of shopfloor representation at the micro-level.

### **Trajectory Three : The nationalist struggle versus worker organisation**

We have already observed that workers struggles in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) were inextricably intertwined with nationalist activities and struggles. Thus many of those who held office or were active in trade union organisation also became politically active nationalists.

This nationalism entered a new phase with the reorganisation of the old African National Congress (which had been banned in 1959) into the National Democratic Party (NDP) in 1960, and which had much support from SRTUC leaders. Four of the five top executive members of the NDP were also union leaders including Jason Z Moyo, Reuben Jamela and Josiah T Maluleke who had been detained for various periods in 1959.<sup>clxxiv</sup> Later in 1961, Joshua Nkomo, who had been a prominent activist in the RRAEA, took over the leadership of the NDP. At a conference later that year the SRTUC unanimously affirmed its support for the NDP. NDP leaders made speeches defending the rights of trade unions and, furthermore, NDP militants were the undisputed leaders of the Bulawayo trade union organisation.<sup>clxxv</sup>

During 1962, however, two factors disrupted the close alliance of labour and nationalism. The first factor was the decision of the nationalist movement, in the same year, to set a course for the eventual adoption of strategies of rural guerrilla warfare. As Hyslop points out, these strategies 'envisaged little active political role for the urban workers'.<sup>clxxvi</sup>

Secondly, there was an organisational crisis resulting from the activities of Reuben Jamela who - at a time when nationalists and many African governments were persuading the union movement to disaffiliate from the International Congress of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) - opted to be sponsored by the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) in order that he could travel to Tunisia and Europe, where he visited the ICFTU. The consequences soon became apparent when Jamela refused to address striking workers at Dunlop Tyre Company in Bulawayo and subsequently rejected an NDP call for a general strike.<sup>clxxvii</sup> Throughout 1961, there had been rising anger amongst trade unionists at Jamela's lukewarm attitude towards the NDP. The result of these stresses was that in 1962 the SRTUC was split by a pro-NDP faction, who formed the SRATUC, which gained the support of the bulk of the Bulawayo labour movement.<sup>clxxviii</sup> When the split between the Bulawayo-based Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Harare-based Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) came in 1963, not surprisingly the

Bulawayo trade union leadership overwhelmingly supported Joshua Nkomo just as the Harare union leadership strongly supported Robert Mugabe.

The formation of SRATUC confirmed the increasing subordination of trade union activities to nationalist politics. The leadership of the trade unions moved between union activities and those of the nationalist movement. This movement reflected the continued instability of leadership in both the trade unions and the nationalist parties, as it was caught between the aspirations of the new elite and obstacles to their fulfilment. As an editorial in the *African Daily News* of 8 May 1957 expressed it these individuals were 'all things to all men...politicians, aspirants to culture, trade unionists, church workers and what have you'.<sup>clxxix</sup>

However, to return to the nationalists' focus on a rural, military guerrilla struggle and their neglect of the urban working class, one observer states: 'it is true that in the 1970s the working class was not the motive force of the liberation struggle. Rather this role rested largely with the peasantry and a section of the petty bourgeoisie in leadership positions. Nevertheless it is also true that workers were involved in the struggle' and the observer goes on to quote, verbatim, a statement by the Minister of Labour and Social Services in 1982. Briefly summarised, the essence of the statement was that urban workers played an important part in acting as informants for those 'in the bush' and also in donating much in cash and in kind to the liberation struggle.<sup>clxxx</sup>

Hyslop, on the other hand, disagrees that urban workers were involved in any meaningful way in the struggle. He states that from as far back as 1962, 'the working class was both less effectively organised than before, and (became) less and less central to nationalist strategy. To support his view, he goes on further to quote a key figure in ZANU (Nathan Shamuyarira) who bluntly stated of this period:

The nationalist politicians looked unfavourably on the growth of a strong labour movement which could make a separate appeal to the workers. They were afraid of rival leadership.<sup>clxxxi</sup>

Hyslop further comments that as soon as the labour movement began to develop the militancy and organisation to potentially define its own goals, the nationalist leadership began to back away from attempts to organise workers around economic demands. He continues his reasoning thus:

The argument often advanced by nationalists, that the rejection of economic and social struggles in favour of political and military ones marked a radicalisation of their movement, is a spurious one. Ignoring the situation of the urban workers, the nationalists left them without political direction and failed to exploit the possibilities for above-ground organisation which the unions provided. Denunciations of the support given by urban workers to pro-internal settlement<sup>clxxxii</sup> unions tends to neglect the fact that the largest of these organisations, Phineas Sithole's ATUC, was aligned with the mainstream ZANU until the mid 1970s...The fact that, in over ten years ZANU had been unable to present its politics to the members of the unions sufficiently clearly as to prevent an overtly collaborationist leadership gaining control scarcely says much for the party's urban strategy. The nationalist parties simply offered nothing as practical and attractive to ATUC workers as Phineas Sithole's bread-and-butter trade unionism.<sup>clxxxiii</sup>

The significance of this deliberate, extended marginalisation of urban worker organisation by the top hierarchies in the nationalist structures, is difficult to overstate. The decision to deny the importance of developing and strengthening trade union organisation in favour of a rural struggle, whose emphasis was military-style obedience to command structures, continues, decades since it was acted upon, to have negative reverberations. The nature of these reverberations is twofold. Firstly, it effectively removed competent activists who, had they remained in the trade unions, may well have begun building solid foundations that would independently represent and protect (urban) workers interests, particularly in a post-independence Zimbabwe. Additionally, it is possible that this potential cadre of trade unionists, had they had the opportunity to build this 'foundation' would have, at the attainment of independence, provided a countervailing influence to what rapidly became Zanu PF's monolithic power.

The second reverberation is that, because of the non-existence of well-developed and strong worker (and civic) organisation on the eve of independence, the same authoritarian, military command structure of the liberation struggle transformed itself into an all-powerful, post-independence Zanu PF governing elite which has subsequently been running the government on the same basis as they did the military struggle, and whose hallmark has been its extreme intolerance of any non-Zanu PF activity or organisations.

## **Summary**



It is scarcely surprising then, that on the eve of the attainment of independence in 1980, 'a dark cloud hovered over trade unionism in Zimbabwe'.<sup>clxxxiv</sup> In fact since the 1970s this dark cloud had been a serious impediment to any kind of vigorous trade union development. This impediment was a combination of the three trajectories that we identified at the beginning of the chapter, which together militated against strong worker organisation. There were the repressive colonial and UDI policies which resulted in the creation of an industrial reserve of labour to keep wage costs low and, more importantly formed a context where strong worker organisation would be highly unlikely to succeed. In fact these repressive policies actively undermined such organising efforts, accompanied as they were by sustained police harassment, intimidation and arrests of trade union activists which led to a damaging absence of continuity of leadership in the unions. The weakness caused by this lack of continuity was also compounded by internal power struggles in the unions. Finally there was the nationalist parties' explicit withdrawal of political commitment and support for urban worker organisation in favour of a rural military struggle. It is with this historical context in mind that we come to the situation in Zimbabwe at the time of its independence in 1980.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Worker Representation in the Post-Independence Period**

Having explored pre-independence historical trajectories in the previous chapter, we will now follow a similar process in this chapter, for the post-1980 period. It is clear that at independence there were no viable structures at all that could either articulate or represent (urban) workers' position or interests at any level. On the day after national independence had been officially proclaimed, shopfloor workers found themselves in exactly the same position as the day before. Micro-level structures were non-existent; more or less the same applied to the macro-level, the only difference being that a structure did actually exist, but in name only. But following independence in 1980 micro-level structures in the form of Workers Committees have been established by government regulation. At the macro-level, the story of worker representation has been - almost from the very beginning - one of struggle and resistance against a government which has been heavily corporatist-authoritarian in its dealings with the labour movement. Latterly however it has dropped all pretence at being even corporatist and as we shall see later in this chapter, has simply concentrated on consistently baring its dangerously authoritarian teeth.

More than twenty years after independence then, what are the factors that could help us to explain the state of contemporary worker representation in Zimbabwe? Why does it appear to be so endemically weak at the micro-level but, contradictorily, growing in strength and stature at the macro-level?

We will attempt to answer this question by examining the four main factors that have combined to make up the current situation vis-à-vis worker rights and representation in Zimbabwe. The first factor relates to what was the new post-independence Labour Relations Act (1985) and its implementation and administration, and which for the first time recognised and re-defined workers' rights but at the same time rendered labour strikes illegal. The second factor concerns the development and coming-of-age of the macro-level trade union movement through its successful national organising and consolidation of the resulting new worker activism. The third factor is the sustained government arrogance in determinedly pursuing destructive economic policies which have caused acute poverty, and which ironically acted as a spur to worker activism. And the final factor is the continuing weakness of shopfloor micro-level trade union organising. But let us begin first with the new labour laws introduced after independence in 1980.

## **Post-independence labour law, worker representation and the Labour Relations Act (1985)**

It has been noted in earlier sections that for a variety of reasons, labour organisation was weak and in disarray in 1980. Nevertheless, with the dawning of an independent Zimbabwe where a new political party (ZANU PF) had recently been voted in, worker expectations were extremely high. Part of ZANU PF's election manifesto included: "Freedom of speech, assembly, association, procession, demonstration and strike action".<sup>clxxxv</sup> Thus, according to Wood, in the euphoria of Robert Mugabe's dramatic victory pronouncements, the first wave of strikes 'burst like a colonial dam wall and released a sea of workers' grievances'.<sup>clxxxvi</sup> By the end of 1980 there had been some 150 strikes in most sectors: industrial, mining, municipal, agricultural, food processing, steel, motor industry, transport and public service. Well over 300 000 production-days were lost in these strikes, undoubtedly the largest since the 1948 general strike.<sup>clxxxvii</sup> The immediate objectives of the strikes were increased pay, better working conditions, dismissal of racist/abusive managers and supervisors, clarifications of pensions schemes and re-instatement of dismissed militant workers.

This massive outburst of strikes should not have come as any surprise, given the pressures that had been building up, before independence. Actually it would have been surprising indeed if the response of workers (under the circumstances) had been anything other than a defensive, short term reaction, given the weakness and incoherence in the labour movement. These problems had been compounded by the historical marginalisation of the labour movement by the nationalist parties in the liberation struggle. This marginalisation of the role of urban workers limited the degree to which labour could intervene (with regard to preventing strikes) in the name of 'the national interest' in the immediate post-independence period.<sup>clxxxviii</sup> In other words, the labour movement was at this time too weak, fragmented and distanced from its constituency to act decisively during this massive wave of strikes.

But for Zanu PF, the strikes posed a direct challenge to the untested governing abilities of the nationalist movement in an environment of political uncertainty, and increasingly threatened to disrupt the fragile stability of the productive sector. The immediate response from the government involved warnings and appeals for workers not to disrupt the economy, and to refrain from placing undue pressure on the new government. This was accompanied by a political position which dismissed labour militancy as a threat to nationalism and the

gains of the nationalist struggle - to which Zanu PF regarded the labour movement as having been marginal.<sup>clxxxix</sup>

This political criticism was soon backed up by with more concrete threats and repressive state action. In May 1980 the Minister of Labour, Kumbirai Kangai sent in police to break up one thousand striking transport workers, after warning them that:

"I will crack my whip if they do not go back to work... If this appeal is not heeded and the workers persist in continuing with strikes, then government...will take whatever action is necessary to ensure that the country as a whole does not suffer."<sup>cxc</sup>

In the same month government sent in police and troops in an attempt to re-establish order at the Wankie colliery where four hundred workers had rejected Kangai's appeals to end their stoppage peacefully and 'put the country and national interest before anything else'. At the Empress Nickel mine private security guards were used to fire on strikers resulting in injury to five of them. Around the same time the then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe also gave strong warning to the strikers, for example:

*"Democracy is never mob rule... Our independence must thus not be construed as an instrument vesting individuals or groups of individuals with the right to harass and intimidate others into acting against their will."*<sup>cxc</sup>

By late 1980 the government had authorised the dismissal of hundreds of "illegal" strikers and warned that wildcat strikes would be punished by summary dismissal in the future. Yet this did not stem waves of new actions. Workers going on strike in essential services, and particularly public-sector workers were especially targeted. In October 1981 for example, striking teachers and nurses in Harare were brutally attacked by police, leading to the spread of protests by colleagues in other centres in the country. In all, more than nine hundred teachers and nurses were arrested, with more than two hundred given suspended sentences and eighty teachers dismissed.<sup>cxcii</sup>

Thus we have a picture of increasingly defensive and authoritarian reactions on the part of the newly independent government in the face of acute national-level labour unrest. And as we have already noted, the trade unions were neither equipped nor competent to make any interventions either in defence against these flagrant violations of workers' rights or in a mediating role that could possibly have lessened the impact of the unrest.

An article written in the "Zimbabwe News" the official organ of Zanu PF, shows the thinking that lay at the heart of the government's industrial relations policies since independence:

The workers and peasants...must realise that socialism can only be realised through hard work... The raising of their standard of living does not lie in laziness or complacency... Exploiters are not only those who own the means of production and exploit the labour force, but also include those workers who are lazy. This necessarily leads us to the conclusion that co-operation between the workers and employers in economic activities of the country is essential.

Thus capitalist development and co-operation between workers and employers required a disciplined, peaceful work force. It would not be helped by strong independent trade unions. As the government was seeking to maintain a favourable business climate and encourage foreign investment, it was also waging a relentless campaign against strikes, while also taking a range of measures to prevent the emergence of a truly independent trade union movement.<sup>cxci</sup>

In the same way that the labour movement was unable to intervene in national strikes at independence, so it was equally unable to do so at the micro-level, because worker representation structures at this level were non-existent. There was simply no framework within which any kind of discussion or negotiation could take place. And at the macro-level what structure there was, had no coherence at all.

It is therefore not surprising that in the months following independence worker militancy was simply seen by many as the outcome of poor communication on the shopfloor. The editorial of the government newspaper reflected this when it said that:

in each of the (industrial) stoppages, one of the main reasons seems to be lack of communication between management and workers...but many companies are beginning to learn that they stand to gain more by fostering active, responsible worker-employer relationships than they do by wielding the big stick.<sup>cxci</sup>

There was a certain amount of justification for this view, given the authoritarian and racist nature of management in most business concerns prior to 1980. But as we have already observed, this exclusive emphasis on the issue of communication as a solution for strikes and worker militancy ignored the wider issue of the nature of the employer-employee relationship.<sup>cxci</sup>

However, government indeed did choose to ignore this wider issue and, following the avalanche of these post-independence strikes, encouraged the formation of Workers Committees at each enterprise. But at first, strikers were uncomfortable with these committees and chose instead to follow principles 'which dated back to their grandparents' days, of never making informal self-organisation permanent and public, and always speaking to management as a whole workforce before appointing any representatives'.<sup>cxvii</sup> Many managements' response to this was to set up unilaterally what were called liaison committees, either before or even after the strikes. The government endorsed the concept behind these liaison committees and in February 1981 published 'Workers Committee Guide Lines' setting out the aims and specimen constitutions for Workers Committees and Works Councils. (See Appendix I).

