



## South Africa and Zimbabwe

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The debate around South Africa-Zimbabwe relations has heated up since the expulsion of the COSATU mission to Zimbabwe. In a heated debate conducted through their media and the commercial media members of the ANC-COSATU-SACP alliance have expressed divergent viewpoints.

To help interested observers to identify the concerns and issues involved SARPN has compiled this collection of statements from the parties involved.

We will be updating this collection as the debate develops to give you easy access to information from all sides in the debate.

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## **The Zimbabwean crisis and our alliance**

1 November 2004, Umsebenzi Online

The deepening all-round crisis in Zimbabwe is having a devastating impact on the lives of millions of Zimbabwean workers, peasants, the youth and middle strata professionals of all kinds - teachers, nurses, police officers. The crisis has also spilled over into our country, with an estimated 3 million Zimbabwean economic refugees now living in South Africa.

Faced with this crisis, it should be admitted that we in the ANC-led alliance have not always found it easy to effectively position ourselves. Of course, Zimbabweans themselves must find their own solutions, but no-one doubts that South Africans – whether in government or in civil society – also have an important role to play. So why our difficulty?

In the first place, we in the South African liberation movement have a long, common history with the ruling party in Harare. In the late 1960s and through the 70s, the ANC's alliance was rather more with ZAPU than with the now dominant ZANU component of the present ruling party. But, after Zimbabwean independence in 1980, ZANU PF played an absolutely critical role in standing up to apartheid destabilisation throughout our region. Zimbabweans paid a high price for their principled position in the fight, for instance, against Pretoria's Renamo contras in Mozambique. The Zimbabwean CIO was instrumental in uncovering apartheid hit squad networks directed against ANC operatives, saving many lives. This history should never be forgotten.

It should also be remembered that, in the immediate post-independence period, the Zimbabwean liberation movement led the country on a significant social redistribution programme, with notable gains in education and health-care.

However, it is also incontrovertible that much of the present crisis is centred on ZANU PF itself, including internal stagnation, social distance from its historic mass base, factionalism, and serious policy mistakes. For the first decade of independence, the ruling party accommodated a capitalist growth path in the industrial and dominant commercial agriculture sectors, encouraging some capitalist indigenisation, while pursuing progressive welfarist redistributive policies for the majority: the so-called 'two economies' approach which essentially left the mainstream capitalist economy untouched. There were successes, as noted above, but by the mid-1990s the redistributive social programmes could no longer be sustained fiscally within the constraints of a dominant and largely untransformed capitalist economy. With a burgeoning debt, Zimbabwe was increasingly vulnerable to an externally enforced structural adjustment programme.

All of the leading ZANU PF cadres we have spoken to readily admit that their mid-1990s implementation of a structural adjustment programme was a disaster. Soaring food prices and mass retrenchments in the late 1990s resulted in a deepening divide between the party and the trade union movement. Social hardships also produced a groundswell of civil society protests in townships and rural villages. These all resulted in an opposition electoral project that emerged in 2000 and that continues to be grouped around the MDC.

President Mugabe himself has also spoken several times recently about the grave dangers of corruption, factionalism and the abuse of state office by leading cadres from within the ruling party. He himself has raised concerns about illegal land-grabbing by some of his own senior officials in the recent 'land reform' programme. Opposition politicians in Zimbabwe argue that these critiques are themselves selective and factional. South African comrades may argue that this is, or is not, the case – but either way it is obvious that there are major problems inside of the ruling party.

From an ANC-led alliance perspective, then, ZANU PF presents a complex challenge. The complexities have not been helped by a wider domestic setting in which certain opposition parties (notably the DA) have run a thinly disguised racist campaign. They have sought to use the Zimbabwean crisis as an example of what happens when 'THEY' (a black majority) take over. This is complemented by a nauseating barrage of white voices sermonising on Zimbabwe on radio phone-in programmes, and in this case the racism is even less disguised.

Various opposition forces in our society also eavesdrop on every internal ANC and alliance debate looking for signs of difference. Differences get played up by these would-be (and uninvited) mid-wives of an 'MDC' project in South Africa. They don't give a hoot about Zimbabwean peasants, or about South Africa trade unionists – but they need our alliance to break so that they can have a shot at an electoral breakthrough for themselves. At a popular level within our country and movement, there has often been a knee-jerk back-lash against these currents: 'If Tony Leon insults Robert Mugabe, then Robert Mugabe must be a super-hero.' All of this has muddled the waters a great deal in South Africa.

