

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



Scroll down to read the article.

ZIMBABWE: AFRICAN WORKING CLASS NATIONALISM, 1957-1963

T. H. MOTHIBE

Department of History, National University of Lesotho

Abstract

Scholars of Zimbabwean history have argued that organised African labour was subordinated to petit bourgeois nationalism. This article refutes these assessments and argues that, in the period between the formation of the first mass nationalist organisation and the adoption of the armed struggle, organised labour and nationalism were intimately connected, a fact that reflected in part the structural position of the African workers in a colonial society. This relationship was, however, disrupted by the adoption of armed struggle by the nationalists in 1963.

THE YEAR 1957 marked a very important era in the history of Zimbabwe's nationalist struggle. This was manifested in the formation of the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC) on September 12 (in defiance of what the settlers celebrated as Occupation Day). This was the first mass nationalist organisation. It also marked the beginning of a close alliance between organised African labour and African political parties in colonial Zimbabwe, an alliance that snapped with the split in the nationalist movement in 1963.

The conventional assessment, however, has generally been that African labour came to be subordinated to the nationalist struggle with the formation of the SRANC. Warhurst argues that '... by mid-1950s the largest unions were in decline and they were to be overtaken by the mass appeal of the ANC re-founded by Nkomo in 1957'.¹ He boldly concludes, 'The trade union movement was to be subordinated to politics and the relationship of trade unionism to politics remains unresolved'.²

In this article, I argue that, contrary to the above assessments, organised labour was not subordinated to petit bourgeois nationalism: rather it was an integral part of the nationalist upsurge, a fact that reflected in part the structural position of the African workers in a colonial society, and in part the role of African labour leadership. Subsequently, state's paranoiac decision to crush SRANC's moderate nationalism on the flimsy

¹ Philip R. Warhurst, 'African Trade Unions in Southern Rhodesia, 1948-56: Prelude to Mass Nationalism?' (n.d.), 1.

² *Ibid.*

grounds that it was subversive resulted in the emergence of politically militant nationalism whose objective was now the overthrow of the status quo. The 1963 nationalist movement split into Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The state's subsequent repression led to the decrease in labour militancy, although its connection with the nationalist parties remained strong.

This article is divided into three main parts. The first part briefly deals with attempts in the 1950s to unify the African labour movement. The second part refutes the above assessments by showing how African labour was integrated with the nationalist parties struggles. The third part shows how the fate of labour and that of nationalist parties were as closely linked in decline as they had been in ascent.

AFRICAN LABOUR MOVEMENT: EARLY ATTEMPTS AT UNITY

Since the proliferation of trades unions in the post-war period, repeated attempts were made to bring different unions into one organisation; these all failed. Nkomo of the Rhodesia Railways African Employees Association (RRAEA), felt that 'all tribal distinctions should be abolished in the interests of unity', while Burombo argued that 'if there existed complete unity, Africans could collect their registration certificates and burn them'.³ The CID noted:

there is a growing, although as yet only incipient tendency among natives to realise that from their point of view, the adage 'Ex Unitate Vires' is particularly applicable.⁴

If this was the feeling of many trade unionists, why did that unity remain so elusive? Many reasons have been advanced ranging from ethnic and geographic differences⁵ to personality and ideological clashes between leaders and organisations.⁶

In the early 1950s, African workers still felt a great need for a national trade union body. This was sensible in terms of the future growth of trade unionism. It was also sensible to bring about the communication between Salisbury (now Harare) and Bulawayo, both of which constituted the main labour centres at this time.⁷ Moreover, the situation had changed. First,

³ National Archives of Zimbabwe (hereafter NAZ) S517, 'Report by Officer Commanding CID...'

⁴ ZBZ 1/2/1, Staff Officer to the Commissioner of Police of Native Labour, Oct. 9, 1947.

⁵ S1561/19, Native Disturbances Commission, Evidence of Captain R. G. Borland.

⁶ N. Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe 1947-1958* (Harare, The College Press, 1989).

⁷ Jamela, then a member of RICU, notes that the need for communication was made more urgent by the fact that the African Artisans and the Railwaymen were already communicating, while there was no communication between other unions. See NAZ AOH/63, 'Interview held with Mr. Reuben Thomas Jamela by D. Murenji', Jan. 11 and Feb. 28, 1980, p.20.

the Central African Federation had come into being despite the opposition of the workers. Second, Burombo and his Voice were now concentrating their efforts in the rural areas, leaving the urban areas to the Federation.⁸ In 1953, at a conference held at Gwelo (now Gweru)⁹, attended by unions affiliated to the Reformed Industrial Commercial Union (RICU), the Federation of Bulawayo African Workers Union (FBAWU) and independents from Bulawayo, Gwelo, Salisbury and Umtali (now Mutare), a decision was made to launch a national trade union body. This was done (although without RICU) in January 1954, when the Southern Rhodesia Trade Union Congress (known as TUC) was launched with J. Nkomo as President, R. Jamela as Vice-President and G. Bango as General Secretary.¹⁰ Other important figures in the Federation were A. Mukarakate, Assistant General Secretary, J. Z. Moyo, L. Nkala, E. Gwanzura and T. Chigwida, almost all from affiliates of FBAWU. Quite clearly, the TUC came to be dominated by the Bulawayo unionists, who had a longer history of organisation and were in many ways more experienced than their counterparts in Salisbury (now Harare).¹¹

Since then, there were two centres — TUC and RICU. The former covered the whole colony despite initial teething problems which caused some branches temporarily to lapse, while the latter was confined to Salisbury until its decline in 1956.¹² In 1957, the TUC was organisationally rejuvenated under the presidency of K. T. T. Maripe, also General Secretary of the Railway African Workers Union (RAWU), with R. M. Bango as Vice-President, also General Secretary of the Transport Workers' Union and a former RICU man in Bulawayo, and R. Jamela as General Secretary.¹³ This organisational unity suffered a slight drawback when Bango decided to break away to form a stillborn Confederation of African Labour (CAL).¹⁴

⁸ See Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo*.

⁹ *Ibid.*; *The Central African Examiner* (Oct., 1961); C. M. Brand, 'Politics and African trade unionism in Rhodesia since Federation', in *Rhodesian History* (1971), II, 91, claims that this conference was held at Que Que.

¹⁰ Jamela attributes the failure of RICU to endorse the national body to what he calls 'a lot of misunderstanding and disagreement which exists even today', while Brand attributes it to the rivalry between FAWU and RICU in Bulawayo.

¹¹ Interview with Messrs. Gray and R. M. Bango in Bulawayo, Oct. 31 and Nov., 1991.

¹² NAZ AOH/63 'Interview held with Mr. Reuben Thomas Jamela by D. Murenji', 18 and 22.

¹³ Interview held with Dr. K. T. T. Maripe, Francistown, Botswana, Nov. 13, 1991. The presence in the executive of the TUC, in particular, of Maripe, supported by the over 20 000-strong RAWU and Bango, whose organisation (RICU) failed to join the TUC at its launching, marked a very important step in consolidating the labour movement. Maripe attributes this to the decline and collapse of RICU in 1956, especially the eclipse of its leader, Charles Mzingeli, who was bitterly opposed to FBAWU, a strong initiator and supporter of the TUC.

¹⁴ Bango claimed the support of the majority of 11 former RICU-affiliated unions, with about 900 members or so, but in reality his was not a viable organisation and it virtually did not last, as he conceded to the author.