These Workers Committees and Works Councils were not actually given legal backing until four years later, in the Labour Relations Act of 1985 but even then their precise role was not made clear. Nonetheless they were established in virtually all parastatal and private companies with a workforce of more than a hundred. Usually one committee member was elected for each department or identifiable workgroup in an organisation. Workers Committees were made up of workers only, and each committee elected representatives to meet with management on the Works Council. There was often numerical parity representation between management and workers on Works Councils. The committees and councils could discuss general conditions of employment (e.g. rosters, canteen, safety, disciplinary codes), but the outcomes of discussions could only take the form of recommendations to management. There was nothing binding about the conclusions reached by the Workers Committee or the Works Council.

Thus it can be seen that, according to these Guide Lines, Workers Committees were denied any bargaining rights over pay and grading, and their ability to take up workplace grievances was seriously curtailed. For example, according to the Guide Lines: 'grievances relating to the interpretation...of industrial agreements shall be dealt with by the appropriate designated agent or...industrial relations officer, hence such matters will not be dealt with by the Council'. This excluded most real issues from discussion, apart from the relatively trivial ones listed earlier. As Shadur has commented, 'the emphasis was on communication to maintain industrial peace and increase productivity'.<sup>cxviii</sup> It seems clear then, that the emphasis behind the establishment of Workers Committees was one which took into account the needs and thus properly interests of management rather than those of the workers, in spite of the superficially participatory appearance of these committees.<sup>cxviii</sup>

Notwithstanding these aforementioned limitations, there was still space for trade unions to organise at shopfloor level and represent their members at national level through the employment councils. Indirectly, it was also possible for the trade unions to be involved with individual managements, by ensuring that the Workers Committees were wholly unionised and operating in close concert with trade union organisers. Unfortunately the trade unions in the manufacturing sector had not, in general, exploited this opportunity for widening and strengthening their organisation and constituency. By 1984 only 25 per cent had achieved total unionisation of Workers Committees in their industries or undertakings.<sup>cxix</sup> Unfortunately there are no reliable figures for the extent of unionisation of Workers Committees for subsequent years.

### *The Labour Relations Act (1985)*

It has been noted earlier that the Masters and Servants Act (1901) and the Industrial Conciliation Act (1934 and 1959) dominated pre-independence labour relations. Of equal importance for the post-independence period is the Labour Relations Act (1985). But before considering the specific provisions of the Labour Relations Act (1985), it would be useful to consider two opposing perspectives on the impact and importance of labour legislation in the pre- and post-independence periods.

One perspective is that put forward by Cheater, who states that the original Industrial Conciliation Act was 'the first attempt by the new state (dating from 1890) to exert any measure of control over a fledgling but growing industrial base' although it excluded employees working in agriculture, domestic work, the civil service and education.<sup>cc</sup> She goes on to observe that the Industrial Conciliation Act was of an 'essentially apolitical nature' because of 'its insistence that no...trade union or employers' organisation might affiliate itself to any political party...use any of its funds to further any individual or collective interests, allow its property or facilities to be used for any political purposes, or receive financial or other assistance from political organisations of any kind'.<sup>cci</sup>

Cheater then goes on to express her view that the Labour Relations Act (1985) 'extended considerably the theoretical reach of the state into employment' because according to the 'ideological perspective of the new Zimbabwean government after independence...[the] law can dissolve the inherent class antagonism between capital and labour and create industrial harmony'.<sup>ccii</sup> According to Cheater, this perspective holds that it is 'the duty of the state and its political functionaries to oversee the dissolution of this class antagonism. Apolitical systems must be politicised.' Cheater persists in perceiving pre-independence labour relations as "apolitical" because 'the colonial bureaucratisation of labour relations involved state control exercised through **civil servants**, not politicians'.<sup>cciii</sup> Inexplicably, she ignores the fact that these very civil servants were themselves active participants in a political and economic system that was based on outright racial discrimination and which systematically oppressed, persecuted and marginalised the majority of the population.

Sachikonye's perspective, on the other hand, is much more realistic and balanced. He describes the Labour Relations Act (1985) as 'one of the most significant pieces of social and political legislation (to be) debated and approved by the Zimbabwe parliament during the first five years of independence'.<sup>cciv</sup> It was finally gazetted in December 1985, thus replacing the old Industrial Conciliation Act. The new Labour Relations Act was a comprehensive code



of regulations relating to employment, remuneration, collective bargaining, the settlement of disputes, the registration and certification of trade unions and employers organisations. That it differed from the Industrial Conciliation Act can be seen from the wide-ranging objectives specified in the preamble: the declaration and definition of the fundamental rights of workers; the definition of unfair labour practices; the regulation of conditions of employment and other related matters; provision for the appointment and functions of Workers Committees; to provide for the formation, registration, certification and functions of trade unions, employment councils and employment boards; and finally to regulate the negotiation, scope and functions of the Labour Relations Board and the Labour Relations Tribunal; to regulate and control employment agencies.<sup>ccv</sup>

More specifically, the Labour Relations Act (1985) broke new ground in its emphasis on the fundamental rights of workers in that it provided for entitlement to membership of trade unions and Workers Committees without fear of victimisation from management. In addition there were clauses to safeguard workers' rights to fair labour standards which relate to minimum wages, maximum amount of hours of work per day, and occupational health and safety. Also the rights of the workers to seek access to 'any lawful proceeding that may be available to enable him to lawfully advance or protect his interest as an employee' was guaranteed.<sup>ccvi</sup>

However, these formal gains for workers and trade unions alike, have to be balanced against two profoundly negative factors about the Labour Relations Act: the centralisation of vast powers in the hands of the Minister of Labour and the virtual prohibition of 'collective job action' (as with the former Industrial Conciliation Act) in any sector of the economy that was deemed to provide an essential service. In reality, the sectors described in the Act cover almost the whole economy but 'any other service or occupation can be declared by the Minister...by notice in the Gazette, to be an essential service'.<sup>ccvii</sup> In the few remaining occupations and services that fall outside the "essential" category, the procedure that has to be followed before industrial action can be pursued legally, is extremely cumbersome and long drawn-out and amounts, in the end, to seeking permission from the Minister to go on strike. As one prominent trade unionist has commented 'all in all, the Minister has got very draconian powers, powers to throttle the unions if he wishes'.<sup>ccviii</sup>

As Wood comments, the Labour Relations Act (1985) 'inherits a great deal of corporate control measures from the old Industrial Conciliation Act, particularly the virtual ban on strikes and the highly complicated mediation and arbitration procedures'.<sup>ccix</sup> He goes on to comment that 'a perhaps unintended consequence of this corporatist labour strategy is that

shopfloor workers will probably be further cut off' from union organisers by 'this army of conciliators (Labour Relations Officers), so holding back union democratic development; a situation probably made worse by confusion over which "expert" does what'.<sup>ccx</sup>

Sachikonye poses an important question as to why it was 'judged necessary for the state to possess such extensive powers in industrial relations', and then offers the suggestion that one of the possible factors to explain the 'paternalism that permeated the industrial relations apparatus' was the extremely weak and divided labour movement in the early years after independence.<sup>ccxi</sup> If this was the case, was it the government's intention to facilitate the strengthening of an organised labour through "paternal" help? Although little systematic research or evaluation of the functioning of the Labour Relations Act has been carried out, the anecdotal evidence available from day-to-day working over five-year period in a trade union, points to a government that was actively hostile to the labour movement.

This hostility was demonstrated by: the frequent refusal of the Minister of Labour to meet and consult directly with labour leaders, in contrast to a markedly open relationship with employer organisations; regular denunciations in the government-monopoly media by the State President, of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions which he accused of being a destructive and selfish organisation which was working against the national interest; accusations from the Minister and the President that the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions was a secret opposition party and that the government therefore had every justification in marginalising it as much as possible; the detention of the general secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (in 1989) when he publicly supported university students' criticisms of government policies; the banning of demonstrations and marches organised by trade unions and the subsequent harassment of those who did not obey the banning order. It seems more likely then, that this patina of paternalism was a cloak to disguise the government's growing determination to keep control and impose its own agenda on the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

It is clear then that in promulgating the Labour Relations Act (1985) - which at first sight misleadingly appeared to be radically different and more progressive than the colonial Industrial Conciliation Act) - Zimbabwe's post-independence government demonstrated its intention to keep as tight a grip on workers as the colonial and UDI governments had done. This is exemplified in the Act's provision forbidding virtually any sector from going on strike without first receiving government's permission. More specifically, in formulating the LRA (1985) the government also showed its refusal to recognise the importance of strengthening and empowering workers in general, and in particular, workers at the micro-level of the

shopfloor. On the contrary it seems as if the government deliberately set out to maintain worker weakness at this level, by the introduction of enterprise-based Workers Committees. In doing this the government actively avoided any responsibility for providing crucial support to workers at the least-empowered level of the shopfloor, passing it by default, instead to workers' natural adversary - the employers. The government may well have done this in the certain knowledge that, given the massive power inequity that favoured the employers, this would be the most effective way to keep these workers dis-empowered and ignorant, indefinitely. The other part of this government dis-empowerment strategy toward workers, was to systematically undermine Zimbabwe's newly developing macro-level trade union organisation to which we now turn.

### **Development of macro-level trade union organisation**

We have already noted the profound weakness of worker organisation at independence, largely as a result of prolonged subjugation and manipulation by the nationalist political party hierarchy. It comes as no surprise then that the new post-independence government would also be determined to have a trade union umbrella body and affiliate unions that would be completely subject to the dictates of the ruling party (ZANU PF). This was a logical extension of the pre-independence context where the encouragement of independent worker organisation was regarded as being inimical to the achievement of nationalist military victory. The hierarchy in command of the military struggle were now in government. Their status had changed but their mind-set and political analysis did not.

During the first years after independence in 1980, informal moves were made to unite the different strands of the labour movement through the formation of a single national centre, the United Trade Unions of Zimbabwe, whose major objectives were: to find mechanisms to unite the various national centres; to seek national and international recognition; and to establish areas of cooperation with such large international labour centres as the American Federation of Labour-CIO. But the government response through the Ministry of Labour was cool largely because the United Trade Unions of Zimbabwe appeared to be dominated by white unionists and finally because of its preference for cooperating with mainly western international labour federations.<sup>ccxii</sup> It was thus ignored and allowed to dissolve, in favour of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions which was later officially acknowledged by the government as the sole national labour centre in 1981. The composition of this body was, in reality determined by the Ministry of Labour and was thus overwhelmingly ZANU PF in orientation and thus the reality was that the general membership had very little control over this restructuring of the labour centre.<sup>ccxiii</sup>

With regard to industrial actions, the political role of the leadership of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions in suppressing further shopfloor actions was made clear early on. As Albert Mugabe, the first ZCTU Secretary General and brother of the Prime Minister warned in 1981:

*"Strikes do more harm than good. We don't need to retard economic progress by arranging strikes. There are some bad eggs in the union movement... There are some people in the movement who go out looking for difficulties and trying to be difficult. We will watch them closely and discourage striking as much as we can."*<sup>ccxiv</sup>

By mid-1984 the national leadership of the trade union movement was not only organisationally weak but was also dishonest. A research survey conducted earlier that year, found that most of the important officials in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions Executive were corrupt and acting unconstitutionally, notably by delaying the calling of the biennial conference by over a year, not convening general council meetings regularly, not circulating important policy documents, not accounting for a considerable proportion of funds received, promoting splinter unions to unseat rivals and engaging in nepotism in the allocation of overseas scholarships.<sup>ccxv</sup>

Although this research survey was limited in its findings, as Wood points out, it exposed some cases of gross corruption and it also provided important insights into lack of union democracy.<sup>ccxvi</sup> For instance, there appears to have been a minimal emphasis on shopfloor power: only 13 unions out of over 50 claimed to have regular branch meetings below provincial level or to have had more than one branch in each of the major cities or towns.<sup>ccxvii</sup> There was a similarly large hole in organisational effectiveness and recruitment at shopfloor level. Thus by 1984, only 14 out of 56 unions claimed to have unionised all members of Workers Committees at enterprises and undertakings where they were organising and, of these, over half were probably small splinter unions.<sup>ccxviii</sup> But over 40 of the unions said that they had some members on the Workers Committees in their sectors.

According to the survey 'there was a shocking state of affairs in terms of accountability' because the vast majority of unions surveyed had faulty, incomplete or non-existent membership records with the same problem applying to records relating to membership subscriptions, thus making funds 'vulnerable to misuse by corrupt union leaders.'<sup>ccxix</sup>

The research survey's concluding section raises questions and concerns that still have resonance sixteen years later:

The fundamental problem facing the Zimbabwean unions is to overcome the legacy of a divided and "top down" union movement...only a tiny fraction of Zimbabwe's working class is being schooled in organisational methods and issues relating to the control of their work situation.<sup>ccxx</sup>

In late 1984 the worst offenders in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions Executive were publicly exposed and then suspended by the umbrella body's General Council. A caretaker administration was established, composed of senior unionists and Ministry of Labour officials to prepare for the ZCTU's second post-independence congress in 1985. The congress was duly held and elections carried out; however, according to Wood, the circumstances were still equivocal and there was 'still a great deal of tension'.<sup>ccxxi</sup> By 1986, the new general secretary of the ZCTU and several of his staff members were dismissed because ZCTU funds (\$5 400) had gone missing. In spite of Wood's view that by 1986 the 'clean-up of corruption was...an established goal in the major unions', there was yet another ZCTU corruption scandal two years later, in 1988 when the President, Jeffrey Mutandare was forced to resign after being found guilty of embezzlement of donor funds.<sup>ccxxii</sup>

However since 1988 there have been no further reported cases of corruption. According to Pillay, this 'clean slate' had much to do with the election of Morgan Tsvangirai as General Secretary in that year. According to his assessment of its 1990 Congress, the ZCTU had 'established itself on the road to forging a well-organised, democratic and militant workers' movement'.<sup>ccxxiii</sup> He went on to point out that since Tsvangirai's election, financial management had improved with the employment of a bookkeeper, treasurer and two trustees and with the immediate addition of a new Health and Safety Department to the other resource departments of the ZCTU (economics, education, women and legal affairs).<sup>ccxxiv</sup>

In addition to this the new ZCTU leadership was also less dependent on ruling party tutelage and more representative of its mass labour constituency. It was also beginning to assert the legitimate role of the labour movement in shaping industrial relations. By 1988 this new leadership including the new General Secretary and new President Gibson Sibanda, was calling for a greater role for the unions in national collective bargaining, while pointing to the poor performance of government in protecting workers' interests. As Morgan Tsvangirai said in 1988:

"Government's attitude that the workers are too weak to conduct their own negotiations is too paternalistic. The last negotiations were carried out successfully,

and some unions got better deals for members than the government, so it cannot be said that unions are weak... Furthermore we must be given the necessary tool - that is the right to strike - so that we are able to pressure the employers. If you remove that weapon it gives the employers an advantage, and any meaningful negotiations will be impossible."<sup>ccxxv</sup>

### **Economic factors, government arrogance and the growth of trade unionism**

At independence in 1980, manufacturing was the largest sector in the economy, contributing about 26 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product, more than mining (6 per cent) and agriculture (15 per cent) combined.<sup>ccxxvi</sup> This sector in general benefited from the post-independence mini-boom, with output growing by 15 per cent in 1980 and 10 per cent in 1981 in real terms. Employment in manufacturing grew by 25 per cent from 1979-1982, a gain of 35 000 jobs. Average wages per worker increased in real terms by 30 per cent in this period.<sup>ccxxvii</sup>

This initial rise in real wages after independence was more a result of workers going on wildcat strikes and expressing long pent-up frustration than through the disunited performance of the trade unions. The relative decline in real wages after the post-independence mini-boom showed how superficial the strength of the trade unions was. The direct effects on living standards of the government's social reforms began to taper off for the bulk of wage-earners towards the middle of 1983. In effect, five years after independence in 1980, minimum wages in manufacturing were virtually unchanged.

