

The Decline in Trade Union Density in the 21st century in Zimbabwe. A case of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU)

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the reasons why the popularity of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions amongst workers in Zimbabwe has taken a plunge. The study will trace the history of trade unions in Zimbabwe from their formative age to the end of the 20th century, looking at the factors that contributed towards the thriving of trade unions before the decline in trade union density in the 21st century in Zimbabwe. The research extensively used relevant literature which includes newspapers, the internet and books focusing on the history of trade unionism in Zimbabwe as well factors that have contributed towards the steady decline in trade union density in the country. The paper posits that trade union density in Zimbabwe has declined due to factors that include: the formation of a rival trade unions in the country, the introduction of the concept of human resource management in firms and organisations in Zimbabwe, globalisation, unemployment, the formation of small to medium scale enterprises, restrictive laws like the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act, POSA and AIPPA, factionalism in the main trade union and the formation of the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC). The decline of trade unions in Zimbabwe has left workers exposed to exploitation and abuse by employers. The paper recommends the formation of a single trade union or rather the merging of both ZCTU factions with ZFTU so as to boost trade union density in the country. The paper also recommends the delinking of trade unions from political parties.

Keywords: trade unions, 21st Century, trade union density, Zimbabwe

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Introduction

This section of the research will focus on the formative years of trade unions in Zimbabwe right through to independent Zimbabwe and will capture events before the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This section of the research will be divided into four stages which include the colonial era, 1980-87, 1987-1990, 1990-1996.

The first form of trade unionism in Southern Rhodesia (colonial Zimbabwe) was when the white workers formed their own trade unions in the mines and railways sectors from 1916 onwards, these trade unions were always divided from their fellow black workers by racist ideology and self-serving interests, though it should be noted that both sets of workers did clash with their employers.³ Black consciousness took the form of burial societies, dance, religious organisations and mutual aid societies in compounds after the First World War. The Rhodesia Chamber of Mines claimed that the associations were the basis of labour movements. According to (Raftopoulos, 1997) the compound associations were indeed logical precursors of a trade union movement, though they never quite managed to fulfil their promise despite being in existence in various forms between 1918 and 1933.⁴ The first big threat to black mine workers in the compounds and the administration was The Church of the Watch Tower, which was against the Pass Law, taxation and the end of colonial domination. The church attracted a strong following amongst workers at Wankie Colliery and this caused unease in the mines management which enlisted the help of the Native commissioner so as to banish the leader of the Church Prophet Nyasulo from the mine in 1924.⁵

The colonial era saw the formation of trade unions like the Industrial Commercial Workers Union (ICU), Rhodesia Mine and General Workers Association (RMGWA), Rhodesia Railway Workers Union (RRWU), The Rhodesia Railways African Employees' Association (RRAEA), The Federation of Bulawayo African Workers' Union, Reformed Industrial and Commercial Union, Southern Rhodesia Trade Union Congress and others served the interests of black workers and had a national outlook which cut across all sectors of the economy.

³Brian Raftopoulos and Ian Phimister, *Keep on knocking, A history of the labour movement in Zimbabwe 1900-97*, Boabab books, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1997, page 1

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶The trade unions organised demonstrations against low wages and unfair working conditions and served as precursors to the formation of liberation movements in Southern Rhodesia.

The dawn of independence brought about challenges to trade unions as the political space was mainly dominated by the nationalist parties that had coordinated the liberation struggle that brought about independence in Zimbabwe. (Ratopoulos, 1997, p.108) According to (Ratopoulos, 1997) At the dawn of independence in Zimbabwe there were six labour unions namely: African Trade Union Congress (ATUC) led by Phineas Sithole, National African Trade Union Congress (NATUC) led by J.J Dube, Trade Union Congress of Rhodesia (TUCR) led by Howard Bloomfield, Zimbabwe African Congress of Unions (ZACU) led by Aaron Ndlovu, Zimbabwe Federation of Labour (ZFL) led by Abisha Kapfuma, Zimbabwe Trades Union Congress (ZTUC).⁷ Efforts to form an independent single union were spearheaded by government through the Ministry of Labour. Any attempts by the federations to form their own independent body were thwarted by the Zimbabwean Government which formed a national coordinating committee whose task was to create a single trade union body in the country. An inaugural elective congress of the ZCTU was held in February 1981 which saw Albert Mugabe being elected as the first Secretary General and Alfred Makwarimba was appointed President of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) all these leaders had links to the ruling party ZANU PF.⁸ During this period it should be noted there was very little or no antagonism between the labour movement in Zimbabwe and the Government.