Many reasons have been given for this breakaway. These include dissatisfaction over the name of the federation to Bango's dislike of what he calls Maripe's flamboyant style of leadership.¹⁵ Following this breakaway, the TUC emerged much stronger and its executive was reconstituted with Maripe as President, J. Z. Moyo as Vice-President, Jamela as General Secretary and J. T. Maluleke as Assistant General Secretary.¹⁶ In 1957, the conservative Department of Labour reported that there were 27 African trade unions known to be in existence but it did not know the strength of their membership.¹⁷ In 1958, this number fell to 17 due to what it called the federations of trade unions.¹⁸ RAWU, for example, showed a remarkable growth, its membership increasing by 2 000 within a year.¹⁹ Maripe attributes this growth not only to a recruiting campaign by the union but to also a sense of revenge by railway men after the 1956 strike when they were forced back to work at gun point by the Todd regime.²⁰

The organisational rejuvenation was accompanied by a growth in union activity. The struggles for 'trade union issues' remained the rallying points but were strongly linked to the 'political'. For example, the TUC launched a campaign to organise a wages strike in 1958,²¹ and TUC spokespersons began to assert the need to 'change the economic order'.²² Behind this upsurge in economic and political action at this time were economic and political crises. On the economic front, there was economic decline manifested in low wages and unemployment, while on the political front, there was a mixture of 'reform' with repression.

Towards the end of the 1950s, the economic prosperity that had occurred in the colony since 1953 began to fall. World demand of copper, the main foreign exchange earner for the Federation, declined. Concurrently, the influx of foreign capital, which had been the mainstay of economic growth in the colony especially since the establishment of the Central African Federation, started to fall. Capital inflows into the colony fell from \$24,7 million in 1953 to £10,7 million in 1960.²³ Between 1953 and 1960, the investment income outflow rose from £15,5 million to \$32,5

¹⁵ Brand, 'Politics and African trade unionism in Rhodesia', and interview held with Mr. R. M. Bango, Bulawayo, Oct. 31, 1991.

¹⁶ Interview with Dr. K. T. T. Maripe; *Central African Examiner* (Sept. 22, 1958).

¹⁷ NAZ RG 3/LA B2, *Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Department of Labour, 1952-1957; 1958-1959* (Salisbury, Govt. Printers).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Interview with Dr. Maripe, Francistown, Botswana, Oct. 31, 1991.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *The Bantu Mirror* (Aug. 31, 1957).

²² *Central African Examiner* (Dec., 1957).

²³ Colin Stoneman, 'Economic development with unlimited supplies of capital: The case of Southern Rhodesia', in *South African Labour Bulletin* (Feb., 1976), II, (vii), 14.

million.²⁴ During the same period the foreign share of investment fell from 67.7 to 35.8%.²⁵ The reasons for the decline in economic growth were attributable to the increasing White opposition to 'partnership' and the collapse of the liberal federalist project, coupled with the increasing burden of servicing the foreign capital debt, which began to match and even exceed the capital inflow, as well as the internal market which remained tiny in absolute terms because of the low level of Black wages (about two thirds of the wages and salaries bill was paid to Whites).²⁶

WAGES

Wages had become the most important source of income for African workers and their families. The economic stagnation manifested itself particularly in the deteriorating living standards of the African workers as their already poor wages got even worse. At the end of 1957, the Prime Minister and Minister of Labour, Garfield Todd, aware of the deteriorating African standard of living, promulgated a new minimum wage rate of \$6.10s a month, an increase of 35 shillings over the old minimum of £4.15s.²⁷ This minimum wage, which took effect in January 1958, evoked an immediate outcry from a substantial section of the White electorate, who charged that it would price Rhodesia out of the market, create mass unemployment and force many industries to close.²⁸ Industry somehow survived these increases but their author, Todd, did not. His cabinet rebelled and forced him to resign. He was succeeded by Edgar Whitehead.

Todd's replacement did not, however, put to rest the problem of low African wages and African poverty. As a result, the Whitehead regime commissioned an urban study under the chairmanship of Plewman. Among its findings was that the lowest income on which an African man could provide the basic necessities of life for a wife and two children in the colony was some £15 per month.²⁹ These findings were corroborated by the findings of the Bettison Poverty Datum Line (PDL) study conducted in Salisbury in 1958. In 1959, however, African wages (excluding agriculture and domestic service) averaged just over £10 per month, or some two thirds of the PDL.³⁰

In a follow-up survey in 1960, Bettison compared wages earned by the head of a household with the needs of the family of that particular size and

²⁴ 'National Accounts and Balance of Payments of Rhodesia'.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Colin Stoneman, 'Economic development with unlimited supplies of capital', 5-6.

²⁷ It is to be noted that the latter figure was quoted by the Ibbotson Report of 1943/44 as a minimum required for a family of four to survive at that time.

²⁸ *Central African Examiner* (Aug. 13, 1960).

²⁹ Southern Rhodesia, *Plewman Commission Report* (Salisbury, 1959).

³⁰ *Central African Examiner* (Aug. 13, 1960).

composition in Blantyre, Lusaka and Salisbury. In Salisbury, his survey was complicated by the fact that a large number of the working population were unattached males. This did not necessarily imply a high percentage of single men amongst the Salisbury workforce, since a large number of workers were probably living away from their dependents. A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that at that time, the lack of available family-type housing, coupled with the low level of wages, made it difficult for a worker to support his family in the towns and forced workers to live separately. Bettison, however, concluded that:

single men . . . can and do earn sufficient to meet requirements at PDL levels. It is when the wife and children are added to their responsibilities that sources of income, and particularly wages, fall short of requirements at PDL standards.³¹

What is significant about this survey is the revelation that, in the 1950s, wage structures were based on the needs of a single worker, and there were no adjustment mechanisms within these structures that took account of the increased needs of the family man. The economic system did not base itself on the hope that workers would somehow remain single and childless, but rather wages were historically determined in relation to the needs of a migrant worker, who could make remittances home in partial support of his family. There is strong evidence to confirm that this was in fact the basis for setting wages.

Early in 1960, the Minister of Labour, A. E. Abrahamson surprised most people by stating flatly that a married urban African man could not make ends meet on less than £14 per month, and that this should be regarded as the standard.³² No dissent was heard. What had brought about this dramatic change when hardly three years earlier, protests over an annual minimum wage of £78 had been so strong as to cost Todd his position? Now in 1960, the annual minimum wage of £168 was accepted, at least in principle. The answer seems to lie in the interplay of economic, political and social forces. Among these were:

- (a) the grievances implicit in the events that led to the 1959 emergencies and their aftermath;
- (b) growing realisation that, to be an effective consumer as well as producer, the African had to have greater purchasing power; and
- (c) recognition that the urban African was no longer a migrant, but a permanent settler, whose wages must enable him to bring his wife and children from the country and to provide them with a reasonable 'home' as opposed to a mere 'accommodation unit' for himself.

³¹ D. G. Bettison, 'The poverty datum line in Central Africa' in *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal* (1961), XXX.