By 1982 the mini-boom had petered out and, combined with a three year drought which only ended in 1985, caused a recession in manufacturing which lasted from 1982-1984/85. Overall, production fell by 3 per cent in 1983 and 5 per cent in 1984.<sup>ccxxviii</sup> Two thirds of companies went on short-time working and the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (representing business concerns in Zimbabwe) estimated that over a third of companies - mostly in the heavy manufacturing sector - had sacked workers.<sup>ccxxix</sup> By 1984 over 14 000 manufacturing workers out of a total of 180 000 had lost their jobs, according to official figures. And by 1995, estimates of total unemployment by the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, were put at approximately 48 per cent.<sup>ccxxx</sup>

However, during the 1981-5 period, trade unions in the material production sectors registered higher estimated paid-up membership, particularly in mining, building and construction, and to a lesser extent in clothing, footwear and post and telecommunications.

A long-term trend towards industrial unionism and away from craft or general unionism was reflected in the higher membership of these unions.

With specific reference to the clothing industry, it is estimated that clothing union membership increased from five thousand in 1979, to seven thousand in 1981 and to eight thousand in 1984, and further estimates that by 1984 the density of union membership was 55 per cent.<sup>ccxxxix</sup> There are no available, reliable, up-to-date statistics for the subsequent period.

The effects of another drought in 1991 were seriously compounded by the imposition of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme which failed to foster growth and the short term shocks turned quickly into a chronic and worsening social crisis.<sup>2</sup> The key outcome of the growing crisis was a sharp decline in average real wages, which fell from Z\$8 600 in 1990 to Z\$6 700 in 1992. In October 1992 the minimum wage of domestic workers was less than 50 per cent of a basic food basket for a family of four.<sup>ccxxxii</sup> By the mid-1990s average real earnings, which had already contracted nearly 10 per cent per year in 1991-94, fell to the lowest levels since the early 1970s.<sup>ccxxxiii</sup> ESAP, one study argued was dragging ordinary workers to the brink of widespread destitution.<sup>ccxxxiv</sup> The Ministry of Labour estimated that 32 000 formal sector workers were retrenched during 1991-1996. ZCTU officials claimed the real figure was probably twice that number.<sup>ccxxxv</sup> In addition it noted, thousands of public sector workers, public servants, small scale farmers, informal sector labourers, professionals and chronically unemployed also bore the brunt of ESAP austerity.

### ***Deepening poverty, government arrogance and increasing worker activism***

With the introduction of ESAP, substantial changes were made to the labour code and related regulatory instruments. In the early 1990s the government announced its partial withdrawal from the collective bargaining process as part of the liberalisation of the national labour market. As Saunders points out the real effect of this withdrawal of the state was to actually increase the balance of power in favour of employers with the backing of the state thus further eroding workers' collective rights and protections.<sup>ccxxxvi</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The main elements of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme were the lifting of price controls, removal of consumer subsidies, devaluation of the local currency, trade and currency de-regulation and the promotion of export production. In return for a string of large loans and credit facilities to support Zimbabwe's balance of payments and assist with new investments, the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) insisted that the government cut the public deficit in half to 5 per cent through civil service reform, by retrenching more than 20 000 of the state's 190 000 workers and, among other things, a drastic reduction in social spending. Unbelievably, this structural adjustment programme was introduced and implemented with absolutely no involvement or consultation with the trade unions or civil society in general. Nevertheless ordinary Zimbabwean workers were expected to tighten their belts and bear the unavoidable initial sacrifices for the promise of future sustained growth and employment creation

New Statutory Instruments (379 and 404) gave shopfloor Works Councils the exclusive right to negotiate codes of conduct and retrenchment at shopfloor and industrial council level; final approval from the Ministry of Labour was no longer needed. Such measures lessened the likelihood of industry-wide standards of employment being maintained and invited opportunities for the fragmentation of collective worker action within and across industries.

The new amendments also placed further constraints on trade union organising at shopfloor level and favoured management and Ministry of Labour officials who still retained wide powers within the collective bargaining process. On the other hand the shopfloor Workers Committees mandated to lead collective bargaining were deprived of access to many of their most experienced and qualified workers, now designated as 'managerial employees'.

The amendments also asserted the primacy of agreements on retrenchments and codes of conduct made by Works Councils over those reached by the employment council (a sector-wide body comprised of trade union and employer representatives). An additional drawback of the new regulations was that they made collective job action virtually impossible, by giving the government the right to issue blocking 'show cause' orders, and retaining impossibly wide definitions of "essential services". These attacks on the labour movement along with ESAP's rapid and severely negative impact on workers' living standards laid the foundations for increasing conflict between government and the national trade union umbrella organisation, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

Thus in April 1991 the Minister of Labour John Nkomo, announced that he had received unspecified complaints that trade unionists were "violating" sections of the Labour Relations Act and that he would therefore de-register the ZCTU and force it to reapply to his Ministry with a new organisational constitution. Two days later the ZCTU won a High Court interdict preventing the Minister from making such allegations and de-registering the labour centre. Some days later, in a speech delivered at the 1991 May Day celebrations Gibson Sibanda, President of the ZCTU made a plea and a warning to the government:



**"We want to avoid the politics of frustrations, strike action, demonstrations and spontaneous street politics that occurs when democracy breaks down and people are no longer listened to... We should be able to build economic change without oppressing workers or destroying tripartism. We urge the same maturity in government that they urge from us: economic change that is built on disorganising and silencing the voice of labour is neither sustainable nor stable."**<sup>ccxxxvii</sup>

In June 1992 a street demonstration organised by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions against labour deregulation and the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme was banned and broken up by police. But it also led to a successful constitutional court challenge by the ZCTU against laws used by the police to suppress freedom of speech and association. Relations with the government worsened considerably and the Minister of Labour proceeded to effectively curtail constructive communication with the ZCTU for the next three years by pushing amendments to the Labour Relations Act through parliament against the combined voices of workers and employers and using the state-dominated media to pillory the ZCTU as being composed of "people who are semi-literate....who represent probably less than 10 per cent of the workforce".<sup>ccxxxviii</sup>

The rising tide of strike activity in the 1990s - involving both shopfloor and trade union affiliates with significant capacity-building support from the ZCTU - marked a new phase in the development of the labour movement. On the one hand it demonstrated the improved ability of workers to organise and occupy the space opened up by the introduction of collective bargaining procedures in the early 1990s. On the other, it reflected the growing disenchantment of workers with the rapidly deteriorating economic and social situation, brought on by the government's adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme.

In August 1996 Zimbabwe saw its largest strike since independence when as many as 160 000 civil servants walked out for more than two weeks in the latest in a series of "illegal" industrial actions. The dispute centred on the government's non-payment of promised wage increases and its failure to make headway in harmonising public and private sector labour laws by creating negotiating structures for civil servants. In the end these actions led to significant gains in most cases, as government granted salary increases and established a new structure for joint negotiations with public service associations.

But these concessions brought only short-term peace. The economic situation was continuing to deteriorate sharply. By mid-1997 average real annual wages had declined to

63 per cent of their value in 1980 for all sectors, but in reality in many sectors (notably the public service, education, health and domestic service) they had fallen much further, for example to 21 per cent in the case of domestic workers. In 1997 wages rose on average by approximately 20 per cent while devaluation of more than 40 per cent and rising inflation caused price increases on basic food items of more than 70 per cent.<sup>ccxxxix</sup>

This rapidly deteriorating situation gave rise to an escalating incidence of labour militancy in 1996/97 and eventually culminated in a comprehensive national stayaway in December 1997.

The trigger for this stayaway had its genesis in growing protests by war veterans over revelations of high-level corruption and looting of the War Victims Compensation Fund. As a result President Mugabe and other senior Zanu PF officials undertook to quieten the veterans by secretly negotiating a package of extensive gratuities and pensions. The package for up to fifty thousand veterans, which had not been anticipated or budgeted for, was to prove extremely costly - accounting for more than Z\$4 billion in new government spending. Given the existing fiscal constraints on government, it was clear that the war veterans pay-outs would require the imposition of new taxes, at a time when workers were already stretched to the limit.<sup>ccxli</sup>

Within the labour movement there had already been debate around the lack of transparency in government's revenue collection and expenditure. So when government announced in late 1997 that a 5 per cent "war veterans levy" would be imposed to pay for the war veterans packages, along with an increase of 2,5 per cent sales tax (which would then rise to 17,5 per cent) and new fuel taxes, there was an outcry and renewed national consultations about how to block these additional burdens. The urgency of the situation was worsened by the government's declaration that it would designate and seize more than eight hundred white-owned farms, a move which led to a run on Zimbabwe's foreign currency reserves and the crash of the Zimbabwe dollar on "Black Friday" 14 November 1997. It was the beginning of an ever-worsening economic situation, which would see the effective pegging of the Zimbabwe dollar, galloping inflation and interest rates (both reached around 70 per cent), and for workers, plummeting real wages and standards of living.

At this point the ZCTU responded by issuing demands for the new taxes to be scrapped, and for government to work with social partners to determine a more equitable way for war veterans payments to be accommodated within the budget. The government refused to accept these suggestions, saying that workers were turning their back on the war veterans

by denying them their benefits. In reality, the labour movement agreed that war veterans should be compensated, but that this had to be arranged through normal, transparent budgetary procedures that did not adversely shift the burden on those who could afford it the least - the workers.<sup>ccxli</sup>

When the government refused to shift its position, the ZCTU issued an ultimatum threatening a national strike and day of protest against the new taxes. At the same time the ZCTU and union structures began preparing for the action. This included consultations with civic allies, and informing the business sector of the plans for a strike. Importantly, by underlining the labour movement's demands for participation and consultation, the ZCTU helped to attract broad-based support for what would become an authentically national *mass* action. Last minute efforts by the government to avert the stoppage by conceding to workers' demands and scrapping the 5 per cent war veterans levy and fuel tax increases, proved too little, too late.<sup>ccxlii</sup>

The resulting strike on 9 December 1997 brought the whole country to a standstill for one day, with unprecedented popular participation in street demonstrations and rallies around the country. In Harare in particular, these were met with extreme force as the police riot squad forcibly and brutally broke them up. Nevertheless many workers consulted in an important evaluation study of the strike commissioned by the ZCTU saw 9 December 1997 as a turning point: 'for the first time workers could see that it was possible to stand up to government, force concessions from it - and survive'.<sup>ccxliii</sup>

The government's response to the largest post-independence strike was to concede to only some of the demands but it refused to remove its 2,5 per cent sales tax increase and actually added a range of other new taxes. In January 1998 prices of basic commodities were raised yet again and sparked street protests initially in the high density areas which then expanded into the centre of Harare. These protests soon deteriorated into extensive rioting following the heavy-handed intervention of the police riot squads. Government's response this time was to order the temporary lowering of prices of some items but it did not announce a strategy for affordable basic commodities for the longer term. The business sector warned that prices could not be maintained at an artificially low level because their business would simply not be able to survive. At the same time ZCTU demands for the government to address both the outstanding and underlying issues from the 9 December 1997 strike were ignored.<sup>ccxliv</sup>

In 1997 - 1998 ZCTU was clearly expanding political horizons and civil allegiances. As the labour movement developed its links with an informal coalition of progressive social interests including human rights organisations, landless people, progressive professionals and intellectuals, it increasingly began to absorb and articulate their interests along with its own. This in turn led the ZCTU to significantly broaden the scope of its demands within the government-created Tripartite Negotiating Forum made up of representatives from government, industry and labour:

- The establishment of tripartite bodies to look into the national budget, land distribution, privatisation and excessive government borrowing and spending
- Investigation, via tripartite commissions of enquiry, of various corruption scandals (involving among others the state-funded VIP Housing Scheme, management of the national Oil Company of Zimbabwe, the multi-billion dollar collapse of United Merchant Bank, and the looting of the War Victims Compensation Fund)
- Reduction of the size of the Cabinet from fifty five to no more than fifteen members
- Putting into place a new, people-led democratic national Constitution within twelve months
- Freeing the state media, including the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, Zimpapers Ltd and Zimbabwe International Associated News Agency, from government control, by its placement in the hands of neutral, nationally representative institutions.

With the ZCTU having once again demonstrated its capacity to mobilise workers, and increasingly threatening to draw other political constituencies into its camp, the government very quickly responded by moving away from dialogue and towards repressive control. In late November 1997 it formally banned further stayaways and other "politically-motivated" industrial actions, that sought to bring pressure on the government to change or revise its policies. This ban was put in place by President Mugabe, using Presidential Powers (Temporary Powers) Regulations, which allowed him to unilaterally amend the Labour Relations Act at will. Steep fines and/or prison sentences were provided for in the new regulations, adding extra weight to the government's attack.