We should, of course, not allow any of this to deflect us from a sober, thoughtful and comradely intra-Alliance analysis and discussion of Zimbabwe. But it is possible that we have not always succeeded in doing this. Nor have we given ourselves time to debate the Zimbabwean situation fully in the alliance and reach a common approach.

Yet another complicating factor has been the role played by external forces, notably the UK government. Although there have been signs of a certain toning down of rhetoric from these quarters, earlier loose talk about a 'regime change' agenda from the Blair government was certainly not helpful. We only have to look at Iraq to understand that long-distance, externally-imposed regime changes are inevitably a disaster for the local people and the region in which they are located.

It is against this general background that last week's heavy-handed expulsion of a COSATU fact-finding delegation to Zimbabwe occurred. The expulsion, defying a Zimbabwean court order, resulted in various reverberations back here in SA. All of this has once more underlined the need for our Alliance to discuss and harmonise perspectives on Zimbabwe. It is essential we develop complementary analyses, strategies and programmes of action to ensure that we assist as best as possible a resolution of the crisis in our neighbouring country.

#### *The SA Government approach to the Zimbabwean crisis*

We believe that the following are the main features of the South African government approach to the Zimbabwe crisis:

1. While the crisis in Zimbabwe has multiple dimensions, the critical blockage at present is political in character. A political resolution as such will not resolve all the other economic, social and moral problems, but it is the precondition for being able to make any serious headway. The SACP agrees.
2. Based on the assumption of 1 above, the South African government has, with the (apparent) concurrence of the two major political protagonists in Zimbabwe, identified free and fair elections, whose outcome will be accepted by both major parties, as the key unblocking mechanism. The assumption is that after such elections, and regardless of who wins, the political conditions will have been created for some kind of patriotic, nationally unifying developmental project that addresses the all-round crisis. The SACP believes that this MIGHT well be the best hope that Zimbabweans have. Therefore we believe that every effort must be made to give this option a chance – without necessarily foregoing other considerations, and certainly without being over-optimistic about the short-term prospects of success.
3. The South African government, again with the (apparent) concurrence of ZANU PF and MDC has identified a three-step process to unblock the political impasse and to arrive at conditions for free and fair elections:
  - 3.1 negotiations between ZANU-PF and MDC to agree on the measures necessary for the holding of such elections, including agreement on constitutional reforms to underpin such elections and to ensure stability beyond elections;
  - 3.2 the phased implementation of these agreed pre-electoral measures and constitutional amendments and other confidence building steps;
  - 3.3 the actual holding of parliamentary elections.

Given our unqualified agreement on 1 above, the SACP believes that this 3-step process is absolutely essential if elections as envisaged under 2 are to be realised. We believe that all progressive South African formations, and especially our alliance forces, should be very firm, constructive and focused in supporting attempts to realise this 3-step process.

### *The SADC protocols*

The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, which were agreed upon in Mauritius in August this year, have now added a very important additional reference point. These are the basic principles to which SADC governments (including the Zimbabwean government) have solemnly committed themselves. In warmly welcoming these protocols, we need to guard against two potential dangers:

- the protocols must not be seen as ‘ideal’ objectives to be approximated as best as possible in actual election processes. They are the minimum requirements for free and fair elections, and paragraph 7.1 commits SADC governments to implement them ‘scrupulously’.
- the protocols do not now render unnecessary the country-specific pre-electoral agreements and measures as envisaged in the 3-step process noted above. The protocols are an important bench-mark endorsed by all SADC governments, they are not an implementation programme as such.

### *But are free and fair elections in Zimbabwe actually a realistic short-term prospect?*

The 2000 launch of MDC to contest (successfully) a constitutional referendum, and then (nearly successfully) parliamentary elections in 2000, and subsequent presidential elections in 2002, has resulted in a Zimbabwean political reality that is very (perhaps excessively) focused on ELECTIONS.

(It should be noted that this electoral focus is now considerably at variance with the popular mood within Zimbabwe, if the comprehensive polling conducted by Professor Chavunduka is anything to go by. According to his recent polling the great majority of ordinary Zimbabweans, across the political divide, are thoroughly weary of and apprehensive about any forthcoming elections.)

On the side of the MDC, the very rapid rise to electoral prominence has meant that social movement, trade union and other energies have been considerably focused on an electoral project, on winning elections, on contesting in court the results of elections, and on preparing the ground for different elections. Leading MDC MPs are styled as ‘shadow ministers’, and there has been a palpable sense that everything will change at the ‘next elections’. In a sense the strategy has been regime change through the ballot box.