³² *Ibid.*

To what extent was this apparent change of heart by the regime put into effect? In presenting his 1960/61 budget to the Territorial Assembly, C. J. Hatty made a point noting in his review of the economy that

over the period 1954-59, average European wages have risen by 22% and African wages by 40%. During the same period the (European) cost of living index has moved up by 16%.³³

In these terms, the advance appears impressive — even dramatic — particularly for the African, indicating as it does that African wages rose almost twice as fast as those of Europeans. But the picture loses much of its sparkle when related to the following: even after the advance, average African earnings were £80 a year — still only about half the figure given by Abrahamson; the £80 figure applies only to the higher-earning sector of the African population — that is, in the money economy. The two largest fields of employment for Africans — agriculture, with 232 100 jobs, and the private domestic service with 98 900 — constituting more than half the workforce, drew average annual wages of only £50 and £60, respectively. The total wages of 629 800 Africans in employment in 1959 still accounted for only £50 472 000, while the earnings of 82 230 Europeans in employment totalled £92 027 000.³⁴

Coupled with low wages was the problem of indigenous unemployment which began to appear from 1957 and increased in later years. The 1956 census showed that there were 609 953 Africans employed in the colony. Of these 300 178 were indigenous, 42 253 from Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), 132 643 from Nyasaland (now Malawi), 125 218 from Portuguese Territories and 9 661 from other territories. The total comprised 512 042 adult men, 52 920 juveniles and 44 991 females.³⁵ As a result of growing African unemployment, the Foreign Migratory Labour Act was introduced in mid-1958 to keep Mozambicans and other alien workers out of Southern Rhodesian towns. Even with this measure, indigenous unemployment grew, and the Federal recession led to an economic crisis in which low wages and unemployment manifested themselves.

It was in this context that the SRANC and the TUC joined forces to improve the lot of Africans. In 1958 the TUC launched a campaign to organise a strike for increased wages,³⁶ and the Federation spokespersons began to assert the need to 'change the economic order'.³⁷ But what

³³ Southern Rhodesia, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 1960, Col. 3450.

³⁴ Southern Rhodesia, *Central Statistics Office*, 1960 (Salisbury, Govt. Printers, 1961).

³⁵ Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Secretary of Labour and Social Welfare* (Salisbury, Govt. Printers, 1958).

³⁶ *The Bantu Mirror* (Aug. 31, 1957).

³⁷ *Central African Examiner* (Dec., 1957).

galvanised the two organisations was the ousting of G. S. Todd as Prime Minister in February 1958. Despite intense African resentment of the Federation and all that it stood for, and despite the high-handed ways in which he had dealt with the 1954 Wankie and 1956 Railway strikes, many Africans had confidence in Todd because of his liberal missionary background.³⁸ In Todd, they saw their 'leader' and 'believed his government was in some sense theirs'.³⁹ The reasons for these beliefs are given by N. Shamuyarira:

When he became premier in 1954, he pressed for a vast increase in school places for Africans; he wanted to integrate Africans quickly into an industrial society on an equal basis. Perhaps more than these factors, his popularity among Africans and their faith in him stemmed from the way in which he never lost the contacts with educated Africans which he had built up as a missionary organising schools around the whole of Shabani district.⁴⁰

Todd was popular not only with educated people like the Shamuyariras but also with the workers, who saw him as someone who might persuade the settlers to grant them considerable reforms and also as someone who had taken a bold step of promulgating a minimum wage of £6. 10s, even though the consequences were momentous as we have seen above.⁴¹ With the departure of Todd, many Africans felt abandoned and Patrick Fletcher, one time Minister of Native Affairs and Todd's deputy, did not help matters when he said of Todd, 'He has stirred up the natives to want more than they can be given'.⁴²

From this time on, the anger of the Africans against the regime grew. The security reports, though admitting the existence of opposition, chose to misinterpret it: 'There is no reason to suppose that this opposition necessarily reflects the opinion of moderate Africans, nor of those — the vast majority — who are far more concerned with earning a living'.⁴³

The following year the same security report noted:

In Southern Rhodesia, the political crisis has been the subject of considerable interest by politically conscious Africans of all shades of opinion. There is no doubt that moderate Africans regret the removal of Mr Garfield Todd from office of Prime Minister. They regard him as the person most likely to secure their rapid advancement.⁴⁴

³⁸ L. Vambe, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe* (London, Heinemann, 1976), 225.

³⁹ N. Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia* (London, Heinemann, 1965), 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴¹ This view emerged quite strongly during my interviews with Messrs. Zisengwe, Bangos, Maripe and Nehwati.

⁴² Quoted in Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 24.

⁴³ F163/78/31, Security Intelligence Review, Rhodesia and Nyasaland, No. 19 (Aug. 12, 1957).

⁴⁴ F163/78/31, Security Intelligence Review, Rhodesia and Nyasaland, No. 25 (Jan., 1958).

While it was clear to almost all who had eyes to see that the economic and political situation in the colony was deteriorating, the settler regime and its security establishment chose to play down the problems by making believe that it was only a 'politically conscious' minority who understood what was happening and the majority cared less. The regime initially attempted to co-opt this 'politically conscious' group. James Johnson, MP, a strong proponent of this cooptation policy wrote under the heading 'Change and Ferment in the Federation'.

The most terrifying thing to me about Central Africa is the social apartheid, this cultural gap between the two racial sections of Rhodesian society . . . I found the usual African poverty and disease in many places, a lack of fundamental education and paucity of technical skills; but I would place the highest of the tasks ahead, the imperative need to convince the educated black man that he has an acceptable place in this plural society . . .⁴⁵

This condescending thinking was bound to fail because of its arrogance, naiveté, and its ignorance of the fundamental native policy in the colony which, though wishing to treat the so-called African middle class differently, failed miserably, and as a result drove them into the arms of their 'uneducated' brethren, who were ready to confront the regime, as we shall see shortly.

Since its formation and throughout its life, the SRANC was very successful in mobilising African support all over the country as numerous grievances were less and less attended to by the settler state. It did this by teaming up with the TUC at grassroots level, and within a year, it had established 39 branches all over the country and its membership was reported to have swelled to 6 000 by May 1958.⁴⁶ It gradually turned into a mass movement encompassing the workers and the peasants, both at the leadership and rank-and-file levels. The leadership came to be fearless in its attack on the settler state, reflecting largely a militant membership in the rural and urban areas. True, as Ranger points out, SRANC remained 'by comparison with other African movements elsewhere, a moderate and painstakingly non-racial organisation'.⁴⁷ Non-racial yes, but not moderate, as one security intelligence report testified:

. . . at rural meetings, congress speakers, notably George Nyandoro, the General Secretary, have continued their attacks on Government Legislation and Government Departments, particularly the police and

⁴⁵ *Central African Examiner* (June, 1957).

⁴⁶ N. Bhebe, 'The nationalist struggle, 1957-1962' in C. Banana (ed), *Turmoil and Tenacity* (Harare, College Press, 1989), 66-7.

⁴⁷ T. O. Ranger, *Crisis in Southern Rhodesia: Research Series 217* (Fabian Commonwealth Bureau, Sept., 1960).

the Native Department. There has been nothing constructive in their criticism and the distortions of the truth which have formed the greater part of congress propaganda have clearly been designed to cause unrest. The attacks on government Departments have had as their object the undermining of the prestige of the Native Commissioners and the loyalty of African policemen. The inevitable consequences of this trend will be the creation of a situation in which African masses will be induced to take unconstitutional action over some imaginary grievance and the peace and tranquillity of the territory will be unnecessarily disrupted.⁴⁸

On February 29, 1959, the regime felt sufficiently threatened by the mass mobilisation of the SRANC that it decided to ban the organisation, under the notorious Unlawful Organisations Act, which had been rushed through the settler Parliament. It is reported that the regime confiscated £15 000 worth of property and arrested and detained almost all of the SRANC leadership on the allegation that it was engaging in subversive activities.⁴⁹ The TUC was also hit hard by the banning of SRANC. Its leadership was arrested. Maripe, TUC President, Moyo, Vice-President, Jamela, General Secretary and many others were detained.⁵⁰ The alliance of the two in action meant that the regime could not hit one and leave the other. This marked the turning point in the African struggle for independence, as we will soon show.