These new regulations resulted in an outcry from the ZCTU as they represented a direct and blunt attack on the basic right to strike, and the right to freedom of association and speech. The President of the ZCTU Gibson Sibanda said:

*"These regulations are only a joke. Stayaways are the only weapon we workers have in this Chimurenga Chevashandi (workers' liberation war) and no one has the mandate to take that weapon away from us... Ian Smith tried it, but where did it take him? And this is the*

*path Mugabe is now trying to follow, hoping this imbroglio will go away. He is in for a rude surprise, for by banning us he is pouring benzene on the fire.*<sup>ccxlv</sup>

And the General Secretary of the ZCTU Morgan Tsvangirai added:

"People are prepared to go to jail or even die because we are fighting to improve the economic conditions of the workers. We will call a stayaway any time, any day when we think it's necessary and convenient, and the workers will defy any stupid rules in place."<sup>ccxlv</sup>

The ZCTU decided to suspend further mass action at the end of November and called on the government to seriously address the issues on the negotiating table. More importantly however, the ZCTU leadership indicated clearly that a new form of challenge was in the process of being developed. In the coming months, a wider front of political engagement was opened in relation to the government. In the face of government obduracy, particularly within the Tripartite Negotiating Forum, it fell to the ZCTU to deal head-on with the key underlying problem in Zimbabwe, which was the problem of governance. As Moran Tsvangirai summed up the situation in 1998:

*"There is no longer any need for people to continue skirting the root cause of our economic problems. Zimbabweans must now resolve the question of national governance. When those who have been put in power show such arrogance and behave as if nothing can be done to them, then it is perhaps time for the people to find other means out of these problems... What we're crying about now is the issue of governance, how national affairs are being conducted - corruption, the land issue, public tenders, involvement in foreign wars and amendments to the Constitution. Until we address these, I doubt we're going anywhere".*<sup>ccxlvii</sup>

Thus on 30 January 1998 the ZCTU decided to pursue the outstanding grievances from the 9 December 1997 strike. These were the scrapping of the 2,5 per cent sales tax increase, 5 per cent development levy and 15 per cent tax on pensions and the restoration of food prices to 1997 levels and development of a long term solution to food cost issues. The ZCTU sent these demands in a letter to the Minister of Labour and gave government until 27 February 1998 to respond positively. Failing this, a new sequence of mass action would take place at a date to be announced by the ZCTU.

There was no response from government until a few days before the end of February 1998 when an offer to have joint consultations was made. At the same time the state-dominated

media intensified efforts to undermine and vilify the ZCTU and the proposed stayaway. In the light of government's consistent refusal of meaningful action and engagement ZCTU resolved to call a two-day national strike for 3-4 March 1998.

Support for the strike nationally, was overwhelming. The only carefully researched evaluation of this general strike called it 'the biggest national strike since 1948'.<sup>ccxlviii</sup> Despite considerable intimidation by government and a surrounding atmosphere which was politically charged the high percentage of workers who boycotted work, the degree of resolution and courage displayed by many workers in the face of severe intimidation, and the discipline with which the action was planned and carried out peacefully under hostile conditions bore testimony to the organisational success of the action.

The stayaway was most successful in the industrial sector. Across the country there were high rates of participation in all urban centres with heavy and light industrial areas effectively brought to a standstill. Virtually all (+98 per cent) plants and factories were closed for both days.<sup>ccxlix</sup> The following sector snapshots from the report reflected the general experience of the industrial sector.

In the clothing sector 100 per cent of the 22 000 workers (including 5 000 member of NUCI and several thousand contract workers) stayed away for both days. Not one of the approximately 250 factories in the country was open on either day. In the textile sector 95 per cent of the 12 000 workers (including 6 000 members of the Zimbabwe Textile Workers Union) stayed away from the sectors' 51 factories for both days. In the chemicals sector there was 100 per cent stayaway nationwide. Approximately 55-80 000 workers went out (the total number depends on how many small companies are counted as part of the sector), including 13 000 members of the Zimbabwe Chemicals and Plastics Workers Union.<sup>cc1</sup>

The mining and agriculture sectors present a special case: both employ a large number of workers who are situated in isolated workplaces in the rural areas. They are therefore more difficult to reach and in some crucial ways, more difficult to organise in national mass actions. The large majority of the 65 000 workers in the formal mining sector, about half of whom are members of the Associated Mineworkers Union of Zimbabwe were not well informed in their workplaces of developments around the stayaway and were not called out by their union AMWUZ - which only officially re-joined as an affiliate of the ZCTU a month *after* the stayaway.<sup>cc1i</sup>

Only a small proportion of approximately 300 000 workers in the agricultural sector joined the stayaway. The General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union, which represented 80 000 workers estimated that about 20 000 left their jobs on the two days. Most of those who stayed away were workers on farms near Harare and a few other urban centres. In these locations, farm workers maintain closer contact with labour and other social structures and are more aware and informed of national political issues.<sup>cclii</sup>

Nevertheless, in general the stayaway was a clear success in bringing out a large majority of workers who had been informed well in advance, of the mass action: this included both unionised and non-unionised workers. The bulk of industry and commerce was effectively closed for the two-day period, particularly in the larger centres but also in most medium and smaller towns. In the public services, including parastatals, work in most stations was brought to a standstill, if offices were not closed completely. Statistical estimates of worker participation in the stayaway indicate that more than 80 per cent of industrial and government workers participated in the strike, with an even higher proportion of urban-based employees joining the strike.<sup>ccliii</sup>

The overall assessment of the impact of the strike was appositely described as follows:

One of the most important outcomes of the March 1998 stayaway and of the national strike which preceded it in December 1997 was the confidence it gave to workers that the labour movement has the capacity to articulate their interests and demands.....and defend workers rights to do this in the face of government hostility. The two mass actions did much to break Zimbabweans' fear - of government, the security agencies, the unknown - and re-establish the labour movement's popular credibility as a legitimate national interest with a right to contribute to national debate and policy making. Workers are unanimous in their view that December 1997 marked a turning point in this process. The March 1998 stayaway was grounded in the success and spirit of December 1997 in terms of both the issues addressed and the manner in which support was organised through consultation and debate.<sup>ccliv</sup>

### **Weakness of the trade union at micro-level**

We are however, left with a conundrum. How do we reconcile the findings from the case study – of continuing worker disempowerment and relative silence at the shopfloor micro-level – and the extraordinary events that have recently taken place at the macro-level? How

is it that the same shopfloor workers who collectively engaged in successful, national mass-action against the government in support of their demands, feel unable to make similarly powerful demands at the shopfloor level? The most important reason lies in the area of trade union organising. We have seen from the evaluation report that the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions paid a great deal of attention to grassroots-level consultation and organising activities. We have also seen how workers themselves felt empowered by this. Thus, in the final section, of this chapter, we will turn our attention to this conundrum, and representation at the shop floor.

We have seen that in the clothing industry at least, the National Union for the Clothing Industry remains a distant and generally inactive entity at the micro-level. There is virtually no shopfloor organising; the shopfloor members remain largely ignorant of specific labour rights and regulations and continue to be deprived of essential technical information which could significantly strengthen them in their dealings with their employers. The fulfilling of all these needs should be done by the clothing union but it persists (in common with other manufacturing-sector unions) in regarding its almost-exclusive role as being a grievance-handler together with some conflict resolution when called upon by factory managements. This is a typically bureaucratic approach to trade unionism.

Rosa Luxemburg was a sharp critic of trade union 'bureaucracy' i.e. the paid and unpaid leaderships of the trade union movement, for their concern with organizational survival, industrial peace, short term reforms and their personal careers. She also shared Lenin's view that without the influence of a revolutionary party, trade unions could make only a limited impact on workers conditions under capitalism:

The scope of trade unions is limited essentially to a struggle for an increase in wages and the reduction of labour time, that is to say, to efforts at regulating capitalist exploitation... But labour unions can in no way influence the process of production itself. [T]rade unions are nothing more than the organised defence of labour power against the attack of profit. They express the resistance offered by the working class to the oppression of capitalist economy. <sup>ccliv</sup>

And in Gramsci's view the trade union was '*objectively* nothing other than a commercial company, of a purely capitalistic type, which aims to secure, in the interests of the proletariat, the maximum price for the commodity labour, and to establish a monopoly over this commodity in the national and international fields.'<sup>cclvi</sup> Gramsci also believed that trade unionism was weakened as a revolutionary force by its internal structure, notably the division



between the stratum of paid officials and the rest of the membership. Gramsci shared the widespread contempt of his fellow Marxists for the trade union bureaucracy:

*These men no longer live for the class struggle, no longer feel the same passions, the same desires, the same hopes as the masses. Between them and the masses an unbridgeable gap has opened up. The only contact between them and the masses is the account ledger and the membership file. These men no longer see the enemy in the bourgeoisie, they see him in the communists. They are afraid of competition; instead of leaders they have become bankers of men in a monopoly situation.* <sup>cclvii</sup>

For Gramsci the conservatism of the trade unions derived from the function of the trade union itself.. Unable directly and unaided to eliminate private property, trade unions concentrated on the improvement of the immediate terms and conditions of employment of their members, not only through the use of strikes, but also through,

..obliging the employer to acknowledge a certain legality in his dealings with the workers, a legality that is conditional on his faith in the union's solvency and its capacity to secure respect for contracted obligations from the working masses. <sup>cclviii</sup>

The implication of Gramsci's analysis was that the ideology and behaviour of union officials could not be seen apart from the evolving function of trade unions within collective bargaining under capitalism. In Gramsci's view, the trade unions were an historical product of capitalism, created in its image. They organized only a part of the working class, and confined themselves to the sale of labour power under terms and conditions negotiated with the employer, themselves divorced from the militant world of their members.

There is undoubtedly a depressing sense of *déjà vu* for us now, when nearly a hundred years later we seem to be trying to address much the same problems which Luxembourg and Gramsci in particular, had already so acutely identified nearly two generations ago. But perhaps this depression should be mitigated by taking a somewhat more constructive attitude towards all this. The problems of hierarchies' distance and bureaucratisation within formal organisations seem to be 'eternal' ones. Thus the most constructive approach would be for all those involved - at the top and at the bottom - to honestly and actively acknowledge the potential or actual existence of these blocks to organisational democracy and empowerment (trade unions, political parties, non governmental organisations).

Another positive contributory aspect could also be the overall context within which these 'blocks' are allowed to develop. After all, these contexts are not necessarily monolithic and do not remain for ever - sometimes the surrounding context enables the consolidation of bureaucratised, corrupt and arrogant elites. But by the same token the context also can and does change thus enabling a new dispensation to take place. Zimbabwe itself is a good example of this changing context.

Let us then address the main problematic within this context. What are the reasons for the specific weakness of clothing workers at the micro-level, when the trade union movement at the macro-level appear to be strong and coherent? The reasons fall into two categories, which are themselves not mutually exclusive. One is the chronic weakness and disengagement of the National Union of the Clothing Industry. The other is the absence of any kind of tradition or history of shopfloor workers, systematically and successfully challenging the management at individual workplaces.

There are several reasons which go some way towards explaining the National Union for the Clothing Industry's chronic weakness and thus its failure to properly serve its members. Firstly, the union officers themselves have low levels of education and in this are typical of clothing workers in general, who are amongst the lower-paid in the manufacturing sector. In the case study the educational level of the majority of respondents was no more than Grade 7 (the equivalent to first year of secondary school) and only a small minority of respondents had gained one or two 'O' levels. Thus the calibre of the officials that are employed by the union is rather poor; all of them (the general secretary, his deputy and six organisers) have been 'promoted' from semi-skilled shopfloor jobs.

However, more important than these trade union officials' poor education, is the extremely limited orientation and vision within which they see their role in relation to their shopfloor members. Far from seeing themselves as active agents of mobilisation and worker empowerment, their perspective defines for them a much more passive role. Trade unionism for them is, first and foremost, that they remain based in their offices and that whoever needs their services - members or workers in particular - has to come there to see them. Beyond that they see their functions as being made up of various bureaucratic and administrative functions which range from attending to grievances brought by individual members, attending regular meetings of the national employment council for the clothing industry, being a (passive) repository of legal regulations as they relate to clothing workers, being a channel through which the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions communicates and

organises national training workshops and deciding which members should attend these workshops, to acting also as a channel for ZCTU's national protest activities.

Thus, active shopfloor organising and strengthening is completely absent from their remit because it is neither recognised nor acknowledged as being one of the most important of a trade union's functions. And of course, as a consequence these union officials are poorly equipped for it. This situation of omission and neglect continues because of a context where the upper levels of the trade union administration, as well as the leadership, have remained largely unaccountable for the overall vision and day-to-day functioning of the trade union.

In mitigation, the trade union itself cites scant resources as the reason for its extremely limited activities and for the virtual absence over the last eighteen years of any systematic shopfloor organising.<sup>cclix</sup> But while limited resources are a definite constraint, they are not an acceptable explanation either for the absence of the trade union from the shopfloor or for its lack of financial and organisational accountability. This absence of trade union officials from shopfloor organising maintains and continually reinforces workers' weakness and disorganisation. As we have seen from the case study most of the respondents were not even aware that that they either could or should demand accountability from their own union officials.

An example of this weakness and shopfloor worker disempowerment arises from a meeting of the Works Councils (which comprises equal numbers of management and Workers Committee members) at the Concorde Clothing factory, at which I was an observer. Virtually every aspect of this meeting brought into sharp relief the obvious subservience of the workers' position, both literally and metaphorically. For a start, the meeting itself was held on management territory - the smart, carpeted and airconditioned company boardroom, a planet away from the dusty, hot and crowded factory below, where the workers carried out their jobs. At the behest of the managing director, tea was brought in by a smartly-dressed waiter - delicate china cups and saucers and separate milk and sugar containers for the management staff (the MD, the chief accountant, chief personnel officer etc) while as if to emphasise their place in the pecking order, the Workers Committee members were given thick mugs of already-sweetened tea. The agenda was drawn up by management after receiving suggestions in advance from the Workers Committees. And the meeting was conducted in English, even though the majority of participants were Shona-speakers. So the scene of subtle intimidation is set: an environment in which the workers clearly feel uncomfortable and the use of a language in which they are far from fluent and which puts them at an obvious disadvantage.

Even from this description of the circumstances before the actual meeting has started, inferences can be drawn about the workers' obvious disempowerment. Even though the Works Council is heavily skewed against the workers in terms of power imbalances, there could still be room for the workers to manoeuvre a bit more space from themselves, and thus build a certain amount of (self) respect for their position, which could in turn perhaps, strengthen their negotiating position. For instance they could have politely insisted that the meeting be held in the majority language, but none of them felt confident enough to do so and they were also afraid of antagonising the MD and thus threatening their job security. The most that they felt able to do was to ask management to consider a request for higher funeral allowances, pleading that coffins and other costs were crippling them. This was because of the massive increase in deaths in their families because of the AIDS pandemic. Needless to say, the chief accountant quoted a vague set of figures to back up his argument that the company could not afford to make any increases in funeral allowances. The workers were forced to accept this because they did not have the expertise to challenge this financial information nor did they feel strong enough to demand to see the company accounts. The effect of the absence not only of any technical input from NUCI but also its failure to organise and empower these shopfloor workers at their workplace is starkly negative.