The honeymoon period between the Government of Zimbabwe and the ZCTU ended during this phase (1987-90) as the labour union (ZCTU) went through leadership renewal. The pro Government trade union leadership lost its grip to an anti-government group which was led by Morgan Tsvangirai as Secretary General. During this era the ZCTU became more vocal towards the state especially when there were suggestions that the country be turned into a one party state, a position which government later backed down on.⁹

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid page 108

⁸ Ibid page 109

⁹ Ibid

The relationship between the Government and ZCTU completely broke down when the ZCTU leadership decided to make the trade union into an autonomous entity breaking away from its association with ZANU PF in 1989. During this period ZCTU pushed for accountability on the part of the state voicing its displeasure not only about the proposals of a one party state but also the Willow Gate Car Scandal and also supported the University of Zimbabwe demonstrations against corruption.¹⁰ Thus it should be noted that the period of antagonism between ZCTU and the Government of Zimbabwe started during this period.

The period 1990-96 was dominated by the discarding of Socialism and adoption of the neo-liberal policy ESAP which was prescribed by the IMF and World Bank. The policy of ESAP called for trade liberalisation, devaluation of the local currency, fiscal and monetary policy reforms, public enterprise reforms, budget deficit reduction, deregulation of investment, labour and price controls, cost recovery measures in social services and ending of subsidies and the retrenchments in both the public and private sectors.¹¹ By 1995, 50 000 permanent workers had lost their jobs as well as a large number of contract workers. The areas most affected were the textiles, clothing, engineering, transport and retailing sectors. This loss in jobs and decline in the economy saw ZCTU gaining even more popularity as they called for Public Sector strike in 1996 against the repercussions caused by the adoption of ESAP¹². During this period there was untold suffering amongst workers and the rise of trade unionism in Zimbabwe. In 1993 President Mugabe vowed never to attend any workers day celebrations as he accused leaders of trade unions of having an ulterior motive as the tension between the government and ZCTU continued.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

A trade union is an organization whose membership consists of workers and union leaders, united to protect and promote their common interests.¹³ Trade Union Density on the other hand can be defined as the proportion of employees who are union members.¹⁴

¹⁰Ibid page 119

¹¹Ibid page 121

¹²Ibid page 121

¹³ Why Labour Unions Fail Workers as cited on www.znccharare.co.zw/2012/01/18/why-labour-unions-fail-workers/, extracted on 22-12-2013, page1.

¹⁴ Trade Unions-Worker Participation.eu as cited on www.worker-participation.eu/National-Industrial/Across-Europe/Trade-Unions2, extracted on 22-12-2013.

There are theories that help explain the trade union phenomenon in Zimbabwe and these include Structural change theory, traditional cyclical model and the globalization model.

The globalization theory states that the impact of globalization on unionization is limited even though impacts of globalization which include national openness to trade, foreign direct investment inflows can lower union density the theory posits that unions can benefit from globalization for instance by serving as vehicles of insurance against a volatile market.¹⁵

Contrary to this hypothesis globalisation has been one of the factors that led to the decline of union density in Zimbabwe as firms due to policy of ESAP which was force-feed to the Zimbabwean government were open to competition from goods and services from outside the countries borders which were cheaper thus local goods and services could not compete leading to closures, unemployment and a subsequent decline in trade union density.

The traditional cyclical model explains the upward and downward movement in trade union density as correlation to the movements in a business cycle and the theory also states that union density growth is pro-cyclical.¹⁶

The theory further assumes that growth in employment figures and wage inflation also contributes to the increase in trade union density.