It was no coincidence that at the time when the Whitehead regime was using a big stick to beat down the nationalist movement, it also used an apparent carrot by promulgating the amended Industrial Conciliation Act (ICA) in 1959. This Act for the first time legalised the African trade unions under very strict regulations, recognised African workers as employees but excluded workers in agriculture and domestic service.⁵¹ In piloting the Act through parliament, the Minister of Labour admitted, 'It could be argued that to provide for these associations is nothing more than a control measure and, let me be perfectly frank, it is.'⁵² The control was to be explicitly in the prohibition of the use of funds and facilities by trade unions for political purposes. This meant that trade unions were denied rights:

⁴⁸ FIBS, *Security Intelligence Review* (May, 1958), XXIX.

⁴⁹ Vambe, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*, 281.

⁵⁰ Interview held with Maripe, Francistown, Botswana, Oct. 31, 1991. See also the interview held with Jamela, Feb. 28, 1980, by Munjeri, where Jamela admits that 'we were arrested because as I said we played a part in unionism and nationalism. When the politicians were arrested in 1959, we were also arrested', p.22.

⁵¹ The African workers employed in these sectors numbered 323 000 and accounted for 51.6% of all African wage-earners, and had their employment conditions regulated by the repressive and archaic Master and Servants Act. See T. E. Mswaka, 'The relationship between wages and employment in Rhodesia, 1954-1968' in *Rhodesia Journal of Economics* (Sept., 1972), VI, (iii).

⁵² Southern Rhodesia, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 1959, Col. 1547.

- (a) to affiliate with any political party or political organisation;
- (b) to use any of their monies or funds for the furthering of interests of any political party or political organisation;
- (c) to (by any provision in their constitution) require or permit any member thereof to subscribe to the funds of any political party or organisation;
- (d) to use or permit use of any of their services, equipment or facilities for the purpose of furthering the interests of any political party or political organisation;
- (e) to accept any monies or services from any organisation which is permitted by their constitution or otherwise to use their monies or funds for furthering the interests of any political party or political organisation.⁵³

These detailed provisions continued the politicisation of the economic issues by the state and they were meant to break the close links that organised labour and nationalist parties had developed. In short, the regime put serious limitations on the political role that unions could play in the nationalist struggle. But it was not going to be possible to separate economic from political struggles 'and under colonialism the convergence between the two was quicker than under normal conditions of capitalism or post-colonial struggles'.⁵⁴

On January 1, 1960, the National Democratic Party (NDP) was formed to succeed the banned SRANC. Its membership was essentially the same as that of SRANC,⁵⁵ and for the first time the demand for one-man-one-vote became policy.⁵⁶ The interim leadership consisted of M. Mawema, President, M. Malianga, Vice-President, S. Samkange, Secretary-General, T. Samkange, Treasurer, N. Marondera, Publicity Secretary, and J. Nkomo, Director of External Affairs.⁵⁷ Labour was once again represented at the leadership level by Mawema and Nkomo, but its strength lay in the rank and file.

The NDP was formed at the height of enormous African socio-economic and political grievances. The state of emergency and the detention of

⁵³ Quoted in L. Sachikonye, 'State, capital and trade unions', in I. Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-1986* (Dakar, CODESRIA, 1986), 250-1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *The Bulawayo Chronicle* (July 25 and 27, 1960).

⁵⁶ Interview held with Dr. M. Mawema, Harare, Zimbabwe, Nov. 13, 1991. See also 'National Democratic Party: Statement of appeal by interim President Michael Mawema and Secretary-General Sketchely Samkange, Salisbury, 1960', in Nyangoni C. and Nyandoro G. (eds.), *Zimbabwe Independence Movements: Select Documents* (London, Rex Collins, 1979), 21.

⁵⁷ This was an interim leadership because the State of Emergency was still in effect, the SRANC leadership was still in detention and it was also difficult at this time to call membership to elect its leadership. Nkomo was out of the country at the time of the banning of SRANC and was unable to return and he spent the next two years campaigning against the Whitehead regime from offices in London. Interview with Mawema, Nov. 13, 1991.

labour and nationalist leaders had radicalised the labour and nationalist rank and file. This was reflected in the one-man-one-vote demand. Within four months of its formation, NDP was able to attract as many as 7 130 people to its meetings spread over seven days.⁵⁸ This was spectacular by any standard. The SRANC had never been able to mobilise so many people in such short time during its two-year existence.

While SRANC's strong support came from the rural areas, NDP's major strength came from the urban areas. The main reason for this was rapid urbanisation of the population at this time. The colony was going through a period of economic recession resulting in high levels of unemployment in both the rural and urban areas. Unemployment which started to show in 1958/59, reached its peak in 1960 when 637 000 Africans were reported unemployed, a figure which decreased slightly in 1963 to 602 000.⁵⁹ The regime responded differently than in 1958 by admitting that there was indeed a problem and appointed the Southern Rhodesian Labour adviser, G. E. Stint, to examine the problem and make recommendations.⁶⁰ Later in 1961, a Parliamentary Select Committee, under the chairmanship of A. E. Abrahamson, was set up to examine the possibilities of unemployment benefits (albeit on a restricted basis) for all workers.⁶¹

By the end of 1962, 80 000 Africans who had previously been employed were seeking work, but the Rhodesian Front regime rejected recommendations made to establish an unemployment insurance fund on the grounds that it was too expensive. African workers bore the brunt of that decision.⁶²

Unemployment went hand-in-hand with poor wages. According to government statistics, in 1962 the average African wage was £68. 8s per annum while that of the European workers was £1 034 per annum.⁶³ Over half of the African labour force of 612 593 earned less than \$5 a month and less than one sixteenth of the total earned more than £10 per month.⁶⁴ In 1963, it was estimated that less than five per cent of Africans in the colony earned a living wage in cash. While the European worker averaged £1 171 in annual earnings, the African worker averaged £101 annually.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ F120/L343/2, Internal Security Weekly Reports, 1960-6, Secret Memo, Jan. 12, 1960.

⁵⁹ *Central African Examiner* (July, 1964).

⁶⁰ In a statement on March 13, 1958, the regime said that there was no problem of African unemployment but one of maldistribution of labour. It went further to say that the surplus labour in the urban areas could largely be absorbed by employers in the rural areas. According to the regime, genuinely unemployed Africans were estimated not to exceed 8 000 at that time. See *Rhodesia Institute of African Affairs* (March, 1958), II.

⁶¹ D. G. Clarke, *Unemployment Crisis* (CIIR, 1978), 6.

⁶² International Labour Organisation, *Labour Conditions and Discrimination in Southern Rhodesia* (ILO, 1978), 122.

⁶³ Southern Rhodesia, *Government Statistical Year Book*, 1963.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Central African Examiner* (Sept., 1963).