The National Union for the Clothing Industry itself has no vision and no strategy of any kind and therefore, neither do the shopfloor workers. It is an uncomfortable chicken-and-egg situation. But the primary responsibility for initiating change in this situation has to be with the union officials whose job it is, after all, to mobilise and educate (in the widest possible sense) their membership. But there is also an element of responsibility that should be shouldered by the shopfloor membership, even at the minimal level of demanding a regular presence of union officials at their workplaces and requiring, at the very least, a financial accounting of how the income from membership subscriptions is being spent.

The outcome is an unfortunate self-reinforcing circle: ignorant and disempowered shopfloor members who do not (or cannot) challenge either their own office bearers or the organising and administrative staff in their trade union to move from this narrow, disempowering, bureaucratic view that reinforces the status quo of shopfloor weakness when it should be trying to change it.

There is also the point made earlier that there is no history or tradition of shopfloor workers making any fundamental and successful challenges of management in individual workplaces. In a way, participation in such a disabling structure as the Workers Committee

has contributed to this. But it also has to be said that at no time, in the instance of the National Union of the Clothing Industry, did the trade union make any attempt to 'subvert' or make over these Workers Committees in its own image. And unless the National Union for the Clothing Industry urgently develops the vision, coherence and determination to make micro-level representation an actively contested terrain between itself (through its shopfloor membership) and management, the prognosis for strengthening micro-level worker representation in the clothing sector is extremely bleak.

## **Summary**

Thus we have a disturbing scenario of enduring weakness of worker representation at the micro-level of the shopfloor. An important factor accounting for this weakness lies in the labour law introduced and implemented by the post-independence government. More specifically, the entrenchment of the Workers Committee as the predominant structure of micro-level worker representation in 1980, right at a time of extreme fragility and incoherence in worker organisation, has contributed very significantly to the maintenance of this weakness. This has also been aggravated by the absence of systematic trade union organising activities at shopfloor level. At the national macro-level, government hostility and explicit efforts to undermine the development of effective trade unionism also played its part in weakening the national representation structure, particularly during the first decade or so after independence. However, in contrast to the continuing weakness of the shopfloor structure of Workers Committees, the national umbrella structure, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions has, against significant odds, grown in strength and coherence. In the next, concluding chapter we will examine the broader implications for Zimbabwe at this critical juncture of its history, of a strong, national trade union structure which nevertheless has important micro-level weaknesses at its base.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusions : Academic Advancement, Recommendations and Caveats

In the preceding chapters we have reviewed and evaluated the nature and limits of shopfloor worker representation in the Zimbabwe manufacturing sector. We have also attempted to explain and investigate the reasons for these limits through historical as well as contemporary analysis. In this final chapter, apart from summarising our analysis of the issues connected with worker representation, we will be describing how this work has contributed to the advancement of academic knowledge. We will also be assessing the developing nature of, and potential future directions to be taken by the labour movement at this time. This assessment of the labour movement's role in the future of this country is important because of its crucial and continuing significance in workplace struggles against employers in particular, capitalism in general and most importantly against government oppression, at this particular historical juncture of Zimbabwe's history.

Our central argument has been that strong worker representation has been, and will continue to be, crucial for civil society as a whole in Zimbabwe. However, an important aspect of that argument has also been that the depth of that worker representation is extremely uneven, with increasing strength and coherence at the national macro-level but with continuing weakness and dis-organisation at the shopfloor micro-level. This unevenness undermines the sustainability of any kind of new dispensation that is likely to come with a new government. Unless workers, and indeed the citizenry in general, feel empowered in their own day-to-day lives, they will not have the coherence and strength to either influence or challenge macro-level policies and events. This strength and coherence is particularly important to prevent a recurrence of dis-empowering state corporatism towards worker organisation in particular and civil society in general, as well as also preventing any future state-induced moral and economic bankruptcy.

The current preoccupation at this juncture in Zimbabwe's history is with something quite simple and yet absolutely fundamental to any future which foresees constructive and democratic change. The preoccupation right now, is with fighting a running battle to keep in meaningful and functioning existence, the institutions that defend and uphold the most basic human rights - the protection of the judiciary, the protection of trade union structures, the defence of citizens against state-sponsored terror and killing - protecting and defending the whole gamut of the freedoms, rights and entitlements that most nation-states ordinarily take for granted.

During this process of being one of the main focal points of defence against this oppression, the trade union movement will need to develop some clear perspectives around current and future transition processes - or rather to assess from past experiences, the important elements that can influence the direction a national transition takes, and therefore whether the potential for a positive transformation in the interests of the majority of the disempowered citizenry will actually be realised. Zimbabwe is after all, in what can be understood as a transitional process - from a once authoritarian-corporatist government which has now degenerated into one which maintains its power undemocratically, through corruption, killing, gross intimidation and flagrant violations not only of its own laws but those of ordinary human decency.<sup>cclix</sup> The future part of this transition process will be the removal of this present government and the accession of one which has (hopefully) been popularly and democratically elected.

The role of the trade unions in this initial part of the transition process - shaping not only workers' broad responses but those of civil society as well - has already been significant as we have seen in earlier chapters. In neighbouring South Africa the umbrella trade union body (the Congress of South African Trade Unions) has already played a pivotal part in a transitional process that began a few years ago when the apartheid government agreed to relinquish power. Because of the significance and centrality of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions in influencing the direction of the future unfolding of its own country's transition, it will be important to examine that experience of transition in South Africa so as to define clear caveats as well as the potential pitfalls that might be encountered in Zimbabwe.

In view of this it will be timely, after considering the academic findings of this thesis, to review the lessons that have emerged from our case study and analysis. That is, what the trade union can do specifically to strengthen and empower its shopfloor members and, in turn what the workers' umbrella body should, and should not do in order to support that process.

### **Advancing academic understanding and new ideas concerning worker representation in Zimbabwe**

Through the research and analysis in our work, we have advanced academic understanding and new ideas in two ways. In the first instance as far as our advancement of new ideas is concerned, our contribution has been the formulation of a methodology for evaluating the strength of worker representation. This methodology consists of a simple framework which

enables us to identify and classify two separate but interdependent levels of worker representation. Our model sees worker representation as taking place in two different levels, at the micro-level of the shopfloor Workers Committee and at the national macro-level of the umbrella trade union organisation. Thus once this classification is complete, each level can then be systematically evaluated according to its composition and functions, assessments made about its strengths and weakness and, finally remedies put forward to deal with the weaknesses. The details of each level may vary from one national context to another but in principle, our classificatory model provides a clear framework of analysis for future labour studies.

In the second instance, in terms of advancing academic understanding, we have adopted a new perspective in relation to the Zimbabwean context, which holds that structures of worker representation are not simply adjuncts of industrial relations practice. These worker representation structures are inescapably part of the wider socio-political context and have therefore to be studied and analysed within a framework that explicitly includes that wider context. And in support of this new perspective we have pursued a systematic historical and contemporary analysis of the origins and nature of the problems bedeviling micro-level worker representation in present-day Zimbabwe.

#### *Methodology for evaluating the strength of worker representation in Zimbabwe*

To facilitate this evaluation of worker representation we have formulated a new framework which classifies this worker representation in Zimbabwe as occurring at the micro-level, meso-level and macro-level. This framework not only classifies the different levels of representation it also puts forward a basis on which to systematically assess the current state, in terms of weakness and strength, of each of the levels. Based on the outcome of this assessment, this framework also provides clear *pointers* as to where the areas of weakness lie and therefore which areas need change and strengthening.

At the micro-level of the shopfloor in Zimbabwe, the sole structure of representation is the Workers Committee. It is clear that this structure's primary function is to serve as a channel of communication. At its best (theoretically) both workers and management are thus equally able to dialogue about issues of respective concern on the shopfloor. In reality, as we have seen from the case study the Workers Committee is more a channel through which management can transmit and "discuss" their own issues or deal with grievances or requests put by shopfloor workers. It is largely a management tool for maintaining industrial



harmony and optimal production. The power inequities at play in the operation of Workers Committees are so skewed against the Workers Committee members themselves - lack of technical information, lack of resources, educational inferiority, lack of negotiating skills and most importantly, individual fear of losing one's job - as to render them almost entirely impotent as a mechanism that *actively* protects and promotes the interests of the shopfloor workers.

But there is also the inescapable fact that, as we have seen from the case study, the Workers Committee is the only structure, in the absence of a vigorous trade union, that has any relevance for shopfloor workers in their day-to-day working lives. It is the only channel through which they can raise grievances and issues that directly affect them. Thus at the micro-level, it is the Workers Committee - a flawed, inadequate and deeply inequitable structure - and not the trade union that plays the most important part in shopfloor workers' day-to-day lives. This study therefore promotes the idea that trade unionism has to be studied at all levels of activity, especially this micro-level. We now move to the meso-level.

The intermediate meso-level of worker representation which comprises the sub-sectoral National Employment Council (composed of equal representation from employers and the trade union) remains a structure that is only as strong or as weak as the participating trade union. Its functions are restricted to jointly negotiating agreed wage levels and the administration of the sub-sectoral workers' pension fund. Ideally the trade union would be educating and consulting about all aspects of operation at National Employment Council level, with its shopfloor membership and thus would be truly negotiating from a position of relative strength, on the instruction and behest of its membership. The more likely reality is that there is scant consultation with the membership. And in the case of the National Union for the Clothing Industry, the trade union officials who attend the negotiations, are themselves technically weak and ill-equipped – largely it seems because the union itself does not put a high (enough) premium on recruiting competent and committed staff. In some ways the meso-level National Employment Council scenario of weakness and power inequity seems similar to that of the micro-level Workers Committee. But there is an important difference. The trade union – because of its access and proximity to resources - has the wherewithal and thus a greater basis on which to make itself stronger and therefore be nearer a level of equality with its employer counterparts on the National Employment Council.

Worker representation at national macro-level through the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions is and has been, an altogether different experience. Until after the mid-1990s there

was little meaningful representation or even defence of workers' interests *per se*. The reasons for this as we have seen, had their roots in the pre-1980 nationalist and later, military struggle and which resulted in a trade union umbrella body which in the early years after independence, for the most part represented no more than the material interests of its corrupt top officials; it was simply an impotent adjunct of the ruling party ZANU PF. Towards the end of the first decade after independence however, there were palpable efforts to 're-invent' the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions into an independent labour body with proper, transparent accounting and administrative structures. But sustaining these efforts was easier said than done, given the legacies of corruption and self-interest that still lingered to some degree. However, gradually in the early 1990s there emerged a core of independently-minded, honest trade unionists who made up the upper echelons of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, and under whose stewardship the umbrella body began to consolidate into what has subsequently turned out to be an important entity around which the representation and defence of workers' and citizens' interests has begun and continues to take place.

The issues that have emerged in the foregoing analysis will also be incorporated into the final section of this chapter which will be dealing with lessons for the trade union movement. But in terms of academic study, the framework itself is a new and useful analytical tool in any context where strength of worker representation needs to be evaluated.

### New Ideas About Worker Representation in Zimbabwe

This thesis has revealed a paucity of knowledge about worker representation in Zimbabwe. It has built upon what exists, and has then developed new ideas in this field. We will summarise what already exists and then we will describe how our work has introduced new information which enhances our understanding not only of the severe limitations of Workers Committees but also the important implications, not only for the shopfloor but for the wider socio-political arena in Zimbabwe, that emerge from these limitations.

There have been four pieces of empirical research concerning Workers Committees in Zimbabwe : those of Shadur (1987), Nyoka (1986), Maphosa (1986) and Mutizwa-Mangiza (1987)<sup>cclxi</sup>, of which Shadur's is by far the most well known. Although the focus of his research was on Workers Committees, he was only marginally interested in worker perspectives; rather his concern was to be able to evaluate the Workers Committee structure

in terms of its usefulness as an industrial relations tool at enterprise level. His appreciation of workers concerned only their capacity as shopfloor instruments of production. Not surprisingly his work led him to conclude that the Workers Committee is useful as a channel of communication.

Nyoka's research observed the interaction between management and the Workers Committee and his work has highlighted the inequities inherent in the way such a structure operates. His main conclusion is that this inequity exists because the workers' side is poorly resourced both in education levels, technical expertise and in overall levels of confidence; while the opposite is the case for the management side which over and above these advantages, has the singular ability to terminate the employment of whomsoever it wishes. But Nyoka's analysis goes no further than the highlighting of these inequities coupled with the observation that concepts of democracy are not well understood at the workplace - he does not analyse the origins and underlying causes that gave rise to these inequities.

Similar drawbacks apply to the works of Mutizwa-Mangiza and Maphosa - either they are simply assessing whether Workers Committees are functioning according to their own extremely circumscribed objectives or whether, in a more abstract way they have made any contribution to democracy at the workplace. In neither case do either of these works systematically and seriously examine the prevailing political and ideological context within which such democracy is meant to have taken place. Even more problematic is their failure to even question how the word "democracy" could seriously be used in a national economic and political context, let alone on the shopfloor, where such a concept has held very little meaningful currency. In any event, both Mutizwa-Mangiza and Maphosa arrive at the unsurprising conclusion that the Workers Committee generally functions to the advantage of management but has a beneficial spin-off for workers who would otherwise have absolutely no other channel through which to communicate on permissible issues.

The research work in this dissertation on the other hand has broadened the terrain covered by a much wider range of issues, concepts and perspectives connected with worker representation in Zimbabwe. While our work has of course confirmed what all the foregoing writers found - that the chief function of a Workers Committee is to serve as a shopfloor communication channel between management and workers - it has also sought to move beyond simply highlighting this particular fact.

It has sought to introduce the new concept that workers and their structures of representation cannot be viewed purely as aspects of labour relations theory and practice.

We have examined and then drawn together all the strands involved in the different social and analytical categories - from Zimbabwean historiography to post-independence political and economic developments - to demonstrate and highlight the context and environment which enabled the establishment and continued operation of the deeply inadequate shopfloor micro-level structures of worker representation. This work has also sought to identify the location of specific weaknesses not only to suggest solutions that could strengthen worker representation but which could also, more broadly lead to significant worker empowerment. Thus, emerging from our new conceptual framework, another output has been to make specific recommendations as to how these weaknesses could be addressed - always with the main aim being to enhance and strengthen worker - and therefore civic - empowerment.

Thus the important new idea that emerges from our work is that structures of worker representation do not exist in a vacuum and in isolation from the wider socio-political arena. It follows therefore, that these structures cannot be regarded or studied solely in the narrow and exclusive context of the 'technical' level at which the structures operate e.g. a Workers Committees being assessed exclusively in terms of being a shopfloor phenomenon. It is therefore important to adopt a much broader framework of analysis which takes into account the multi-faceted nature of worker representation as part of national civil-society structures.