However, a rise in unemployment leads to the decline in trade union density. The traditional cyclical theory also helps in explaining conditions prevailing in Zimbabwe as a unemployment in the country is a contributing factor to the decline in trade union density.

The structural change theory states that union membership base growth and its decline are influenced by circular trends that change the industrial structure from high to low unionised sectors.¹⁷ A shift in employment from manufacturing to private services tends to have a negative impact on trade union density.

¹⁵Claus Schnabel in a document entitled Union membership and density: Some (not so) stylized facts and challenges, retrieved from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp6792.pdf>, page 5.

¹⁶ Ibid page 5

¹⁷Ibid page 5

The theory is applicable to Zimbabwe's situation as a shift from the traditional industrialised economy to small to medium enterprises (SMEs) has resulted in trade unions losing membership as the workforce in these sectors do not see the need to join unions.

Findings and Results

Various statistics have been thrown around as to the unemployment figures in Zimbabwe dependant on who is giving out those figures. The argument given by these authorities on their statistics on unemployment is the fact that there are different definitions for the term unemployment. Zimstat, the official statistics body puts unemployment rate at 10.7% a figure that many have disputed. According to Zimstat director MutasaDzinotizei the data given by his office is based on a broad definition of the term unemployment.¹⁸ Economist John Robertson places unemployment at more than 70% with fewer than 900 000 out of the 13 million people formally employed and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions placing the unemployment rate at 80%.

The operational unemployment rate for the paper is 80% as observed by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU).¹⁹

Though there might be debate and controversy on the actual rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe, there is however, consensus on the fact that there is a massive decline in the number of people who are formally employed in the country.²⁰ According a Zimstat survey conducted in 2011 only 11% of Zimbabweans are employed formally whilst 84% are informally employed and the largest group being in the wholesale and retail sector.²¹ The reasons behind the increasing rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe have been the closure and lack of viability of firms due to the harsh economic climate experienced in the country especially before the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) characterised by a hyper inflationary environment, lack of foreign direct investment (FDI), infrastructural decay, power shortages, a liquidity crunch, foreign currency shortages and a balance of payment deficit.

¹⁸Trade Unions are dead in Zim: What went wrong?,
<http://www.newsdezimbabwe.co.uk/2013/05/trade-unions-are-dead-in-zim>

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰Ibid

²¹Ibid

The impact of the economic decline in Zimbabwe on trade union density cannot be down played as the massive retrenchments scared the worker psychologically such that the worker was content with the little they were being paid by their employers thus the trade unions in the country played a peripheral role as compared to the role they played before the economic decline. Trade Unions get membership from the formal sector thus with the high rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe there are simply no workers to unionise.

After the formation of the Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe in 2009 recruitment in the public sector was halted under the guise that the government needed to carry out an audit in the civil service to stem out so called ghost workers and those who had been employed without proper qualifications. The government also halted recruitments as it was argued that there was no money for salaries. Ebbinghaus(2006) is of the view that union density is considerably higher in the public service than in the private service, a fact that is undeniable when one looks at the membership in ZCTU as government is the biggest employer in Zimbabwe. In the Education sector were both Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) and the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) all affiliate members of ZCTU have witnessed their membership decline as a result of the economic collapse in 2008 and the employment freeze. The Education sector during the GNU era was filled with temporary teachers who are not unionised due to their conditions of employment thus ZCTU has lost membership through government recruitment policy.

The Civil Service recruitment freeze by government has contributed to the decline in trade union density in ZCTU.

Due to factors like the economic decline in Zimbabwe and ESAP a policy that contributed massively to the deindustrialization of the Zimbabwean economy a new economy has since emerged, premised on the principle of being the master of ones' destiny. The "new economy" in Zimbabwe is not only informal but also small and has been coined small to medium enterprises. The formation of these small to medium enterprises was a response to closure of firms in the formal economy, the structural shortages created by their closure and the increasing poverty induced unemployment. The creation of SMEs in Zimbabwe has had a negative impact on trade union density in Zimbabwe as workers in the SMEs are not unionised.