Life was not tough and rough in the urban areas only, but in the rural areas as well with the impoverishment of the rural-based households that were significantly dependent on wage labour for subsistence. Now, with fewer options in the labour market, or at best uncertain earnings from various forms of petty production, such households and families sought to survive more from the land than before.⁶⁶ The land was not only inadequate but poor and infertile whenever available. The Land Apportionment Act of 1941 and the Land Husbandry Act of 1951 not only reduced the amount of land available to each African family, but the number of stock permitted per family as well. As a result, the numbers of landless Africans increased.⁶⁷ There was also the fact that the Africans had no access to capital and modern agricultural skills. As a result, the cash incomes of African farmers were reported to be as follows in August 1961: Master-farmer made £40 per annum; plot-holder and member of a co-operative, £6; an ordinary farmer £3. 10s and a woman farmer, £1.⁶⁸

In short, the Land Apportionment Act was both too hard and too soft. Too hard because it prevented those Africans who had the ability and determination to break out of the vicious circle to enjoy the fruits of their endeavours; too soft because it provided a prop for an anachronistic semi-rural economy which was clearly doomed to collapse. Worse still, it brought about a twilight existence between town and village which enabled workers to exist on sub-economic wages and salved the consciences of their employers.

The real situation, however, was best described by an African worker living in Salisbury, who wrote and sounded a warning:

In Southern Rhodesia, thousands upon thousands are unemployed and move with empty stomachs. Thousands of Africans have been left landless by the Native Land Husbandry Act, the purpose of which was to create cheap labour pools. The landless and those who cannot get enough crops to live on from the poor soils allocated to them are forced to try for employment in the industries in urban areas, thus fulfilling the government policy of supplying cheap labour. The government forgets the warnings of history that when the majority of the people continue to live without the means they are bound to resort to demanding control of the key to existence, the taking over of government.⁶⁹

Old fallacies die hard, and there were still those who argued that Africans were paid low wages because they worked badly. It needed no more than the merest common sense to realise that an undernourished

⁶⁶ Clarke, *Unemployment Crisis*.

⁶⁷ See Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo*, Chapters 2 and 6, for earlier effects of these two Acts.

⁶⁸ Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo*, 70.

⁶⁹ *Central African Examiner* (Nov., 1963).

man could not give his best, as was heavily underlined by the voluminous report 'African Labour Efficiency' published by the British Government as long ago as 1947. The survey team who compiled the report showed that in every case where the productivity of African workers was found to be significantly below standard, the cause could be traced to malnutrition. Low wages meant poor diet and poor output.

Feeding on the numerous African grievances, the NDP was fast becoming a mass movement on an unprecedented scale attracting attendance ranging from 6 000 to 15 000 to its meetings within months of its formation, according to security reports.⁷⁰ Alarmed by the NDP's popularity, the regime felt sufficiently threatened to move against NDP leadership in the early hours of July 19, 1960. Three leaders — Mawema, Samkange and Takawira — were arrested. The regime claimed that these arrests were not directed against any particular party or any particular race, but the settler press, whilst describing the arrests as routine police operation, stressed the NDP functions of those arrested.⁷¹ To the remaining leaders and members of the NDP, these arrests were a direct and deliberate challenge by the regime to the continued existence of the party. In the weeks before the arrests, there had been other manifestations of the regime's hostility towards the NDP: the party office was searched on July 8, homes of Asian supporters and sympathisers were searched also on July 8, and leaders were constantly trailed by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID).⁷² Moreover, on the morning of the arrests, dozens of party officials and members of NDP were searched in Salisbury, Bulawayo, Umtali and Gwanda, including one of the European members of the party. Finally, the three arrested leaders were charged under the notorious Unlawful Organisations Act, which provided penalties of a fine of £1 000 or five years imprisonment for the offences of continuing to be an officer or member or assister of an unlawful organisation.⁷³

⁷⁰ F120/L343/2, Internal Security Weekly Reports, 1960-6. For example, for the month of April 1960, the NDP attracted 5 990 people to its meetings in and around Bulawayo and Salisbury. In May it attracted 7 130 at meetings covering Gwelo and Umtali. In May, 1961, it was attracting 14 860 people to its meetings held around the colony. See Secret Memos, May, June, 1960 and June, 1961.

⁷¹ See *The Rhodesia Herald* (July 20, 1960), and *The Bulawayo Chronicle* (July 20, 1960).

⁷² Interview with Dr. M. Mawema. Mawema told the author how, days before his arrest, he was trailed by suspicious people wherever he went. He alerted his colleagues who reported the same stories. Then they knew that people who were trailing them were the CID. When the searches were conducted at their offices, they knew that it was a question of time before the regime moved against them. He and others were not fearful of their lives because they knew that the regime could not get away with it.

⁷³ *Central African Examiner* (July 20, 1960). It is interesting to note that leaders of the NDP were charged under the Act that did not affect their organisation as it had not been banned. What the regime was admitting was that the NDP was the resurrected SRANC, and they were about to ban it too.

The arrest of the NDP leadership provoked a quick and massive reaction from its membership and supporters. The day following the arrest, more than 20 000 people, most of whom were workers, assembled peacefully at Stodart Hall, Salisbury, to protest and demand the immediate release of their leaders.⁷⁴ When the police tried to disperse them, widespread attacks on public installations ensued, and many were arrested.⁷⁵ When the settler state marshalled all its forces of 'law and order' — the military, the police, the Rhodesian African Rifles and the reservists — who showed little idea of how to cope with the situation, things rapidly got out of hand and running battles in the streets were fought between the people and the 'security' forces until July 21. The way the 'security forces' handled the situation brought a lot of criticism. The *African Daily News* complained and other observers confirmed, that tear gas and batons were used indiscriminately throughout the disturbances. On the morning of July 21, three Africans, including a woman and her baby, were wounded by gunshot, and in the afternoon, a European constable was badly beaten in Highfields. Over 200 arrests were made that day and government announced a ban of meetings. The military and the police were reinforced to restore order in Salisbury townships. The final official toll was 11 dead, scores of Africans arrested and thousands of pounds in damaged property.⁷⁶

A day after order was 'restored' in Salisbury, Bulawayo stood on the brink of the greatest working class explosion of its history. On July 22 J. Z. Moyo, recently released from his 1959 detention, addressed a public meeting at the Stanley Square on the question of the arrests of the NDP leadership.⁷⁷ On July 24, the NDP called a mass rally at Stanley Square to protest the arrests of its leaders. The regime panicked when it saw the size of the rally and decided to ban it at the last minute. This could not work and the police attempted to disperse the crowd by force. This failed and the march to the city centre took place but was blocked by approximately 500 military police equipped with armoured cars. In the ensuing skirmishes that lasted the whole day inside the location and on the outskirts of the city, people threw stones while the police used tear gas and batons. By evening, a false sense of quiet followed as people retreated to their homes and the police withdrew.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Shamuyarira quotes a figure of 40 000 on p. 64. He goes further to mention that at least half the Salisbury labour force did not go to work that day.

⁷⁵ F. Nehwati, 'The social and communal background to "Zhil": The African riots in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia in 1960', in *African Affairs* (1970), LXIX, 254, 276.

⁷⁶ *The African Daily News* (July 22, 1960); Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 63.

⁷⁷ This part draws heavily from the most detailed account of the events by a participant, which were published by Nehwati, 'The social and communal background to "Zhil"', and the interview held with this author, Bulawayo, Nov. 1, 1991.

⁷⁸ *Dissent* (Aug., 1960), XXI.