On the side of ZANU PF the electoral rise of the MDC has led to an ever-narrowing laager mentality. Conspiracies are seen (or constructed) everywhere. The hastily launched land reform programme was less about land reform, and more about seeking to consolidate the ZANU PF apparatus and its electoral base. The unleashing of youth militias and other violence is also very much based on electoral calculations, with heightened violence occurring around by-elections, etc. Anti-democratic steps – tightening up on media laws, outlawing newspapers, the prosecution of the MDC leadership – are all also driven essentially by electoral calculations. ZANU PF is less and less a liberation movement confidently fostering a progressive hegemony in its own country and in the region, and more and more a repressive machine focused narrowly on holding on to power.

The trajectory of the MDC and the trajectory of ZANU PF over the last few years have tended to reproduce each other. The 2002 presidential election, which our own South African alliance had fervently hoped would lay the basis for a resolution of the crisis (regardless of the winner), has itself become fuel to the fire. For all of these reasons, the SACP believes that while pushing firmly for democratic elections in Zimbabwe, we must be sober in our expectations. There is very little to suggest that ZANU PF, in particular, is seriously and confidently preparing to lay the foundations for a democratic process. Almost all of the indicators (including the expulsion of Cosatu) are pointing in the opposite direction for the moment.

In these conditions, the worst possible option we could take as the Alliance in South Africa would be a 'pragmatic' acceptance of ZANU PF's unilaterally-declared March 2005 election date, and a 'pragmatic' making the best of a bad deal in the hope that somehow, after a flawed election, a victorious ZANU PF would be more magnanimous and a reduced MDC would be more realistic. In a way, this would be to re-play the illusions of the 2002 presidential election. Such an election would not lay the basis for any sustainable resolution of the crisis. It would nullify the progress made within SADC on democratisation principles, and it would also contribute to an ongoing stagnation of progressive analysis and debate on Zimbabwe in our own country.

### *ZANU PF*

In the view of the SACP, the crisis in Zimbabwe is considerably rooted in the social reality of the class force dominant in the leadership echelons of the ruling party. This class force is a bureaucratic capitalist class reliant on its monopoly of the state machinery for its own social reproduction. This class force, dominant in ZANU PF ruling circles, is unable to provide a coherent and hegemonic strategic leadership capable of beginning to address Zimbabwe's political, moral, economic and social crisis.

Indeed, in many respects, it thrives (at least over the short-term) in conditions of crisis, using its access to state power for land grabs, and currency and other speculative activities. It is also able to use state power as an insulation against the terrible impact the crisis is having on most other strata. But, unlike other fractions of the bourgeoisie, it is also incapable of surrendering direct control over state power. This double-bind, an inability to constructively and strategically use political leadership on the one hand, and an inability to cede some bureaucratic dominance, on the other, lies at the heart of the present blockage.

There are, from time to time, signs that there are more far-sighted groupings within ZANU-PF leadership, who are prepared, for instance, to explore the possibility of some kind of patriotic power-sharing deal with the MDC. But, at least for the moment, these elements are easily outflanked within the leadership dynamics of the ruling party – it is hard to sell the idea of ceding some power, when that means that some in the ruling party will have to do the ceding.

Having said this, the SACP believes that there is no solution to the Zimbabwe crisis, at least within any foreseeable future, without ZANU-PF...(or, for that matter, without the MDC). This means that there needs to be ongoing honest, robust engagement with ZANU-PF from the side of South Africa, and particularly by those forces most capable of exerting a positive influence. Challenges that arise include:

- what can be done to limit and indeed reverse the economic advantages to a bureaucratic bourgeoisie of the ongoing crisis?
- how can significant sectors of the ZANU-PF leadership be weaned away from the unsustainable (in the medium-term) laager into which they are increasingly retreating?
- ZANU-PF might actually have lost its hegemony and therefore have to negotiate with all those forces that are disillusioned with its rule. The Cosatu EXPULSION might well have closed people-to-people contact between Zimbabwean mass formations and South African progressive forces thus running the danger of isolating our government in seeking our solution to the impasse.

### *The role of the SA government and the Alliance*

Progressive South African formations need to premise their engagement on the basic principle that Zimbabweans have the prime responsibility for finding their own solutions. There are also no easy solutions. However, we do have a responsibility to Zimbabwe, and we do have a responsibility to our own national democratic struggle.

Our solidarity towards Zimbabwe needs to be multi-pronged. Government to government, party to party, and people to people engagements are all part of what is required. We also have a responsibility for the estimated 3 million Zimbabweans living in our country, many as a direct result of the present crisis.