SMEs are generally family or even cooperatives and due to their size workers in those entities do not find reason to join trade unions. SMEs have been tainted as perfect replacements to formal employment (Mpofu, 1998).²² Fan (2003) and Fleetwood(2009) are of the view that SMEs are the largest employers in emerging and developing economies a case in point being China having 99% of its firms being SMEs.²³The contribution of SMEs in economic growth cannot be disputed as Goriwondo(2011) puts it at 90% in Zimbabwe. ²⁴The employment in Zimbabwean has been generated in traditionally non-union sectors of the economy thus the decline in union density. ZCTU has not been able to penetrate the SME sector due to the above mentioned reasons thus as the 'old economy" folds in Zimbabwe trade union density also declines with it.

The turn of the millennium brought with it changes in the way firms were being run as there was now a shift from the traditional trade union representation for the worker to the introduction of the concept of Human Resource Management (HRM).²⁵ The concept of HRM can be described as anti-union and unitarist as it shifts away from the traditional collectivism to individualism. In Zimbabwe the concept has grown rapidly with tertiary institutions even offering courses in the subject matter.

The concept oh HRM has grown rapidly in private sector in a bid to derail the debilitating impact of trade unions thus derailing industrial relations. Workers have generally ignored trade unions and engaged the human resources departments in their firms to seek recourse in matters affecting them in the work place. HRM departments in the work place are responsible for the attraction, selection, training, assessment and rewarding of employees.

The element of factionalism has been a major obstacle in democratic institutions and organisations in Zimbabwe the cancer has caught political parties, student unions and now trade unions in this instance ZCTU.

²²Raphael T Mpofu, Competitiveness Factors Of Small To Medium Sized Enterprises In Zimbabwe: The Pre- And Post Economic Structural Adjustment Programme Era, Department of Bussiness School, South Africa, 1998, page 2.

²³FaraiMaunganidze in a paper entitled The Role of Government in the Establishment and Development of SMEs in Zimbabwe: Virtues and Vices as cited on www.infinitypress.info/index.php/jbae/article/view/193, page 3.

²⁴ Ibid page 3.

²⁵ Human Resource Management 2013, available from <https://www.google.co.zw/#what+is+human+resource+management>, accessed on 23-12-13.

Factionalism in ZCTU has seen the once vibrant labour movement turned into a pale shadow of its former self besides facing challenges of a small pool of workers to unionise, an unstable macro-economic environment, restrictive laws and political repression and now the labour union has to deal with the problem of factionalism within its ranks.²⁶ ZCTU the largest trade union body in Zimbabwe split into two factions after the 2011 congress which was supposed to elect a new leadership but the elections were disputed on the basis of allegations that there was vote buying.²⁷

The split has its roots in the dispute over the verification of some delegates from four affiliate unions to the elective congress of ZCTU in 2011.²⁸ After the disputed elective congress ZCTU was split into two factions with one led by Lovemore Matombo and the other led by George Nkiwane.²⁹ Matombo who was the incumbent leader made an application to the High Court to stop the Congress which saw Nkiwane elected as new president.³⁰

The factionalism in ZCTU saw the two factions holding separate Workers Day celebrations in 2012 with the Matombo faction holding its celebrations at Harare Gardens and the Nkiwane led faction holding its celebrations at Gwanzura stadium.³¹

²⁶The Zimbabwe Independent, Workers bear brunt of trade union strife, <http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2012/05/03/workers-bear-brunt-of-trade-union-strife> as cited on 3 October 2013.

²⁷NewsDay Zimbabwe, ZCTU factions stay apart- <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2012/04/27/2012-04-27-zctu-factions-stay-apart>

²⁸The Zimbabwe Independent, Workers bear brunt of trade union strife, <http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2012/05/03/workers-bear-brunt-of-trade-union-strife> as cited on 3 October 2013.

²⁹ZCTU blunder: Tsvangirai loses support, www.zimeye.org/?p=52582 , 3 May 2012 cited on 3 October 2013

³⁰The Zimbabwe Independent, Workers bear brunt of trade union strife, <http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2012/05/03/workers-bear-brunt-of-trade-union-strife> as cited on 3 October 2013.