That evening and the early hours of July 25, the NDP joined with organised labour in planning and mobilisation.⁷⁹ On Monday morning, everything appeared normal as workers went out to work. By 10.00 a.m., however, the whole industrial area came to a standstill as workers stopped work and streamed out back to their townships. Commercial workers joined the strike and commercial enterprises were attacked along the way as they conveniently lay between the White industrial area and the African townships. It was, however, the townships that took the brunt of African anger. Everything that had anything to do with the regime's native administration was attacked, damaged or destroyed. The exceptions were schools, churches, social amenities and other African owned establishments which remained closed as demanded. Many people identified as 'sell-outs' were attacked and run out of town; pickets roamed the streets patrolling and enforcing support for the strike. 'By the end of the day, the administration had temporarily abdicated and the townships had literally fallen to the African masses.'⁸⁰ The 2 000-strong army and police forces had, in the meantime, concentrated their forces in defence of Europeans and sealed off the townships, stopping everything from either coming in or going out. By Wednesday, July 27, the strike began to collapse because of hunger resulting from the food blockade. Coupled with this was the police and army's repression of the townships, which they had entered the previous day. The final toll, according to police, stood at 12 dead,⁸¹ several hundred injured, and damaged property, estimated conservatively at between £100 000 and £200 000.⁸²

The significance of these July riots lay in the fact that they represented a political general strike, planned and executed by the African workers.⁸³ Over 50% of the people arrested in Salisbury and Gwelo, and over 70% in Bulawayo, were workers. The strikes were not confined to Bulawayo and Salisbury only but spilled over to Gwelo. In Gwelo, the pattern was similar to that in Salisbury and Bulawayo. True, the strikes were not overtly called by organised labour but the latter was at the core of their execution and sustenance. These strikes marked a high point of close co-operation

⁷⁹ R. M. Bango, in an interview with the author, told that, although not taking part in these meetings, he was informed in detail by some of his former colleagues of the meetings which took almost the whole night planning. He was insistent that organised labour played a crucial role in this planning and execution of the strike. Nehwati, one of the planners, admitted as much to the author.

⁸⁰ Nehwati, 'The social and communal background to "Zhi", 252.

⁸¹ *Central African Examiner* (Oct., 1960). Nehwati, 'The social and communal background to "Zhi", 253, disputes this on the grounds that the figure of 12 undercounts those people who were killed and were collected by their relatives to be buried in the rural areas and therefore escaped the police count.

⁸² *The Rhodesia Herald* (July 26, 1960).

⁸³ In the interviews with R. M. Bango and F. Nehwati, this point was emphatically made by these two gentlemen. See also J. Hyslop, 'Trade unionism in the rise of African nationalism: Bulawayo, 1943-1963', *African Perspective* (1986), I, 55.

between labour and nationalism, exposing in the process its weaknesses and strengths. More important, these strikes initiated a sustained period of worker militancy, closely allied to the political struggles for one-man-one-vote in colonial Zimbabwe. The month of September was marked by rolling strikes which began on September 5 when the Rhodesian Spinners' night shift downed tools because they had not received pay increases in spite of the investigations into their working conditions by the Industrial Board.⁸⁴ As they left the factories, and went back to their townships, they attacked and destroyed machines at work, and stoned cars along their way. Police intervened to disperse them with tear gas. On the morning of September 6, industrial trouble had spread to Gatooma (now Kadoma), where almost all the African labour stayed away from work.⁸⁵ By evening '... workers set on fire the Native Administration Offices and the beerhall in Rimuka Township'.⁸⁶ The following day, September 7, the struggle continued as the workers and the police fought running battles lasting the whole day. It was only due to the belated intervention of the Minister of Labour, who promised another Industrial Board, that the workers decided to return to work.⁸⁷

The strike wave affected the neighbouring Que Que (now Kwekwe), where on September 5 a strike by workers at the Rhodesia Iron and Steel Company (RISCO, now ZISCO) works' single quarters began. The main complaint here was poor cooking. They were so angry that they beat up the cooks.

During October, the situation got even worse as a wave of strikes spread all over the colony. It began in Harare (now Mbare) Township on October 8, when a European ran over an African in what was apparently an accident. This sparked a bloody riot, as people started to burn shops, beerhalls and cars. Coupled with the burning was the looting of property, so that at the end of the day, seven Africans lay dead, 24 were admitted to hospital and at least 42 others were treated in hospital and released; 15 shops and four cars were burnt; three beerhalls were severely damaged and the total loss in damaged property was estimated at \$50 000.⁸⁸

On October 9, the disturbances spread to Gwelo. Behind these was the anger resulting from what the Africans in Gwelo regarded as callous, cold-blooded murder of their people in Harare Township. On October 10, on the heels of the Salisbury and Gwelo unrest, came the 'sit-down' strikes

⁸⁴ Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo*, 76.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Central African Examiner* (Oct. 22, 1960). Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo*, put the figure of the injured at 70 109 arrested and notes that a number of Whites were injured as their cars were stoned.

in Bulawayo's industrial area. These 'sit-down' strikes covered the railways, bus companies,⁸⁹ Fox and Bookless cartage contractors and many others.⁹⁰ The immediate causes of these strikes, according to one newspaper appeared to be

the chronic but recently aggravated problem of trying to live with and keep families on present wages, and a genuine misunderstanding over the industrial machinery used to decide wages and conditions.⁹¹

The same paper continues to say that 'the strikes were sporadic, confused and certainly did not give the impression of being organised'.⁹² True, the NDP denied organising these, and the settler regime denied any connection between the industrial unrest and the general political unrest.⁹³ But the strikes were encouraged by, and intertwined with, the rising tide of African nationalism. The settler regime admitted this when it noted that NDP was the potent factor behind all the disturbances which started in July.⁹⁴ The Bulawayo unrest, unlike others before it in other areas, passed without violence. As a result of these colony-wide strikes, substantial wage increases were initiated by the regime in several industries.⁹⁵

Concurrent with these industrial strikes, student unrest and insubordination was reported in several schools around the colony, including St. Joseph Mission in Umvuma (now Mvuma), Morgenster Mission in Fort Victoria (now Masvingo) and the Salvation Army School in Mazoe.⁹⁶ The regime accused the NDP of exploiting high unemployment and shortage of money in the colony, in order to make the colony ungovernable.⁹⁷ The October unrest, manifested in political riots, industrial strikes and student unrest, had one thing in common: they were linked to the rising strength of African nationalism. This was admitted by the Department of Native Labour in its report:

The industrial picture was somewhat clouded by the spasmodic political strike that broke out in the major cities. Ostensibly the reason for the unrest was a demand for increased wages but there is no doubt whatsoever that the real motive was political.⁹⁸

⁸⁹ *Central African Examiner* (Oct. 22, 1960).

⁹⁰ Brand, 'Politics and African trade unionism in Rhodesia since Federation', 95.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ For the former, it was a tactical move, while for the latter it was politically expedient to deny the connection.

⁹⁴ See, for example, F120/725/L343/2, Internal Security Weekly Reports, Secret Memo, Oct. 26, 1960.

⁹⁵ *Central African Examiner* (Dec., 1960).

⁹⁶ Bhebe, *Benjamin Burombo*, 77.

⁹⁷ F120/725/L343/2, Internal Security Weekly Reports, Secret Memo, Oct., 1960.

⁹⁸ Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Department of Native Labour and Social Welfare for the Calendar Year 1960* (Salisbury, Govt. Printers, 1961), 23.