In developing our solidarity, we must guard against expecting our government to behave like a trade union movement...or COSATU to behave like a government. We must also ensure that we do not allow tactical differences within our Alliance, for instance, to cloud and confuse us, and to become the main issue to the detriment of pursuing a converging strategic objective in Zimbabwe. The crisis is not in differences of tactic within our Alliance. The crisis is in Zimbabwe.

We should agree:

- to pursue and support as a priority the SA government's 3-step approach to securing free and fair elections in Zimbabwe;
- that success in this regard will require engagement but also pressure on the relevant formations within Zimbabwe;
- that in engaging with all formations within Zimbabwe, different components of our alliance will have better prospects in different directions. We should appreciate this, while not allowing the differences in Zimbabwe to become strategic differences amongst us back at home.
- that, while free and fair elections in Zimbabwe are probably the most likely breakthrough possibility, solidarity and engagement must not be narrowly confined to an electoral objective. Which is to say, amongst other things...
- anti-democratic measures and human rights abuses in Zimbabwe – regardless of the source – must be clearly condemned by our entire alliance. We need to send a clear signal, not just to Zimbabwe, but to our own mass base about the moral and democratic foundations of our own revolution.

### **We are not quiet diplomats**

Zwelinzima Vavi, COSATU general secretary  
5 November 2004

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) is part of the liberation movement, whose record of struggle against apartheid and colonialism at home and abroad is well documented. It has always been politically close to Zanu-PF, but recent events in Zimbabwe have opened up a debate in Cosatu as to whether that country does not now represent a typical example of a derailed revolution.

Cosatu has been forced to intervene and publicly criticise the Zimbabwean government after it trampled on fundamental worker rights. We will not keep mum when freedom does not lead to respect for workers and human rights. Liberation must mean a decent life for all, not a selected few.

I am proud of the 13 brave members of the Cosatu mission who were deported from Zimbabwe last week. They went through 24 hours of hell — arrested, shoved on and off buses, threatened, physically and mentally abused, deprived of food and finally dumped at Beitbridge at 5am.

But they succeeded brilliantly in their mission — to highlight what sort of society Zimbabwe has become. The mission's short visit proved beyond doubt that this is a society where people's human rights and civil liberties are being crushed. Our members' ill treatment and nightmare lasted for a day. For Zimbabwean trade unionists, activists and the people as a whole, it lasts 365 days a year.

In support of our comrades in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), we have sent numerous letters to the Zimbabwe authorities, complaining about restrictive laws, police attacks on union meetings and the arrest of ZCTU leaders. They have all been unanswered.

Our national congress held last year resolved to send a fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe to get a full, first-hand picture of the conditions under which our sister organisation, the ZCTU, operates. The aim was to engage constructively with the broadest range of representative organisations, including the government and ruling party, so that we could have a more comprehensive picture of the country's challenges.

The Zimbabwean government squandered a golden opportunity to put across its side of the story and get Cosatu as a partner to engage constructively with the situation there in search of a solution to its mounting political and economic problems.

The collapse of Zimbabwe's political system and economy would have profound implications for all countries and peoples of Southern Africa. Already none can deny the effects of that impact.

So why would a government that claims to be progressive and revolutionary feel threatened by 13 people with writing pads and pens from a left-wing revolutionary trade union movement with whom it shared the same trenches in the struggle against the Ian Smith and apartheid regimes?

The only reason the Zimbabwean government objected to this mission was fear of what it might uncover. So, first it deported our members, and then wheeled out Jonathan Moyo's propaganda machine to make absurd allegations that Cosatu was acting on behalf of Tony Blair, that the mission was 'an act of aggression against the country' and that Cosatu were 'agents provocateurs whose agenda and views on Zimbabwe are similar to the country's archenemies'.

Moyo's level of buffoonery is such that no one can take him seriously. What is frightening, however, is that the levels of paranoia in the government have reached dangerous proportions. Government leaders have taken refuge in, and are victims of, their own propaganda.

Any person who is critical of their awful human rights track record is casually labelled an agent of Blair or Western interests. Anyone critical of their policies that have resulted in record unemployment and hunger is seen to be working with the enemies of Zimbabwe. Hitler, the master propagandist from whom Moyo must certainly have learned his tricks, believed in repeating a lie frequently enough until it settles as the truth in the minds of ordinary people.

Moyo's aim is to get ordinary Zimbabweans to be tolerant of the general assaults on people's civil liberties, on the spurious grounds that it is all done to protect Zimbabwe from its mythical enemies.

Unfortunately, the majority of people in Zimbabwe will have read nothing about the real reasons for the Cosatu mission, because media freedom has been virtually snuffed out and only the government's views are published. But truth will out and President Robert Mugabe and Moyo will learn that 'you cannot fool all the people all the time'.