³¹NewsDay Zimbabwe, ZCTU factions stay apart-, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2012/04/27/2012-04-27-zctu-factions-stay-apart>

To beef up their support base both factions invited leaders of political parties to their celebrations with the Nkiwane led faction inviting MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai and other leaders from his party meanwhile Simba Makoni of Mavambo Kusile Dawn (MKD) and Welshman Ncube were seen at the Matombo led ZCTU faction.³²The split in the ZCTU has seen the labour movement losing its support base thus contributing to the decline in trade union density in Zimbabwe.

The formation of the MDC came in the midst of an impending economic collapse as the workers in the country were falling deeper and deeper in the abyss of poverty. In March 1998 ZCTU organised a week-long strike which forced a meeting between President Robert Mugabe and a ZCTU team.³³ The economy was riling as the country had now engaged its self in the DRC war and had paid an unbudgeted Z\$50 000 gratuity per each war veteran. The government had to introduce more taxes thus resulting in workers incomes being diminished, so as to raise money for the unbudgeted expenditure.³⁴The meeting at State House did not go well as President Mugabe dismissed the unionists as people who were masquerading as trade unionists yet they had political agendas.³⁵ This was a catalyst for the formation of the MDC, a team was put together and led by Timothy Kondo to assess the national mood and see the feasibility of forming a worker's party. The National Working Peoples Convention was the platform for the discussion on the proposal to form a political party though it should be noted that the Convention did not achieve this aim but got civil society and trade union members discussing the possibility.³⁶ An extraordinary ZCTU congress was then organised and held on the 7th of August in Harare and 24 affiliate unions, which were represented by 149 delegates attended the congress.

The Congress supported the idea of ZCTU leading the project to form a political party which then officially launched on 11 September 1999 and named the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).³⁷

³²ZCTU blunder: Tsvangirai loses support, www.zimeye.org/?p=52582, 3 May 2012 cited on 3 October 2013

³³Morgan Richard Tsvangirai, *At the Deep End*, Penguin Books, 2011, Johannesburg, South Africa, page 181

³⁴Ibid page 182

³⁵Ibid page 182

³⁶Ibid page 235

³⁷Ibid page 236

The formation of the party led to the weakening of not only ZCTU but also its affiliate unions as the trade unionists joined the political hierarchy of the MDC and leadership were forced to relinquish their posts as they campaigned for political office. The names of trade unionists that joined the MDC included Morgan Tsvangirai, Gibson Sibanda, Matongo, Mudzengerere, Makuwaza, Esaph Mdlongwa, Mpariwa and Thokozani Khupe amongst others.³⁸ Politics in Zimbabwe is now controlled by personalities as people follow personalities rather than policies and that is what has affected the popularity of trade unions thus the decline in union density. According to Munyaradzi Gwisai "For many years before the MDC was formed, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) was leading anti-government protests and was virtually the opposition party.

It has now been replaced by spineless and corrupt leaders and unions who hide under the skirts of politicians, suffocating the masses."³⁹After the formation of MDC, ZCTU went off the radar as it was difficult to differentiate between the union and the movement, workers went in support of the MDC as they saw it as the solution to the problems confronting the nation at large. It should be noted that the MDC's popularity was mainly in towns and cities where the working class of the nation is mainly based.

The link between MDC and ZCTU has not aided ZCTU but in fact hurt it, as the formation of the party using ZCTU facilities served as an open betrayal to the wishes and aspirations of workers in Zimbabwe as its leadership abandoned its core business to venture into national politics.

The branding of the party as a workers union was not an apt description as only less than 20% of trade unionists contested as parliamentary candidates in the 2000 parliamentary elections and most of them contested in rural areas which were ZANU PF strongholds and lost.⁴⁰

³⁸Ibid page 240

³⁹Trade Unions are dead in Zim: What went wrong?,
<http://www.newsdezimbabwe.co.uk/2013/05/trade-unions-are-dead-in-zim>

⁴⁰Trade Unions are dead in Zim: What went wrong?,
<http://www.newsdezimbabwe.co.uk/2013/05/trade-unions-are-dead-in-zim>

Socialist and academia Munyaradzi Gwisai rightly described the ZCTU conundrum when he lamented the demise of the ZCTU as a potent force: by saying "The roar of the 1997 lion had, by March 2002, been reduced to less than a kittens meow."