Throughout this extended period of unrest there was evidence of African workers' support for the NDP and vice-versa. Within the labour movement there was a move away from 'gradualism' and 'partnership', because these had failed. This was reflected in the leadership as younger and more militant potential leaders tried to win power from older and more conservative men. It was also reflected in the ideological battle, as to whether or not trade unions should identify themselves with political parties.⁹⁹ During December 1960, S. J. Moyo, President of RAWU since 1959, was overthrown, for being a delegate to the Constitutional Review Talks, having been chosen by the settler regime to represent the views of the trade unions.¹⁰⁰ He was initially suspended but was later expelled for 'taking part in the politics' and for neglecting his trade union work.¹⁰¹ Leaders like Moyo were being replaced not because of involvement in politics as such but because they got involved in wrong politics: Moyo had recently used his influence to urge RAWU members to be patient and follow constitutional procedures.¹⁰²

In 1961, the mood in the colony in general, and in organised labour in particular, was still one of increasing militancy. Enos Nkala of NDP had predicted without obvious exaggeration, 'By 1961, we will be walking over the ashes of European supremacy and they know it . . . 1961 is a year of positive action; if not you will perish.'¹⁰³ On the first point, they had to wait another 19 years but on the second, he was very right. The first shot was fired at the third annual conference of TUC held in Gwelo over the weekend of March 25-26. Among the resolutions, almost always unanimous, the conference decided to:

- reject out of hand the 1961 Constitutional Proposals for Southern Rhodesia;¹⁰⁴
- raise the TUC demand for a minimum wage from £20 to \$25 per month;
- demand the immediate and unconditional release of all political detainees and restrictees; and

⁹⁹ In an interview held with Dr. K. T. T. Maripe, he was emphatic that African workers were no longer prepared to be led by people like himself, who advised on the use of the industrial machinery as provided by the ICA, and who cautioned that trade unions should not be too closely identified with political parties. The tactic did not mean that they were denouncing African nationalism but that unions should not fall victim to political repression as happened in 1959. He admitted that such leadership lost because the rank-and-file was way too radicalised by this time.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Central African Examiner* (Dec., 1960).

¹⁰² *Central African Examiner* (Oct. 22, 1960).

¹⁰³ F120/725/L343/2, Internal Security Weekly Reports, Secret Memo, Sept. 28, 1960.

¹⁰⁴ These notorious proposals provided for the franchise which only guaranteed the Africans 15 seats in a House of 65 members. Nkomo, Sithole, with Chitepo and Silundika as their advisers, initially accepted these proposals but later denounced them when the majority of the NDP rejected them.

— approve the appointment of a deputation to negotiate with Whitehead for their release.

In the event of his failure to accede, the TUC was to adopt a policy of non-cooperation.

The President of TUC, Reuben Jamela, generally conservative and moderate, seized the moment by accusing the regime of 'playing into the hands' of unemployment and challenged it to scrap the Native Labour Act which opened the way for cheap alien labour into the colony, and to abolish the Native Labour Supply Commission. George Gotoru, President of the Mashonaland Regional Council, was blunt:

We, in the TUC, have no more time for moderates. We are prepared from now on to take a tough line. We must remember at all times that we have no common problem with people whose colour of skin is their protection.¹⁰⁵

On April 29, the TUC held an emergency meeting of councillors who resolved to strike by September 1 if the demand for a minimum wage of \$25 failed.¹⁰⁶ They further agreed that no tax be paid until every African worker was in receipt of \$40 per month. Jamela once again lashed out at what he called a

farmer Government which . . . had no sympathy for the Africans as it was composed of Boers. He said all Boers in the colony should leave before the 1st of June, failing which they would be removed by force to South Africa and their property confiscated.¹⁰⁷

It was no coincidence that NDP was at the same time deciding not to pay tax until they had representation in the legislature. The security policemen agreed that 'it would appear that both the NDP and the TUC are eagerly searching for any excuse to foment trouble . . .'¹⁰⁸ A month later, they reported that 'Reuben Jamela, President of the SRATUC, was one of the speakers at the large NDP meeting at Harare on the 9th April and promised full TUC support for any action taken by NDP.'¹⁰⁹

The demand for a minimum wage of \$25 per month was based on a moderate budget of an African married man, with four children, and included the bare necessities of such a family.

This demand for a minimum wage was made against the official average minimum wage of \$7 per month, according to the Central Statistical Office

¹⁰⁵ F120/725/L343/2, Internal Security Weekly Reports, Secret Memo, Sept. 28, 1960.

¹⁰⁶ F120/725/L343/2, Internal Security Weekly Reports, Secret Memo, April, 1961.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

figures.¹¹⁰ The response of the regime to SRTUC letter was as expected extremely patronising arguing that £25 '... would be economically disastrous nationally and would most seriously injure the very section of the population it is designed to benefit'.¹¹¹

At its conference in July in Bulawayo, where 80-odd delegates met, two earlier resolutions were unanimously reaffirmed, namely, to support the NDP in its stand against the Southern Rhodesia Constitutional Proposals, and to demand a minimum wage of £25.¹¹² NDP leaders who were attending the conference made speeches defending the rights of trade unions.¹¹³ The militancy of the SRTUC was attracting a lot of support, and it was disclosed that its membership had increased from 14 000 to 22 000 since the March conference.¹¹⁴ These figures excluded the 12 500 members of RAWU, whose relationship with SRTUC was at this time obscure.¹¹⁵ The Congress also agreed that labour would give support to Nkomo's protest initiatives such as his national day of fasting on Occupation Day 1961. As soon as SRTUC ended, Bulawayo was hit by a two-day municipal workers' strike in August, led by Nehwati, which resulted in major improvements in pay and conditions from the Bulawayo City Council.¹¹⁶ In October and November 1961, another wave of 'wild-cat' strikes erupted in the industrial area, affecting many of Bulawayo's largest employers including Dunlop Tyres, Rhodesian Timbers and Rhodesian Wine Industries.¹¹⁷

During 1962, however, the close alliance of labour and nationalism was disrupted by two events. First, came the organisational crisis in labour resulting from the activities of the President of SRTUC, Reuben Jamela.¹¹⁸ In October, 1961, SRTUC was reported to have 30 000 members and as such was an important player in the colony's affairs.¹¹⁹ This crisis followed from its affiliation to the international labour movements. In 1960, SRTUC had affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), and as a result Jamela went abroad for the first

¹¹⁰ This was a paltry increase from Todd's January 1958 introduction of a \$6. 10s minimum wage, then regarded as outrageously radical by a substantial section of the White electorate. The result, as we now know, was that Todd lost the premiership.

¹¹¹ Confidential Comments by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Sept. 7, 1961.

¹¹² *Central African Examiner* (Dec., 1961).

¹¹³ *Drum* (Oct., 1961).

¹¹⁴ *Drum* (Aug., 1961).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Interview held with F. Nehwati, Bulawayo, Nov. 1, 1991. See also *Contact* (3 Dec., 1961).

¹¹⁷ *Central African Examiner* (Oct., Nov., 1961).

¹¹⁸ It must be underlined, however, that this does not mean we attribute the problems of the entire labour movement to one man but argue that he bore a large responsibility for those problems.

¹¹⁹ *Central African Examiner* (Oct., 1961).

time, on a trip sponsored by the ICFTU of three months to Tunisia and Brussels.¹²⁰ On that trip he came into contact and under the subsequent influence of Irving Brown, the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisation's expert on African labour.¹²¹ As a result of these contacts, Jamela was elected to the Executive Board of International Labour Organisation with Tom Mboya of Kenya, representing East, Central and Southern Africa.¹²² In 1961, Jamela attended America's Labour Day in New York, at the invitation of American Federation as one of the main speakers.¹²³ From then on he was mostly abroad.