President Thabo Mbeki, at the launch of the African Union in 2002, said 'we must mobilise all segments of civil society, including women, youth, labour and the private sector to act together to maximise our impact and change our continent for the better'.

Cosatu is playing the role he demanded — mobilising in support of human rights. The objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) and the AU, which Cosatu shares, must not be left only to the political leaders. Nepad must be propelled from below. The concept of partnership should not be interpreted to mean singing praises and keeping mum when things are obviously going wrong. Ordinary workers and citizens must be mobilised to demand their freedoms and a better life for all. Cosatu's campaigns should be seen as complementing the work of governments who use diplomatic channels to get all African states to act in conformity with the objectives of Nepad.

Cosatu supports attempts to find a diplomatic solution to Zimbabwe's problems, but that does not mean that we must suspend pledging and acting in solidarity with our ZCTU colleagues until there is a diplomatic breakthrough.

A diplomatic breakthrough can only happen when Mugabe is forced to change by a mass movement from below, by the Zimbabwean people, assisted by a campaign of international solidarity action, to compel him to restore human rights, repeal repressive laws and allow free and fair elections. This is exactly how we defeated the tyranny of Smith and apartheid. Trade unions can only survive if they receive and provide solidarity. Cosatu will not flinch from its international duty to organise activity in solidarity with its comrades in the ZCTU and the people of Zimbabwe.

We have called for an internal debate on how we should take forward this struggle, which may include protests at border gates and other, harsher forms of solidarity action. For this we need no permission from our government or other tripartite alliance formations. While we need to coordinate our actions so that we can reinforce one another, we cannot afford to suspend acting in solidarity with other workers until diplomatic engagement delivers.

## **Finding facts about Zimbabwe**

ANC Today  
5 November 2004

A COSATU 'fact finding mission' arrived in Zimbabwe on Monday 25 October. This was after the Government of Zimbabwe had informed COSATU that, 'the mission is not acceptable', and asked that the members of the delegation should be informed 'in time that the mission has been called off.' Since then, the fate of this mission has received saturation media coverage.

In the light of all this, many members of our movement have sought clarification from the ANC leadership about this whole affair. We have therefore informed the COSATU leadership that this edition of *ANC Today* will carry an article on this affair to respond to the queries of our members and supporters.

But before we get into the substance of this matter, we must address some misconceptions that have gained some currency arising from COSATU's 'fact finding mission' to Zimbabwe.

One of these is that in one way or another, the confrontation between COSATU and the Zimbabwe Government has complicated or would complicate the relations between the ANC and our Government on one hand, and ZANU-PF and the Zimbabwe Government on the other. Whether this is a mere prediction or the expression of a wish, the reality is that COSATU's 'fact finding' mission will have no effect whatsoever on these relations.

Here are some of the public comments made in this regard. *ZimOnline* said 'There are fears that the COSATU visit could have hardened the ruling ZANU PF's attitude towards Mbeki's efforts to find a solution to the crisis'. *Business Day* said 'that the row could escalate and undermine government's efforts to mediate in the political crisis in Zimbabwe'.

The *Sunday Times* said: 'A spat between Cosatu and the Zimbabwean government could be a serious embarrassment for South African President Thabo Mbeki, who has so far espoused a policy of "quiet diplomacy" with his country's northern neighbour.' The BBC said 'the action will cause embarrassment for the South African government'.

Another view that has been peddled around is that this episode reflects divisions within our movement. *Business Day* reported that 'Senior African National Congress (ANC) officials were locked in a meeting all afternoon yesterday, discussing efforts to control the damage caused by the deportation of a Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) delegation visiting Zimbabwe on a fact-finding mission. It also wants to preempt a possible fallout among the tripartite alliance partners.'

There was no such meeting!

The *Voice of America* reported that, 'the incident has exposed a rift within the ruling party on how the Zimbabwe situation should be handled.'

It quoted one Adam Habib of the Human Sciences Research Council as saying: 'There is clearly tension within the ANC itself about whether that (quiet diplomacy) is an appropriate strategy. And there have been discussions and debates within the party itself on that matter. Now I think the ANC is of course not in a position to publicly chart a different route to government, or at least to the presidency and foreign affairs, but



COSATU is. It has a relative greater degree of autonomy and it has been very vocal right through the last two or three years about its opposition to Mugabe and what Mugabe's been up to.'