In any democratic society in the world multiplicity and divergence of views is always welcome as it contributes to the moulding of society. The same concept can be applied to trade unions as the multiplicity of trade unions encourages competition thus ultimately benefiting the working population. However, Tarugarira(2011)posits that deliberately sponsored multiplicity can cause hostility and weaken the labour movement.⁴¹The formation of the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU) in 2000 raised a lot of eyebrows as it was viewed as a counterforce to the raising star of ZCTU which had caused headaches for the government through stay aways, food riots and public demonization of government policies. ZCTU had become so popular that it organised numerous strikes throughout 1997, attended by approximately 1,073,000 workers, culminating in a two-day general strike starting on 9 December 1997.⁴² ZFTU was formed primarily as a vehicle for anti-ZCTU campaigning from within the labour ranks.⁴³ The leadership of ZFTU spoke volumes of its origins with the trade union being led by war veterans who were now allies the government after being awarded Z\$ 50 000 gratuities. The liberation war rhetoric of patriotism once again began to be chanted as ZFTU began to demonise ZCTU as an unpatriotic entity whose sole aim was to bring the Zimbabwean economy to a grinding halt. ZFTU was opposed to mass stay-aways as they viewed these to be counter-productive both to the employer and employee, instead the union took a more confrontational approach in dealing with issues affecting the worker as it particularly attacked private firms.

The ZFTU negotiated directly with employers and even went further to invade companies between March and May 2001.⁴⁴

⁴¹Gilbert Tarugarira. (2011) in the *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* (Volume 13, No 3, 2011) in a paper entitled *Workers' Autonomy Under Siege: An Analysis of the Challenges Faced by Zimbabwe's Trade Unions in an Economy Under Stress and a Bipolarized Political Environment*, Pennsylvania, USA

⁴²MunyaradziGwisai, 2009 *Revolutionaries, Resistance, and Crisis in Zimbabwe*, in Zeilig, L (eds) *Class Struggle and Resistance in Africa*, Chicago: Haymarket Books

⁴³Joe Sutcliffe, *The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012*, March 7, 2013 accessed on www.e-ir.info/2013/03/07/the-labour-movement-in-zimbabwe page 12.

⁴⁴Gilbert Tarugarira. (2011) in the *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* (Volume 13, No 3, 2011) in a paper entitled *Workers' Autonomy Under Siege: An Analysis of the Challenges Faced by*

The formation of ZFTU adversely affected the membership base of its rival trade union ZCTU as some workers rushed to join ZFTU a case in point was the Commercial Workers Union of Zimbabwe (CWUZ) an affiliate member of ZCTU lost some of its members in the security sector to ZFTU. Tarugarira(2011) argues that, the politicisation of trade unionism was also impacting negatively on the membership to both trade unions as ZCTU had been labelled an MDC project owing to its leadership who came from the trade union whilst on the other hand ZFTU was led by well-known war veterans and ZANU PF apologists.⁴⁵ The politicisation of trade unions saw membership dwindling owing to the political unrest, violence and intimidation that characterised Zimbabwean politics in the 21st century. According to Tarugarira(2011) the old English adage which stated that “when two elephants fight, it is the grass which suffers” became a reality as the bi-polarisation of these trade unions adversely affected the workers as they became prone to abuse by their employers.⁴⁶ Thus the politicisation of trade unionism inadvertently caused a decline in trade union density in the 21st century in Zimbabwe.

The polarization of Zimbabwe’s politics in the 21st century has witnessed the government being repressive against opposition forces deemed to be unpatriotic and agents of regime change. The ZANU PF led government using its majority in parliament enacted pieces legislation which included the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act, Political Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) aimed at disrupting labour meetings, restricting information deemed to be politically volatile and frustrating any efforts to organise meetings.