It is in pursuance of this extended framework that we will now address a broader context of wider issues, as they relate to worker representation and, more particularly, as they relate to the current and future position and role of the labour movement in Zimbabwe's rapidly changing socio-political scenario.

### **Caveats and lessons for Zimbabwe today**

The narrow or economistic, sporadic macro-level worker action of early post-independence years has recently moved from strictly employer-worker conflicts to the wider civic arena of workers being mobilised and organised by the national-level Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions against the government. Rank-and-file workers have been participating actively in regional ZCTU-organised discussions. The vast majority of these workers had never before experienced this kind of participation and nor have they ever before experienced a similar sense of ownership.

As the evaluation research commissioned by the ZCTU following the March 1998 stayaway (which also took into account the 1997 mass action) points out:

There is evidence that workers' demands are broadening to include grievances related to government economic mismanagement, transparency and equity issues. The original demands focused on the scrapping of tax increases and resolution of food prices remain intact, but there is also a clear sense that the solving of these problems by government will no longer be sufficient to quieten the general membership. Many respondents noted that wider questions of housing, education, health, government corruption and wastage etc, had to be addressed by government and that these were all directly related to the issue of taxes precisely because of the government's inequitable misdirection of public funds.<sup>cclxii</sup>

Thus worker activism has now consciously moved into the wider realm of the 'political' in the sense that workers have analysed and identified that the ZANU PF government has been largely responsible for the current malaise and they have therefore sought, through their mass action to bring pressure at a national level to bear on government to make radical changes.

There is a danger however, given the recent series of successfully organised worker mass actions in Zimbabwe, that inaccurate assumptions could be made about the depth and strength of worker organisation in Zimbabwe. As we have already seen, it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that this national-level activism - moving away from the shopfloor as the specific terrain of struggle - emanates from a coherent, micro-level worker organisation that has now become strong and vibrant and where the rank-and-file membership participate meaningfully in their own trade union, and therefore confront management successfully and equally on the shopfloor. Quite the opposite is the case.

We need then to be clear that there is an important difference between the successful macro-level organisation of worker action by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and the continuing status quo at the micro-level. As a general observation, particularly taking into account the changes that have been brought about in the last three years, it could perhaps be said that there now exists strong worker organisation through the trade union movement in Zimbabwe. But this strength exists largely at the macro-level. And as we have seen from the case study, it is clear that this strength is not evident at the micro-level.

In fact the central thesis of this dissertation is that contemporary micro-level trade union functioning and organising – and crucially shopfloor worker representation structures – have not managed to graduate beyond being tools to facilitate management objectives. In spite of the growing coherence and focus on the part of the macro-level organising structures of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, there has not been a similar focus on the part of the affiliate trade union in the manufacturing sector at least. They are still being run in a top-

down manner where micro-level shopfloor worker empowerment is light years away from being the trade unions' central focus of activity, as is any conception of driving these trade unions to operate in a democratic and empowering way. But as we have already mentioned elsewhere there is the already-existing problem of what Roger Dahl calls 'civic competence' on the part of trade union members. Although he applies his formulation at a nation-state level it can be just as useful in the context of a social entity such as a trade union.

According to Dahl, if democracy is to work it requires a certain level of political or civic competence on the part of its citizens. His statement that, 'in newly democratic or democratised countries, where people are just beginning to learn the arts of self-government, the question of citizen competence possesses an obvious urgency' has resonance in the Zimbabwean context, both for the new dispensation that will follow the almost-certain change of government as well as for the trade unions themselves.<sup>cclxiii</sup>

What standards must trade union members or citizens meet for them to be considered competent? It seems reasonable to expect people to be aware of what they want their trade union or government to achieve and be predisposed to act in ways aimed at bringing this about. The modern politically competent citizen is assumed to be concerned about trade union business, public affairs and political life, as well as being well informed and involved in discussions and activities to influence trade union and/or government decisions in order to foster the general welfare of the community as well as protect their own interests. This may well be a somewhat unrealistic expectation. As Torres rightly points out in her survey:

People will participate in politics according to whether and how, they see their own living conditions affected by political decisions. The mobilisation for political activity depends upon political knowledge and interest, as well as confidence in one's own capacity to change circumstances through political action.' But these reservations notwithstanding, if a trade union operates within an institutional framework which is egalitarian, cooperative and democratic, it is much more likely to enhance the development of such values in people.<sup>cclxiv</sup>

Thus the macro-level strength and micro-level weakness in the different strata of worker representation has important implications not only for the future of a strong trade union movement but for civil society as a whole in Zimbabwe. We have seen the pivotal role being played by organised labour and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions in mobilising not only its members but wider society too, to protest and act against destructive, national economic policies but also latterly, against government harassment and terror campaigns

against its own citizens. The centrality of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions in organising these activities at this juncture cannot be overstated. Not only were the umbrella body's organisational resources and structures efficiently mobilised, they were also successful in the process of enabling the rank-and-file membership to feel a level of empowerment as never before. But once again it has to be pointed out that this initial sense of empowerment has come from worker action at the macro-level. A similar sense of action and empowerment is not evident at the micro-level.

Latterly (in late 1999) a large proportion of the leadership of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions became part of the founding executive committee of a new political party called the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The birth of this new political party followed a decision which emerged from a process of discussion and consultation during a series of Working People's Conventions convened by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. The MDC is the first political party in the history of post-independence Zimbabwe, to provide a credible alternative to Zanu PF. This is demonstrated by the fact that the MDC managed in the general election of June 2000, in spite of calculated terror campaigns and systematic electoral rigging by the government, to incontrovertibly win nearly half of all the parliamentary seats after having been in existence less than a year.<sup>cclxv</sup>

### **Future role of trade unions in Zimbabwe**

We can therefore see that in some ways the trade union movement has already provided the basis for, and important elements of, a government-in-waiting in Zimbabwe. However it is now of paramount importance that the new ZCTU is clear about its future role, direction and objectives, following the possible departure of the current Zanu PF government. The first challenge for the trade union movement is to remain absolutely clear about its primary commitment to workers' struggles; the lessons emerging from the subversion by Zanu PF of the labour movement in the earlier years following independence must not be forgotten. We have already noted earlier that after independence, the common pattern in Africa has been for the governing party to assert its control over the indigenous labour movement; but the aim of this has been generally not to promote but to prevent radical consciousness among the unionised workers.

Yet it is incorrect to conclude from this that African urban workers, on their own are capable of only "trade union consciousness" as can be seen from the South African example. The preoccupations of Blade Nzimande, General Secretary of the South African Communist

Party (SACP) for the need to strengthen the working class as the most strategically important force to lead the offensive for a people-driven democracy in South Africa has acute resonance for Zimbabwe. But how should this working class act to strengthen the democratic state without at the same time abandoning its struggle against an 'increasingly arrogant capitalist class'? The view of the SACP is that:

Whilst organised workers do not constitute the totality of the working class, at the same time they are the bedrock and the leading detachment of the working class a whole. This is because of their strategic location at the point of production and the economy as a whole, as well as their organisational muscle. The core social constituency of the SACP and of the Confederation of South African Trade Unions - organised workers in the formal sector - is the crucial social force. It is this stratum of the working class that has the collective numbers, and the strategic economic location, as well as revolutionary organisational traditions, to provide effective social weight to any progressive agenda. But the organised working class must also constantly deepen its organic links with the urban and rural poor. (10<sup>th</sup> SACP Congress Programme)<sup>cclxvi</sup>

But as Adler points out, the importance of workers and their organisations is not restricted to the economic realm. Strength at the point of production may provide a platform for broader political initiatives, as it is in South Africa (but in contra-distinction to Zimbabwe). Trade unions are often among the best organised forces in developing societies, with large memberships, funds, and influence over key points in the economy. They can affect politics by withdrawing support for a ruling regime, serving as a foundation for political parties contesting for state power, as a constituency to be mobilised for political action, and as a shelter for activists or underground agents of liberation movements (as in Zimbabwe). They can also seek an improved quality of life for their members and the working class generally by making consumption demands on public authorities for better housing, education and other state-provided amenities (future in Zimbabwe).<sup>cclxvii</sup>

The Zimbabwean trade union movement has much to learn from its neighbour: South African studies have shown the importance of political learning in the union movement. Activity at the shopfloor and grassroots level increased with the democratisation of the labour movement in the 1980s. Workers brought the increased confidence gained in the unions into the larger community. As they gained increased control of their lives at work, they wanted decision-making powers also after working hours. They organised street and area



committees in their local communities, reflecting the democratic structures of their unions. In Friedmans's words: 'labour unions can work as laboratories for democracy'.<sup>cclxviii</sup>

Equally the trade union movement has also to make sure that its own functioning is democratic and inclusive. As Sandbrook has pointed out `in contemporary Africa, union officials can more often be found stifling rank and file initiatives than articulating common grievances and coordinating industrial action. Part of this is undoubtedly due to weak internal organisation. But of more importance in explaining the behaviour of trade union officials, as Sandbrook highlights, is the control of unions and the co-optation of their leaders increasingly practised by corporatist governments in Africa.<sup>cclxix</sup> In the instance of Zimbabwe, this corporatism has transformed itself into a form of violent authoritarianism, which is described with extraordinary and visionary accuracy by the Nigerian sociologist Claude Ake, who wrote the following in 1981:

The present state of economic stagnation will continue, deepening class contradictions causing governmental instability, but not necessarily sparking off revolution. [T]he politics of anxiety will become institutionalised; increasingly, the ruling class will display signs of paranoia while the subordinate classes become frustrated, demoralised and available for induction into extremist movements. [T]he ruling class will increasingly appeal to loyalty, patriotism, discipline and dislike for outsiders. Enemies of society will be found all too ubiquitously and will be dealt with summarily. Fascism - that is the reality staring us in the face in most of Africa.<sup>cclxx</sup>

Ake's words were later sharply echoed by Howard, a human rights activist who maintains that:

It is important for advocates of human rights in Africa to analyse the future of trade unionism there. I believe that the immediate future is bleak. Given the current economic and political crisis in Africa, corporatism and perhaps a variant of fascism, are the likely modes of political organisation and repression in the foreseeable future.<sup>cclxxi</sup>

### **Transition to a new dispensation?**

It is not only useful but necessary, to view the period running up to (and probably beyond) the almost-certain change from the current Zanu PF government to a new MDC government as an explicit period of transition. This transition can be seen as a process that moves in its most immediate sense, from horror to normality and then, at another level, from prevailing

economic melt-down to some kind of return to normality of economic functioning. This period of transition has important implications not only for the trade union movement but for civil society as a whole in Zimbabwe. Unless matters are dealt with clearly and decisively during this transition there is a very real anxiety that matters will return, in the not-so-distant future, to a familiar position of government autocracy - either through corporatist measures or something worse - effectively suppressing the strengthening and empowerment of workers and their interests which of course, are also those of the majority.

South Africa's transition experience in the mid-1990s provides us with some important pointers and caveats. But as labour sociologists Adler and Webster, point out, mainstream transition writers neglect the role of labour movements as important actors in transitions.<sup>cclxxii</sup> Popular and radical movements are given scant attention and are understood as being dangerously excessive in their demands, which if allowed free reign, risk prompting a right-wing reaction, thereby scuttling the entire peace process. Adler and Webster's warning that 'attention falls instead on an alliance between reformers in the authoritarian regime and moderates among the pro-democratic forces in civil society, both of whom corral the extremists in their respective camps on the way to brokering a centrist pact' has serious implications for the future transition process in Zimbabwe. But more importantly as they go on to state:

..[T]he crucial consequence of this approach is an inappropriate narrowing of possible outcomes. Through a strategy we label *radical reform*, disciplined and sophisticated social movements may be able to inject more progressive content into the democratisation process and wrest important concessions from reformers and moderates alike. In other words, a conservative outcome is in no way given in advance.. (In South Africa) rather than being a force to be restrained by the alliance between reformers and moderates, a mobilised civil society and powerful social movements – especially the labour movement – played a central and constructive role in creating conditions for the transition, in shaping its character, and indeed in legitimising the transition process itself. Whether the labour movement in particular can continue to play this role is an open question. With the advent of parliamentary democracy and the creation of corporatist-style policymaking and institutions, as well as the emphasis on national reconciliation, pressures towards incorporation and demobilisation have never been stronger.<sup>cclxxiii</sup>

But we should also take seriously Przeworski's view that, successful transitions require a pact that is 'inevitably conservative, economically and socially.'

The *ancien regime* gives up unilateral control in exchange for a system in which they continue to wield considerable influence, while in agreeing to such an elite-pacted transition the pro-democracy forces accept a limited form of democracy and postpone – if not abandon – aspirations for equality. [I]n such situations, governments are confronted with two options in relation to social movements. They can either work to undermine and weaken them or work with them to garner support

for their programme. Where there are strong social movements, the first path can be pursued only at great risk as it threatens to compromise the democratic character of the transition. Thus governments attempt to draw in these social movements through corporatist-type arrangements on the assumption that these will demobilise and moderate popular movements.<sup>cclxxiv</sup>

But writers on South Africa labour have fruitfully applied the concept 'social movement unionism' to account for the particular form taken by the labour movement.<sup>cclxxv</sup> This form of unionism blurs the demarcation between union as formal organisations and social movements as loosely structured networks of action or, more drastically, the distinction falls away. In other words, a form of social movement unionism exists when the formal organisational features characteristic of unions are fused with the mobilisation capacity and looser structure of social movements.<sup>cclxxvi</sup> Once again there is a clear and strategic lesson here for the labour movement in Zimbabwe.

But just as there is a clear lesson, so is there also a clear caveat from the South African experience:

The South African labour movement has played a central role in the origins of the transition process and in the development of the transition itself through a variety of interventions driven by the strategy of radical reform. However, with the creation of a new parliamentary democracy, there are increasing signs of a widening gap between the leadership and the base, echoing the classic features of goal displacement first described by Michels. If the labour movement does not address the problems head on, it indeed runs the risk of bureaucratisation and co-optation, with its power – historically based on its capacity for disciplined mobilisation – slowly ebbing away.<sup>cclxxvii</sup>

### *Lessons*

Thus we come to the nub of the issue: the importance of the trade union movement in Zimbabwe recognising the gap, in terms of organisational strength and coherence, between the strong macro-level of worker representation and the weak micro-level situation on the shopfloor. If this gap is not acknowledged and addressed as a matter of specific priority – resulting in shopfloor workers still not being able to confidently address the inequities at the workplace – then there is a strong risk that the (new) labour movement which is in the process of re-forming itself following the exit of most of its leadership and top officials to the new political party, will be undermined in the long run by this continuing grassroots

disorganisation and weakness and will thus lose the strength and momentum gained so far by its successfully-organised mass actions.

Once again, because there are so many parallels with Zimbabwe, it would be useful to draw on the experience of building trade union organisation in South Africa. According to Friedman it is 'normal' to see two types of trade unions - those which are interested in 'narrow' factory battles and those which are 'political'. It may seem normal but it also misunderstands why the trade unions are so important in today's South Africa.