We would assume that Mr Habib, described as a 'political analyst', would know that as in any other democracy, our Government implements policies decided by the ruling party, the ANC. However, he chose to pretend that the Government decides policy for the ANC. This was to make the suggestion that except for its obligatory loyalty to the Government, which in this instance he reduces to 'the presidency and foreign affairs', the ANC would agree with COSATU 'about its opposition to Mugabe and what Mugabe's been up to'.

Mr Habib overreached himself in his effort to peddle the untruth that obviously serves some people's interests, that our movement is divided about our relations with Zimbabwe. It is clear that in this case, as with others in the past, the wish is father to the thought.

But perhaps we should criticise ourselves that we paid no attention to the predictions about divisions in our movement and so on, made more than a year ago in 2003 by the privately-owned 'The Financial Gazette' of Zimbabwe. In its 26 June 2003 edition, this journal said:

President Thabo Mbeki's much criticised delicate foreign policy on Zimbabwe goes under a litmus test with the powerful and militant Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) positioning itself to aggressively push the South African leader to force President Robert Mugabe, currently balancing on a political knife-edge, from power and call for an interim government as a precursor for the ushering in of a new political dispensation.

The move by the South African labour union, a key ally of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) during the liberation of the country, was unanimously agreed on May 28 and 29, at a meeting convened in Johannesburg to actively support calls by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and other stakeholders, "for an interim government in Zimbabwe and the drafting of a new constitution on the basis of which fresh elections should be conducted.

According to confidential information obtained by this paper, Cosatu's leadership resolved at their Johannesburg meeting that they would shortly be sending a fact-finding mission into Zimbabwe comprising of all its affiliates, before cracking its whip on Mbeki to deal with Zimbabwe's crisis and force a re-run of Zimbabwe's presidential election. This follows their meeting with the ZCTU in Johannesburg last month.

Sources from Johannesburg indicated that Zimbabwe's issue, which had been simmering under within the ANC's ruling block, could boil over, exposing that the alliance has not been singing from the same song sheet over efforts to curtail a long-standing crisis in Zimbabwe.

President Mbeki has come in for a flak over his silent diplomacy at a time there has been a chorus for a radical push to effect a regime change in Zimbabwe...

The decision by Cosatu, which was taken by its executive committee, is expected to break the crucial alliance between Mbeki's government and Cosatu. Cosatu's leadership is intent on taking Mbeki hostage over his quiet diplomacy on Zimbabwe, which has been widely criticised as ineffective in dealing with the country's political and economic crisis.

Cosatu will lobby the South African government to pressurise President Mugabe..to accede to the demands by the trade union movement for democracy, restoration of rule of law and free political activity,' the Cosatu executive declared in minutes obtained by The Financial Gazette.

The Cosatu executive said it had a 'historical duty' to help find a solution to Zimbabwe's problems and ensure democracy and free political activity.

The resolution that was taken by Cosatu was a result of our meeting with them last month. After the meeting that's when they came with that position and I must say we are very much humbled

by their response since we come from the family of both regional and international labour unions', said Wellington Chibhebhe, the secretary general of the ZCTU.

*The Financial Gazette* published this report 16 months ago. We will now comment on what happened 16 months after the report was published, when COSATU sent the fact finding mission to Zimbabwe predicted by *The Financial Gazette*.

On 11 October this year, the General Secretary of COSATU wrote to President Mugabe. He said 'COSATU in its eighth National Congress held in September 2003, decided to send a fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe'. He told President Mugabe that the mission would arrive in Zimbabwe 14 days from the date of his letter, "on the week of the 25-29 October 2004. The delegation will consist of at least one person per each of our 21 affiliated unions plus two officials from the trade union federation - COSATU.'

He said the mission would be hosted by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). He requested that President Mugabe should 'grant an audience to our delegation', during the period it had fixed for its visit. He also said that the delegation also wanted to see Zimbabwe Minister of Labour, Paul Mangwana, and requested that President Mugabe should assist the delegation to meet the Minister.

He informed President Mugabe that the delegation would also meet 'the leadership of key political formations and major civil society formations', to gain 'a full view of the political and socio economic developments in Zimbabwe'.

He went on to say: 'We would appreciate a list of organisations that fall into this ('key political and civil society') category that you recommend we should also meet.' He wrote that otherwise COSATU was making its own arrangements to meet 'other stakeholders'.

He requested President Mugabe to 'revert back to us about suitable dates and times for a meeting'. He went further to advise President Mugabe 'to direct all enquiries to our International Relations Secretary, Simon Boshielo in our head office or alternatively at.(mobile)'.