Zimbabwe’s laws already made it practically impossible for legal strikes to take place, but systematic violence enacted during the 2000s has worn down the opposition with mass activism only seeming to increase the severity of the regime’s response, resulting in a loss of impetus behind mass activism and drop in attendance levels.⁴⁷

Zimbabwe’s Trade Unions in an Economy Under Stress and a Bipolarized Political Environment, Pennsylvania, USA

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷Joe Sutcliffe 2013, The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe 1980-2012, as cited on www.e-ir.info/2013/03/07/the-labour-movement-in-zimbabwe

The state in Zimbabwe has used heavy handed tactics through state apparatus like the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), button stick wielding riot police officers and the army to quell any seeds of unrest from unions or opposition forces thus the labour movement particularly ZCTU has lost impetus.

The Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act empowers the President to make regulations dealing with situations that have arisen or are likely to arise and that require to be dealt with as a matter of urgency, and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The President can make urgent regulations when a situation has arisen or is likely to arise which needs to be dealt with urgently in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality, public health, the economic interests of Zimbabwe or the general public. (Zimbabwe Constitution Chapter 10:20) The Act was invoked in 1998 after the November 11 and 18 ZCTU organised mass stay-aways, this saw the President Robert Mugabe amending the Labour Relations Act banning the incitement or taking in collective industrial or job action.⁴⁸ Under the 1998 decree labour organisations which recommended, encouraged or incited people to engage in collective job action would have their licences revoked.⁴⁹ The President once again invoked the Act when he decreed that there would be no salary increments in September 2007 for six months as the government was grappling to control hyperinflation which stood at 7000% at that time.⁵⁰ The decree though reactionary to the situation prevailing in the country was dictatorial as it discarded the policy of collective bargaining which had been in play through the Tripartite Negotiating Forum (TNF). The unions could no longer represent workers in wage negotiations because of this act thereby weakening the unions resolve and also contributing to the decline in trade union density as workers lost hope in the unions.

The 2007 general strike was not a success as the state used its monopoly in the media to discourage people from joining the planned stay away. Those that planned the stay away were labelled as unpatriotic, sell outs and agents of regime change.

⁴⁸<http://www.ipsnews.net/1998/11/zimbabwe-unions-describe-ban-on-demonstration-as-dictatorial>

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰www.thezimbabwean.co/news/5666/zctu-calls-for-a-stay-away-09-09-07.html , in an article entitled ZCTU calls for a stay away (09-09-07), cited on 10-11-2013

The state security agents worked round the clock to ensure that the planned stay away never saw the light of day as participants were warned that there would be reprisals for joining the stay away especially for those working for the government. Since the planned stay away had not been sanctioned by the courts there was fear amongst workers that the state would use regulations under POSA to disrupt gatherings thus the planned job action become a non-event.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The notion that trade union density is declining the world over is a fact that cannot be disputed and this is a fact supported by statistics and this is a phenomenon that has also caught up with Zimbabwe. The research concluded that the formation of a rival trade unions in the country, the introduction of the concept of human resource management in firms and organisations in Zimbabwe, globalisation, unemployment, the formation of small to medium scale enterprises, restrictive laws like the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act, POSA and AIPPA, factionalism in the main trade union and the formation of the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) have contributed to the decline of trade union density in Zimbabwe.

The paper recommends that free, fair transparent elections based on agreed criteria on who can or cannot vote be drawn and the loser accepting defeat be held so as to have one Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, this will surely boost membership numbers.

In order to ensure its survival ZCTU should enter into dialogue with Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU) for the benefit of the worker as well as to boost union membership as fragmentation of unions does little to benefit the worker. In as much as this is a strategy to gain power and control of union membership this will transform the plight of the worker as the union will have more power to negotiate with both government and firms as was before the formation of ZFTU as a rival trade union.

The deindustrialisation of Zimbabwe can never be underscored as it has witnessed the death of the formal industry which has since been replaced by the informal sector characterised by backyard industries which produce mainly for local consumption. These industries now form the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy in the 21st century.

The scholar recommends that ZCTU forms synergies with employees in these new and emerging industries so as to stem the rot in union density in ZCTU.

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