The most successful trade unions in South Africa spent little time campaigning against the apartheid-government policies. They rarely called on their members to act in support of demands for the vote or the release of political prisoners or students' rights. And yet, as Friedman says `everything the trade unions have done over the past years has been "political" - and would have been no less if they had never organised a single campaign for political rights.<sup>1001xxviii</sup>

It is Friedman's contention that the trade union movement may well have done more to bring political change nearer than any other black organisations in the country's history, but it has done this `mainly in its humdrum factory battles rather than its political campaigns. The factory fight has done something which few black battles for rights have done before - it has given powerless people a chance to wield power for the first time in their lives.<sup>1001xxix</sup>

Friedman paints a picture familiar to African analysts, of the majority of black South Africans assuming that their powerless condition was pretty much part of the natural order. Either it could not be changed - or someone else would have to change it for them.

In 1921, thousands of Transkei Africans rallied behind Wellington Buthelezi, who told them that American Negroes would come in aircraft to free them. By supporting him, they showed their desire for change. But they also revealed their powerlessness, for he did not ask them to work change themselves, but merely to pay a membership fee, slaughter their white goats and fowls, and to wait for the great day when they would be freed...[M]ore than 50 years later the Wellington tradition still lived. Many Africans privately supported the student rebels of 1976 or even the African National Congress and they hoped that these movements would free them - but they did not believe that they could free themselves. They went about their daily business, keeping their hopes to themselves, and no messiahs came out of the sky to change their world.<sup>1001xxx</sup>

The South African trade unions offered no aeroplanes and no quick solutions. They told workers that only they themselves could change their world; that they would suffer many defeats and win few victories but that they had power in their numbers and their unity. They told workers that they could only win if they organised. Acting together to change small things in the factories has given workers their new confidence and sense of power. In the 1980s they went on to bigger things in the factories. By 1982 they could organise a nationwide work stoppage and in 1984 the biggest protest stayaway by black people in the country's history.<sup>cclxxxix</sup>

Friedman is very clear that the trade unions should (and do) still spend most of their time and effort in the factories, the mines and the shops, for it is there that their members' power lies - only if they are strong in the workplace can they be strong outside it. Until the workplace is fully organised, workers will not have the power to win rights elsewhere. This why all those 'humdrum' and 'routine' battles in the factories are so important, why they are so political and why they have affected politics in the black townships. The trade unions in South Africa may never directly change the government. But indirectly, their organising work is already bearing fruit in the communities in which their members live.

Again Friedman is clear that It is because they have won rights in the factories that workers are demanding them in the townships. It is because they have controlled their own organisations (i.e. trade unions) that they are demanding that community groups also allow their members to control decisions. The battle in the factories has not only strengthened the movement for change, but has also given birth to a type of politics which has been rarely seen among the powerless in South Africa: a grassroots politics which stresses the ability of the ordinary men and women, rather than 'great leaders', to act to change their world.<sup>cclxxxix</sup>

It hardly needs to be re-stated in the Zimbabwean context, that a strong trade union movement can only become so, if there is a micro-level rank-and-file membership at the base that is empowered and to whom the macro-level leadership feel accountable. And that this macro-level leadership will therefore act (only) in the interest of the micro-level membership – both on the part of each individual affiliate trade union and of the ZCTU as a whole.

It is necessary to avoid a cyclical return to weaknesses in worker organisation and representation vis-à-vis the government of the day in Zimbabwe. A small but important part of redressing one of these weaknesses would be to acknowledge that. And it is no longer acceptable to have a coherent administrative structure functioning *only* at the macro-level, as was the case with ZCTU in 1986. The organising, strengthening and therefore

empowering of micro-level workers, through efficient affiliate unions, has to be explicitly and energetically addressed as well. Otherwise the chances are that the (new) government will engage with the (new) macro-level ZCTU, which is supposed, finally, to represent the interests of the micro-level. But if, as we have seen is currently the case, this micro-level has neither the strength, coherence or even opportunity to analyse and articulate what their interests are and therefore how they want them to be articulated by their own union leadership and by the ZCTU, then how can these macro-level structures be truly accountable and strong?

This is an important issue because in the wider context, civil society in Zimbabwe has been (and still is) generally weak and the coherence of ZCTU and its structures has therefore been a significant focus for activities of resistance, protest and change.

An important finding of the 1997-1998 Stayaways Evaluation report commissioned by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions was that 'workers want to be asked about their own situation and how to solve it.' The report continues with the observation that '[consultation] has not been a central feature of labour movement mobilisation and policy making in the past but it was essential for the success of the recent mass actions.' Many workers felt that 'with participation came greater ownership and commitment.'<sup>ccclxxxiii</sup>

The strongly expressed primacy and emphasis placed by workers on proper, constructive communication and feedback discussion highlights further the (hitherto) existing absence of this in the day-to-day functioning and operations of most of the individual trade unions. This also fits in with the finding from our own case study that virtually none of the trade union members had had any discussion or contact with their trade union officials other than when a shopfloor crisis rose and the management asked the union to intervene.

Thus at the macro-level organised labour in Zimbabwe has been extremely effective in bringing pressure to bear and in making its voice heard. In a relevant comment about the whole continent Frederick Cooper generalises thus:

...[Y]et Africa - as the labour movements' central role in restoring multiparty democratic elections in Zambia and in general strikes against dictatorial powers in Nigeria remind us - can in the 1990s still be the most effective nucleus of opposition to an oppressive regime. For all their failings at enterprise-level collective bargaining and in institutionalising the influence of labour on day-to-day policy, urban workers

make themselves felt in certain moments - via strikes, general strikes, consumer revolts and occasionally urban riots.<sup>cclxxxiv</sup>

But where does this leave individual trade union functioning and the needs of its members as far as day-to-day shopfloor issues are concerned? Both from the case study and follow-up discussions with key informants it seems that this coherence and consultation of national level organisation and action has – so far - not really affected or changed individual trade union-shopfloor organising and interaction. Even though, as the 1997-1998 Stayaways Evaluation research report comments, the mass actions have clearly given 'confidence to workers that the labour movement has the capacity to articulate their interests and demands, mobilise other national interests in support and to defend workers' right to do this in the face of government hostility and intimidation', it remains to be seen whether this new-found confidence in engaging in national-level struggles will be translated into similarly confident demands for effectiveness, transparency and accountability by the upper levels of the trade union to its rank-and-file membership.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATUC	African Trade Union Congress
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FAWU	Federation of African Workers
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NDP	National Democratic Party
NEC	National Employment Council
NUCI	National Union for the Clothing Industry
PPWAWU	Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (South Africa)
RICU	Reformed Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
RRAEA	Rhodesia Railways African Employees Association
SRBC	Southern Rhodesia Bantu Congress
SRTUC	Southern Rhodesia Trade Union Congress
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Party
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
ZANU (PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)

## APPENDIX I

### Workers Committee Guidelines<sup>3</sup>

#### 1 Workers committee : definition

A Workers Committee is essentially a committee created and elected by the workers to represent themselves in discussions / negotiations with members of management. A Workers Committee therefore consists entirely of employees and does not include any management representatives. Members of the Workers Committee are free to discuss such matters as they may wish to debate without interference from management.

In the interests of good order it is desirable that the Workers Committee should have its own Constitution so that all members of the Workers Committee and the employees they represent know exactly where they stand and what their parameters are.

Obviously however, the Workers Committee will have to meet members of management from time to time to discuss and to formulate recommendations in respect of the matters referred to in its Constitution. These joint meetings should be designated "Works Council".

The Constitution of the "Works Council" itself should be a matter for discussion and agreement between the Workers Committee and management, as also should be the procedure and content of the meetings of that joint body.

#### 2 Aims and objects

The aims and objects of the Workers Committee should include -

- a) To act as a direct link and means of communication between management and employees at shopfloor level;
- b) To provide a means for the presentation of and discussion with management of employees requirements and grievances;
- c) To promote stability and good employee / management relationships and to encourage the settlement of differences and disputes by conciliatory methods;
- d) To promote productivity by generating a stable and good atmosphere within the company and especially within the working environment;
- e) To promote the interests of the employees whom they represent by maintaining regular contact with them;
- f) To ensure that if a fellow worker seeks their advice in respect of any grievance or disciplinary matter that at least one member of the committee is available to render such advice and assistance as may be required;
- g) To cooperate with the established trade union in ensuring where applicable that the industrial agreement or the industrial regulations for the industry are observed to the mutual benefit of all employees and management

#### 3 Composition of the Workers Committee

It is in the interests of efficiency and ease of administration that the Workers Committee should be of manageable proportions. However, in the interests of efficiency and

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<sup>3</sup> Workers Committee Guidelines in English, Shona, Ndebele. Issued by the Ministry of Labour & Social services, Department of Industrial Relations, Government Printer, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1981

continuity it is equally desirable that the members of the Workers Committee should be elected to office for a period of not less than 12 months from the date of election. This enables the members of the Workers Committee to familiarise themselves with all the ramifications of the company's or work place operations and gives them time to gain experience in negotiations in the interests of the employees whom they represent. It also enables management to get to know them and to establish a good relationship with them. Frequent changes in the membership of the Workers Committee can only result in instability and lack of confidence on the part of the employees themselves in the members of the Workers Committee.

The Workers Committee should elect its own chairman, vice chairman, secretary and assistant secretary. In addition, in the interests of continuity, alternates should be elected for at least half the members of the Workers Committee so that if one or more committee members are absent for any reason at all, their place can be taken by an alternate. Where the strength of a particular department is much greater than any of the other departments within an undertaking, then the number of elected representatives should be increased commensurately.

It may be necessary in cases of large establishments for each department to have its own subcommittee, the chairman of which could be the departments representative on the main Workers Committee. How the members of each subcommittee are elected is a matter for the members of the department itself to decide. It would be desirable however, to have the members of the subcommittees elected democratically. The purpose of forming these subcommittees is essentially to ensure that the views, opinions, likes and dislikes of all employees are known to the Workers Committee. The subcommittee provides a means of the Workers Committee reporting back to the employees in their constituencies on the results of their negotiations with management.

Members of the Workers Committee and subcommittee shall not be favoured (with the exception of the provision in paragraph 6) or prejudiced in any way in the pursuit of their responsibilities as members of the committee.

#### 4 Elections

Elections by secret ballot should be held once every twelve months at least two months before the anniversary date of election of the current Workers Committee / subcommittee

Any employee who has twelve months or more service in the company should be eligible for election.

Any member of the Workers Committee may resign if he so desires but whenever possible it is suggested that he should give a month's notice.

Any vacancy which may be created on the Workers Committee by resignation, termination of service with the company, or any reason whatsoever, should be filled as soon as possible by a by-election in the constituency / department from which the vacancy has occurred

Election of members to Workers subcommittees may be by a show of hands at a meeting of the members of each department concerned. The election of the chairman, vice-chairman and secretary of each subcommittee should be by consensus of the members of the respective subcommittees.

#### 5 Matters which fall within the portfolio of the Workers Committee

- a) All matters of mutual interests to the employees and management.
- b) Prevention of accidents, elimination of health hazards
- c) Provision of welfare and community services
- d) Housing where this is applicable

- e) Improvement of working and living conditions
- f) Implementation of agreements reached between management and the Workers Committee
- g) The avoidance of disputes and other acts which are not conducive to productivity or good relationships
- h) The prompt settlement of disputes at the lowest possible level
- i) The explanation and clarification of work place rules and regulations to co-workers and, where applicable to wives and families of employees

In all these regards to assist management when called upon to do so.

## 6 Conduct of meetings of Workers Committees

Workers Committees should meet outside of normal working hours. However members of the Workers Committee who are required to investigate matters falling under their jurisdiction may be allowed reasonable time off with the consent of the head of their department.

Members of the Workers Committee should have reasonable access to heads of department and management. Should this necessitate leaving the job in hand or the normal work site, prior permission should be obtained from the individual's immediate supervisor either directly in charge of him or at the site.

In order to enable the Workers Committee to function satisfactorily, management should consider making available to the Workers Committee a room or hall with adequate facilities such as a table and chairs, for the Workers Committee to meet and discuss their business in private. Where a room or hall cannot be made permanently available for this purpose the Workers Committee should ensure that management is given adequate notice of their requirement for the room or hall as the case may be.

It is possible that some if not all members of the Workers Committee and Works subcommittee may require some training and guidance in the conduct of meetings, taking of minutes etc. Management should be prepared to assist if required to do so in providing training and guidance.

## 7 Meetings with management

As stated in paragraph 1 the Workers Committee will require to meet with management from time to time. It is suggested that these joint meetings should take place regularly say once a month. These meetings may also be attended by representatives of the trade union, staff association, or any other body officially recognised as representing employees governed by a National Industrial Council Agreement made in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act.

Depending on the size and extent of company's operations it may be necessary for the subcommittee of the Workers Committee to similarly hold meetings with the respective heads of department. Apart from everything else this would be desirable in the interests of settling disputes at the lowest level in the interests of industrial harmony

The constitution of the "works council", liaison committee or joint consultative committee should be evolved as a result of consultation and agreement between the Workers Committee and management as also should be the procedure and the content of the meetings of these joint bodies.

## 8 Conclusion

Finally it is suggested that the constitution of the Workers Committee when finally decided upon and agreed by the Workers Committee and management should be printed or typed and signed by the chairman and vice-chairman of the Workers Committee, the general manager /manager of the company and /or the secretary of the company or other senior official, thus conferring on the Workers Committee official recognition by all concerned. Copies of the constitution should then be posted on notice boards and copies made available to each member of the Workers Committee, subcommittees, "Works Council" and of course, to relevant members of management.

## APPENDIX II

### Context and Background Information on Factories and the National Union for the Clothing Industry

#### Context and background on factories

The case study comprised of workers in two medium-sized clothing factories, Concorde (Pvt) Ltd and Bravette (Pvt) Ltd in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Each of the factories involved in the case study was selected on the basis of its size and the extent to which its workforce had been unionised. Both factories were medium sized (a total of 300 - 450 workers), but one had more than half the workforce unionised and the other had substantially less than half the workforce unionised. The rationale behind this was to investigate whether there was a significant difference between the factories, in the respondents' attitude to, and understanding of worker representation on the shopfloor and whether this possible difference was connected with the extent to which the workforce was unionised.

#### Concorde Ltd

This factory began operations as a medium sized concern producing men's clothing in 1947. It is still in the hands of its original owner who is permanently resident in South Africa. Its middle and top level managerial staff is exclusively white; most of these management personnel have been with the firm for a considerable length of time and certainly for a number of years before independence in 1980. The lowest level of management comprises a personnel assistant who is black and who has been with the firm for about 10 years. This personnel assistant worked his way up to his present position from being a machinist on the shopfloor. At the time of the baseline study he was also the national president of the National Union of the Clothing Industry.