Presumably COSATU expected that President Mugabe, a Head of State, would accept that the situation in Zimbabwe justified that a South African trade union federation should send a political fact finding mission, whose fact finding activities he should facilitate, and with which he should then communicate, through its International Relations Secretary, to indicate:

- when he would meet the COSATU delegation;
- what arrangements he had made for the delegation to meet the Minister of Labour; and
- which other organisations the delegation should meet.

It is our firm view that under any circumstances, this approach to any Head of State, including President Mugabe, was astounding. The contempt for a Head of State, a sovereign government and state it communicates could not have created a climate conducive to serious discussions. The best that could have been expected as a response to the letter was no response.

However, the Government of Zimbabwe humbled itself to respond to the letter of the General Secretary of COSATU. Quite appropriately in the circumstances we will describe, the respondent was the Permanent Secretary (Director General) for Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare.

The first point the Permanent Secretary made in his letter is that the ZCTU, COSATU's counterpart and host, only communicated to the Zimbabwe Minister of Labour about the then projected COSATU visit, and the programme of the mission, in a letter dated 19 October 2004. Evidently, the ZCTU indicated that the COSATU mission would be in Zimbabwe from 24 October, 5 days after the date of the letter of the ZCTU to its own Minister of Labour.

The Permanent Secretary concluded his letter as follows: 'In view of the foregoing, the mission is not acceptable and COSATU is advised to liaise with Hon. Mdladlana (the South African Minister of Labour) with a view to revisiting the original agenda. In order to avoid inconveniencing your members who are

supposed to travel to Harare on Sunday the 24th October 2004, you are kindly advised to inform them in time that the mission has been called off. By a copy of this letter the ZCTU Secretary-General is advised of the position.'

Much has been made of this advice in the aftermath of the termination of the stay of the COSATU mission and its transportation out of Zimbabwe back to South Africa. The central allegation that is made is that this advice, and what then happened to the COSATU delegation, demonstrated the anti-democratic and 'brutally repressive' nature of the Zimbabwe Government.

Accordingly, all and sundry, from the South African Communist Party to the Democratic Alliance of Tony Leon, and others in between, have hailed COSATU and the COSATU fact finding mission as outstanding combatants for the liberation of the people of Zimbabwe from tyranny.

However, to entrench the culture of truthfulness in the conduct of public affairs, it is necessary that we indicate some of the contents of the October 21 letter written by the Zimbabwe Permanent Secretary to the General Secretary of COSATU. He said:

Let me start by pointing out that the solidarity arrangement(s) between ZCTU and COSATU are not in dispute. I wish to draw your attention to the processes agreed upon by the Social Partners of both Zimbabwe and South Africa in June 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland, with a view to dealing with the political dimension of Labour in Zimbabwe.

Mr E. Patel of your organisation's International Relations is fully aware of what was agreed upon in June 2003. Social Partners in South Africa being coordinated by Hon M.M.S. Mdladlana, Minister of Labour, agreed to engage their Zimbabwe counterparts in order to discuss the political element of Labour in Zimbabwe.

In line with what was agreed, Hon Mdladlana, in November 2003 invited his Zimbabwe counterpart together with representatives of ZCTU and EMCOZ to a two-day meeting in South Africa. Both COSATU and Business South Africa were involved in the organisation of the planned meeting. The Government of Zimbabwe was to meet the expenses. However ZCTU refused to proceed to South Africa. As a result the meeting was called off, notwithstanding getting the invitation directly from COSATU.

Accordingly, any proposal by COSATU to visit Zimbabwe on a mission to engage Zimbabwean stakeholders outside the realm of Employment and Labour should be in the context of an agreed framework.

The proposed meeting(s) with ZANU PF and MDC officials (and other organisations 'involved in the political discourse of Zimbabwe') demonstrate the political nature of the mission to the extent that it has to be within an agreed framework of dealing with the political dimension of Labour within the two countries. In view of the foregoing, the mission is not acceptable and COSATU is advised to liaise with Hon Mdladlana with a view to revisiting the original agenda.

COSATU decided to ignore this letter. It insisted on its right to visit Zimbabwe regardless of the wishes of the Government of that country, and the right of that Government, like any other, to decide which foreigners to admit into the country.

What all this amounts to is the following:

- During the annual 2003 International Labour Conference in Geneva, the South African and Zimbabwe social partners - government, employers and labour – agreed to work together in a Joint Tripartite Commission.
- Among other things, this Commission would address the political dimension of labour in Zimbabwe'.
- In this context, the Zimbabwe Government reaffirmed its respect for the right of COSATU to act in solidarity with the ZCTU.