These international contacts and trips resulted more in personal than in organisational gains. For example, ICFTU gave Jamela a grant of \$7 000 in 1960 to organise SRTUC but this money was banked in his personal account and was under his sole control.¹²⁴ The ICFTU and American Federation decided to ignore this anomaly because in Jamela they found an ally with whom they would recover what they had lost out in most post-colonial Africa to the communist World Federation of Trade Unions. In Jamela, they saw the last hope to keep African trade unions affiliated to ICFTU 'non-aligned', divorced from African nationalist parties and 'made safe for democracy' or, in other words, capitalist development.¹²⁵

The investment in Jamela soon bore fruits when he attended the All-Africa Trade Unions Federation meeting in Casablanca in May 1961. He clashed sharply with the Federation's chairman, John Tettegah of Ghana, who argued for non-alignment with either West or East. Jamela forcefully expressed his anti-communism, in favour of keeping and strengthening the ICFTU link. He argued that any country which is a member of the British Commonwealth was automatically on the side of the West, and therefore it was illogical to pretend to be neutral.¹²⁶ His standing in the West was greatly enhanced after Casablanca.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*; Hyslop, 'Trade unionism in the rise of African nationalism', 56.

¹²² AOH/63 'Interview held with Mr. Reuben Jamela by D. Murenji', Jan. 11 and Feb. 28, 1980.

¹²³ *Central African Examiner* (Oct., 1961).

¹²⁴ ORAL/228 'Interview held with Mr. I. T. Chigwendere by Brian Willian', London, Feb., 1978. The rationale for giving Jamela personal control of the SRTUC's funds was justified on the grounds that, in the event of the ban, SRTUC would escape the disaster that befell SRANC, when its assets and finances were seized by the state. That notwithstanding, it was still folly to entrust organisational funds to one man, and ICFTU chose not to listen to complaints from any trade unionists and Jamela felt that he therefore had the mandate to do as he pleased with the money.

¹²⁵ ORAL/228 'Interview held with Mr. I. T. Chigwendere by Brian Willian', London, Feb., 1978. It is no surprise that, according to Gary Busch, the British trade unions in Kenya and Malaya and the French unions in Indo-china were, at the same time, seeking 'to detach the trade unions from the nationalist struggle, or at least keep out the communist unions who threatened to take over the movements'. See G. K. Busch, *Political Currents in the International Trade Union Movement*, Vol. II, *The Third World* (London, Macmillan, 1983), 9.

¹²⁶ *Central African Examiner* (Oct., 1961).

The consequences of these influences showed very quickly in the SRTUC. First, Jamela started to hold unauthorised meetings with the Minister of Labour, A. E. Abrahamson, and decided not to brief the executive. As a result of these meetings, he unilaterally switched the Federation's policy of non-cooperation with the colony's industrial legislation to one of recommending that unions register under the ICA and work from within.¹²⁷ Jamela failed to inform the members of his switch. Second, in August 1961, Jamela again unilaterally withdrew a call for a general strike for a minimum wage of £25, apparently after a meeting between himself and Abrahamson, at which it is alleged that money changed hands.¹²⁸ Instead of trying to explain this decision, Jamela left for the USA. Third, Jamela instituted a highly centralised control of the SRTUC, which deprived the branches of any authority to make decisions. All decisions were taken at the central level by Jamela and the branches were expected to obey. This meant also that all funds were controlled entirely by Jamela at the central office.¹²⁹ Fourth, and most important, Jamela showed a lukewarm attitude towards the workers and the NDP. He refused to address striking workers at Dunlop in Bulawayo, in October, and in November he rejected an NDP call for a general strike in protest against the elections held under the 1961 constitution. Jamela is reported to have stated, 'I cannot destroy industry when at the same time I want the same industries to flourish so that my followers may get better and higher wages.'¹³⁰ Throughout 1961, there was a lot of anger amongst workers at the way Jamela was increasingly divorcing labour from the nationalist struggle.

In January 1962, Josiah Maluleke led an inevitable and long overdue split which saw the formation of the Southern Rhodesia African Trade Union Congress (SRATUC).¹³¹ Within months, SRATUC grew to be so powerful as to overshadow SRTUC and threaten the state which accused it of being communist.¹³² Unlike SRTUC, from its inception, SRATUC relied

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*; Brand, 'Politics and African trade unionism in Rhodesia', 96; Interview held with Chigwendere by Willan.

¹²⁸ Hyslop, 'Trade unionism in the rise of African nationalism', 57. It is important to underline that the decision to strike for a minimum wage of £25 was taken at a conference as already mentioned and it was critical that the conference rescinded it if they so felt.

¹²⁹ Interview held with Chigwendere, p.14; *Central African Examiner* (Oct., 1961).

¹³⁰ Brand, 'Politics and African trade unionism in Rhodesia', 95. Note that Jamela now was referring to his followers and to SRTUC followers. No wonder he did not care as to whether many unionists felt that their struggle was an integral part of a wider nationalist struggle.

¹³¹ *Central African Examiner* (Nov., 1963). Maluleke, founder and Secretary-General of the Commercial and General Workers' Union, later Commercial and Allied Workers' Union, was detained when SRANC was banned in 1959 as one of the 'hard-core' nationalists for nearly three years. On his release, he became Secretary-General of SRTUC. He strongly believed that unions had a dual role — to fight for the bread and butter on the one hand and to ensure African political advancement on the other.

¹³² ORAL/228, interview held with Chigwendere.

heavily on the support from its members. On the day of its formation, over £500 was collected in one evening from the workers and the money was used to buy a table, chairs, pay rent, etc.¹³³ Given the level of their wages, this was definitely a vote of confidence by the workers in the SRATUC. On May 14, 1962, SRATUC embarked on a successful strike in Salisbury in pursuit of the £25 minimum wage. The strike brought Salisbury to a standstill and caused a lot of publicity abroad because it coincided with a visit to Salisbury by the British Minister of Colonial Affairs, James Butler.¹³⁴

Following the banning of the NDP on December 8, 1962, ZAPU was formed. The relationship between labour and nationalism continued until the Rhodesian Front (RF) party came into power in 1962 under the leadership of Winston Field. The latter declared an interest to meet with the ZAPU officials to discuss future plans after their release from detention. The political leaders

consulted with trade unions and other party functionaries on the wisdom of meeting the RF government. At a meeting held at Chinamano's house, they arrived at the conclusion that such a meeting would be ill-advised. An alternative plan to go to Dar-es-Salaam to form a government in exile was adopted.¹³⁵

CONCLUSION

It has been argued in this article that throughout the period under discussion, workers and nationalist politicians worked closely initially to seek accommodation in the colonial political structures, and following the 1959 emergency they fought together to demand independence. However, in 1962 this alliance suffered a major setback on two fronts. First was the labour organisational crisis which resulted from the activities of the President of SRTUC, Reuben Jamela. Second, and perhaps more important, was the decision of the nationalists to embark on armed struggle. That decision basically shifted the terrain of the struggle from the urban to the rural areas and as a result labour was marginalised. Finally, in 1963, the alliance collapsed as the nationalist movement split into ZAPU and ZANU.

¹³³ *Ibid.* All property was taken by SRTUC and SRATUC had to start from scratch to buy its own furniture.

¹³⁴ *The Rhodesia Herald* (May 15, 1962).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*