There was a level of racism among the white management, which displayed itself in either subtle or sometimes overt ways, the further down the management continuum one goes. The behaviour of the production manager, whose office was on the shopfloor and far away from his colleagues on the first floor, illustrated overt racism: the workers committee had been given permission to hold a meeting during working hours to prepare for a subsequent works council meeting (between workers representatives and management). Approximately an hour into the meeting the production manager noisily flung the door open and angrily shouted at the members of the committee to get back to work because this was "not a place where you can just sit under the trees like monkeys". The workers briefly attempted to

placate him but then very quickly and quietly filed out of the meeting room and back to their work places. They explained later that they tolerated the production manager's behaviour because "he is an old man who sometimes gets into a bad mood". The managing director on the other hand was scrupulously polite but somewhat patronising towards workers during their works' council discussions -in the words of the workers "it is like talking to our boss who is polite but who only has his own point of view - not ours".

Since Zimbabwe's attainment of political independence in 1980, the fortunes of the factory have largely reflected those of the national economy: an increase in economic growth in the first 3 years after independence, a decline in the years following that partly due to local drought and partly due to a worldwide recession, a slight but temporary improvement in trading conditions before the implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme and latterly, since 1991 a drastic downturn in production and sales both domestically and in the export markets. When working at full capacity the factory produces jackets, trousers, shorts and shirts for both the domestic and export markets.

Concorde's total labour force at the time of the research survey in the first half of 1996 stood at 380 (compared to a maximum total of 580 workers in 1976). According to the managing director (designate) a substantial part of the workforce at Concorde has been working for the company for over 15 years and many are aged 50 years or over.

Well over half of the workforce at Concorde are members of NUCI (61%).

### Bravette Ltd

Bravette was established in 1967. Its output consists of women and children's clothes produced for both domestic and export markets. It is connected with, and supplies exclusive clothing lines for, the retailing group that consists of Truworths Ltd, Number One Ltd and Topics Ltd in Zimbabwe. It also has administrative links with the same group in South Africa.

The factory is owned by a holding company, with a predominantly white ownership. The managerial staff are all black and have been in their current positions for varying lengths of time, since independence in 1980. The managing director at the time of the base line study was formerly the production manager, based on the shopfloor. Relations between the managing director, the workers and workers' committee seemed to be strained because of what the latter saw as his authoritarian and obnoxious attitude towards them. According to many of the respondents "he shouts at us and bullies us.....he does not respect us". The workers had come to rely on the (current) production manager, whom they perceived as being a fair man, to mediate between the managing director and themselves. On the other hand, the managing director during an interview, seemed hurt and surprised at this

perception, and blamed it on the production manager, saying that the latter had never made him aware of the workers' grievances. It was unfortunate that just before this interview took place, the production manager unexpectedly left Bravette apparently to take up a better position elsewhere.

At the time of the research in the first half of 1996 the total labour force stood at 370. According to the managing director who has been with the company since 1982, this amount has remained roughly the same since that time.

At Bravette just over a third of the labour force are members of NUCI (39%).

### The National Union of the Clothing Industry

The National Union of the Clothing Industry is one of the more long-established trade unions having been in existence in one form or another since 1944, and was formally registered in 1962.

### **Recent developments in NUCI**

Early in 1993 the decision-making National Council of NUCI resolved to evaluate the organisational and financial situation of the trade union, with a view to streamlining and strengthening it so that it could service its members efficiently and more effectively than hitherto had been the case. The organisational evaluation was carried out by the union's research and evaluation officer and the financial evaluation was to be carried out by a firm of independent accountants. The financial evaluation was never carried out because of the general secretary's refusal to allow the accountants access to the trade union's financial records. Only the organisational part of the evaluation was done, through a series of consultative meetings and structured discussions and a workshop with members from all the branch executives throughout the country as well as structured interviews and discussions with the salaried, full-time staff.

In May 1993, the final report of the evaluation process and its outcomes was prepared for the National Council of NUCI. Some of its findings reflected those of the earlier National Trade Unions Survey (1984): `members were unanimous that they were not being adequately serviced by union staff...there is little in the way of systematic activities directed towards organising and recruiting members into the union...the union seems to have slipped into the passive role of waiting to be consulted if problems arise...the full-time staff have lost touch with the base and the membership feels that this shows arrogance and lack of



commitment on the part of some staff members...the outcome is that the union has become a top-down organisation, with the membership below being "dominated" by the full-time staff.'

As far as education and training activities, none of the members had received any training from the union itself during the last three years, apparently because of shortage of funds. This lack of exposure to education was cited as one of the main causes of members' lack of meaningful and responsible participation in the affairs of the union. There had also been absolutely no health and safety training in spite of the fact that one of the full-time staff had, for the last year, been regularly attending health and safety training workshops run by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU).

Although the union has a constitution which requires national meetings to be held at prescribed periods, these requirements are frequently ignored. Equally, the constitution requires the annual presentation of properly audited accounts; to date these have not been forthcoming. Instead, in recent years, what has been presented has consisted of a single handwritten or typed sheet of paper with four lines of figures purporting to show total income and expenditure. Rarely have there been any proper supporting documents or statements.

It seems clear then that NUCI is organisationally extremely weak and has divisions in the upper echelons of the leadership and administration which, in turn, is not only unaccountable but is also chronically distanced from the rank-and-file membership. It is an organisation that is barely able to adequately negotiate on the basic bread-and-butter issue of annual wage increases. Even less is the trade union able to define its own objectives and strategies, nor does it have the strength and/or support of its rank-and-file to implement any such strategies, even if they existed. These twin issues of organisational weakness and distance from the general union membership are discussed in the following case study of shopfloor workers' attitudes to representation at the workplace.

## APPENDIX III

### WORKERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Date: ..... Number:.....

Factory: .....

- 1 a) Name .....
  - b) Date of birth.....Education.....
  - c) Job Title.....
  - d) Brief job description .....
  - e) Contract or permanent worker.....
  - f) How long have you worked at your factory? .....
  - g) Department and/or line .....
  - h) Weekly/monthly wage (after deductions).....
  - i) Any family members living in a rural area? Give details.....
  - j) Do you send them money? How often? .....
  - k) How often do you yourself go to your rural home? What do you do there?
- 2 a) What are the working conditions like in your department?  
very good..... good..... okay..... bad..... very bad.....
  - b) Is your department:  
dusty..... noisy..... hot..... cold.....  
not enough air..... dangerous (accidents etc)
  - c) How often do accidents happen?.....
- 3 a) Are you a member of the trade union? Yes.... No..... Why?....
  - b) Do you know anything about the structure of the workers committee? Can you explain how it operates?
  - c) Do you know how often the workers committee meets?.....
  - d) Do you know anything about the structure of the works council? Can you explain how it operates?

- e) Do you know how often does the works council meets?.....
- f) Have you yourself taken any problems or grievances to the workers committee? Yes / No
- (If "yes") Please describe these problems or grievances .....
- How were these grievances resolved? .....
- Were you satisfied with the outcome? .....
- g) How does the workers committee report back to the workers after seeing management or attending works council meetings?
- h) If you yourself have a problem at work, what do you do? .....
- How satisfactory is this? .....
- i) Can you tell me the general procedure for raising a grievance at work?
- Are you satisfied with it? yes/ no Why? .....
- j) How many times have the workers had serious disputes with management this year? Give details.
- k) Name the chairperson of the workers committee .....
- l) What is your personal opinion of the management in your factory?
- m) When you elect people as members of the workers cttee and/or trade union, what qualities do you look for in the candidates?
- 4 a) Are you satisfied with the workers committee system? Why?
- b) Does the trade union play any part in this factory? Give details
- c) Do you think that only trade unionists should be members of workers committees? Why?
- d) Do you think that the trade union should be involved in any activities outside the workplace? Yes / No / Don't know
- What kind of activities? .....
- Why? .....
- e) Do you think that workers should participate in the management of your factory? Yes / No / Don't know
- (If "yes") In what way should the workers participate? .....

f) Do you know anything about the recent amendments to the Labour Relations Act? Yes / No

If yes, can you describe and comment on them .....

Where did you hear about these amendments? .....

g) Which of the following statements do you agree with? (circle the agreed statement)

i) each factory should negotiate its **own** collective bargaining agreement;

ii) collective bargaining agreements should be negotiated **only** by the trade union and employers in the clothing industry. These agreements must then apply to the industry as a whole.

Why?.....

h) In your opinion, which is best at looking after the needs of workers at your factory: the workers committee or the trade union? Why?

l) In your opinion, which **ONE** of the following should be responsible for negotiating and defending workers rights:

a) the government..... b) workers themselves.....

c) the trade union..... d) workers committees.....

## **5 Only for NUCI members**

a) In your opinion, what is the most important function of a trade union?

b) Do you think that there should be a permanent union representative at the workplace (ie, shopsteward)? Yes / No

Why? .....

c) Can you describe the structure of your trade union?.....

d) What is the name of the president and the general secretary?

e) Do you get any advantages from belonging to the trade union? Yes / No. (If "yes") describe the advantages.....

f) What criticisms do you have of the trade union? .....

g) What do you think union members in your factory should do to strengthen the trade union?

## APPENDIX IV

### Guidelines for Semi-Structured Up-dating Discussions with Key Informants

#### **Background**

Three of the respondents who had participated in the baseline case study in 1996, agreed to act as key informants in a follow-up discussion that was held in November 2000. The overall purpose of this semi-structured discussion was to try to assess whether, from the perspective of these shopfloor workers, any (constructive) changes had taken place in the manner and quality of worker representation issues at their workplaces. Another purpose was to get from these respondents, a sense of whether they perceived a difference between the ongoing, macro-level worker-activism that had been taking place on the one hand, and the (apparent) unchanging nature of events and power relations on the micro-level of the shopfloor.

#### **Guiding points**

- Preliminary discussion to remind ourselves of the outcomes of the baseline case study i.e. that as far as the workers were concerned the major purpose of the workers committee was, that it was the only way they could communicate their individual or collective grievances to management. And for the majority of respondents there was no other credible form of micro-level representation of their interests.
- Has the role of the trade union changed in any way (National Union for the Clothing Industry)? Is it carrying out more training and organising activities at shopfloor level? Have trade union members made any efforts to make their union more accountable and transparent?
- In view of the macro-level challenges and achievements that have taken place under the auspices of the umbrella trade union body (Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions) have similar challenges and achievements taken place at shopfloor level? Or are things much the same as they were four years ago when the baseline study was carried out?

## APPENDIX V

### Analysis of Questionnaire Data

	<u>BRAVETTE</u>	<u>CONCORDE</u>
<u>Any family living in rural areas?</u>		
extended family & own kids	32	28
wife, kids & extended family	10	13
no extended family in Zimbabwe	8	8
<u>Frequency of money to rural family?</u>		
every month	33	30
every 4-6 months/school fees	4	4
on public holidays	3	6
nothing/can't afford it	2	1
<p>All those that had family in rural areas went there as often as they could afford and mostly helped with gender-appropriate agricultural tasks.</p>		
<u>Trade union membership</u>		
Yes	28	27
No	22	12
<u>Knowledge of structure of w/committee (&amp; works council)</u>		
Yes	30 (6)	22 (33)
No	20 (44)	27 (16)
<p>Those who knew the w/committee structure, knew it in a general way i.e. that there were 4-10 members. But most respondents, even if they didn't know the structure, said that w/committees were for reporting workers' grievances to management. There was no correlation between union membership and knowledge of structure &amp; functioning of w/committee or works council. There was the same rather passive attitude/expectation of protection (and readiness to blame, if nothing constructive happened) towards both W/committees and the trade union.</p>		
<u>Any grievances taken to w/committee</u>		
Yes	11	23
No	39	26
<u>Satisfied with outcome?</u>		
Yes	3	11
No	8	12
<u>Grievance procedure satisfactory?</u>		
Yes	20	39
No	22	5
Sometimes	8	5
<u>Name of w/committee chairperson?</u>		
Correct	44	47

Incorrect	3	0
don't know	3	2
<u>Opinion of management</u>		
Positive	12	38
Negative	19	8
Ambivalent	19	3
<u>Qualities expected in candidates for W.C or T.U.</u>		
educated/speak good English	20	22
unafraid of management	21	18
honesty & integrity	9	9
<u>Satisfied with w/committee system?</u>		
Yes	12	39
No	27	5
yes,for communication	11	3
don't know	0	2

I think that many of those who said "yes" had not thought further than the immediate function of the w/committee - which is acting as a channel of communication between management and workers. At Concorde the answers relate to the w/committee itself rather than the system. But from my experience during this research most respondents/workers could not think of an alternative and considered the w/committee as a necessary form of communication.

Should w/committee members be trade unionists?

Yes	47	34
No	3	15

Most of those who said "no" said that w/committees should be mixed so that the unionist members could positively influence those who were not members.

Should workers participate in management? Should TUs be active outside the workplace?

The vast majority of respondents were completely unfamiliar with either of these concepts. In relation to worker participation, a few of the respondents (after a great deal of deliberation) said that workers were not educated enough to 'sit in the same chairs as management'. As far as union activity outside the workplace is concerned, the only thing that a small minority of respondents said was that the union should be more involved in getting better pensions for workers; other-wise there was virtually no conception of the union around / being involved in wider community or labour issues. The general view of trade unionism was a narrow and economic one.

Knowledge of recent crucial amendments to LRA

Not a single respondent knew anything about these amendments.

Enterprise-based bargaining versus nationally negotiated CBAs

Virtually all respondents thought that CBAs should be negotiated nationally between the trade union and employers partly because the trade union is seen as having an expertise that the w/committee does not have, and partly because of the strong feeling that all workers in the clothing industry should be treated equally, and not be subject to the whims of individual employers.

### Needs of workers at shopfloor level

w/committee	7	20
trade union	43	29

### Reasons

W/committee - because they know exactly what is happening on a day-to-day basis.

Trade union - because it has the knowledge and expertise.

### Who should be responsible for defending workers' rights?

trade union	43	45
government	6	3
workers themselves or w/cttees	1	1

### FOR TRADE UNION MEMBERS ONLY

#### Should there be a shopsteward at the workplace?

Yes	26	21
No	2	5

#### Can you describe structure of NUCI?

No	50	49
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#### Can you name the President of NUCI?

Yes	0	22
No	50	4

#### Can you name the General Secretary?

No	50	49
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#### Criticisms of NUCI

must come to the factories/give training and information	17	18
give better protection against management/get us higher wages	2	3
no criticisms at all	9	5

#### Members' task to strengthen NUCI?

persuade co-workers to join union	26	20
attend union meetings & contribute more money	6	4

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