- The first post-Geneva meeting of the Commission convened by the South African social partners, and scheduled to take place in South Africa in November last year, failed to take place because ZCTU refused to attend.
- When the Zimbabwe Government received the letter from the General Secretary of COSATU, it said that because of the obviously political nature of COSATU's fact-finding mission, it would be proper that, as visualised in the Geneva understanding, the mission should be organised through the Joint Tripartite Commission.
- It therefore advised COSATU to contact the South African coordinator of the South African social partners, Minister Mdladlana, to use the mechanism provided by the Joint Commission to arrange COSATU's visit to Zimbabwe.
- In response, COSATU flatly refused to use this agreed mechanism and afterwards said it was 'absolutely right to insist that (it) did not require government permission to conduct the mission'.
- In the circumstance that COSATU refused to use the agreed process to enable it to engage the political situation in Zimbabwe, thus dismissing any interaction with the Government of Zimbabwe on this process matter, a confrontation between COSATU and the Zimbabwe Government became inevitable.

Consistent with what was reported by the 'The (Zimbabwe) Financial Gazette' in June 2003, COSATU has now said that it will 'campaign for the restoration of democracy and for free and fair elections (in Zimbabwe).'

It said it 'believes that despite its early forced departure, the mission achieved its goal'. It 'congratulate(d) its members in the fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe for their heroism and commitment.' It 'thank(ed) all those, in South Africa and around the world, who have supported the mission and shown their solidarity.'

Among those who showed this solidarity were the SACP, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the DA.

The SACP said 'the South African Communist Party (SACP) is outraged and angered by the rounding off and expulsion of a COSATU delegation by the Zimbabwean government from Harare. With this act, it is time now that South Africa's workers intensify their solidarity with the workers and poor of Zimbabwe and support for the struggle for the democratisation of Zimbabwe.'

The ICFTU said 'the ICFTU-AFRO condemns in the strongest possible terms the expulsion of the COSATU mission. This strong-arm tactic must be viewed in the light of the deteriorating political situation on the eve of the parliamentary elections early next year. ICFTU-AFRO is concerned that violence and intimidation against opposition and the trade union movement is likely to rear its ugly head bringing into question the fairness of the electoral process.'

For the DA, its parliamentary Chief Whip, Douglas Gibson, said, 'For once COSATU is setting a good example. If only President Mbeki and the ANC would take a leaf out of COSATU's book and adopt a more robust approach, we might soon see a resolution of the Zimbabwean problem.'

In this regard, the Deputy General Secretary of COSATU, Bheki Ntshalintshali, said: 'The ANC and the government have their own ideas on how the Zimbabwean crisis should be dealt with. However, we do not agree with them.'

In another statement, COSATU said, 'We accept that the ANC government shares with COSATU the common goal of restoring democracy in Zimbabwe, but that it is pursuing a different route from COSATU towards achieving this goal.' For these reasons, COSATU has said it saw no reason and was not obliged to consult either the ANC or Government about its Zimbabwe project.

Expressing its 'own ideas', the ANC and our Government will continue to engage ZANU PF, the MDC, the Government of Zimbabwe and other representative organisations of the people of Zimbabwe, as they have done for some years already.

With no hidden agenda in this regard, we will continue to interact with the Zimbabwe leadership, our own people and others throughout the world, convinced that the solution to the problems of Zimbabwe lies in the hands of the people of Zimbabwe.

Our task is to work honestly and inclusively with all the leaders of Zimbabwe to support them as they strive to solve these problems, avoiding any action that might suggest an arrogant superiority on our part, over the people of Zimbabwe.

We will continue to support the Joint Tripartite Commission formed by the South African and Zimbabwe social partners in 2003 with the involvement of all three of our country's trade union federations, and urge the social partners to use this institution to assist the people of Zimbabwe to overcome their challenges. We will also continue to work with all representative organisations of our own people, together to contribute whatever we can to a bright future for Zimbabwe, consistent with the wishes of the people of Zimbabwe. We fully support the statement made by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs that 'The South African government accepts that Zimbabwe is an independent, sovereign state that has an inalienable right to determine and to apply its immigration legislation as it may deem appropriate and in its own interest.'

### **COSATU's mission to Zimbabwe**

COSATU

6 November 2004

The Congress of South African Trade Unions notes the continuing debate around its fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe. COSATU reaffirms its support for all attempts to reach a diplomatic solution to the problems of Zimbabwe and acknowledges the sincerity and integrity of the SA government and the African National Congress in their efforts to achieve this.

Diplomacy however must be supplemented by mobilisation of the people to change their own circumstances. Diplomacy has its role and place, but we cannot afford to place all our eggs in the basket of diplomacy. Mass mobilisation and solidarity have an equally important role. The challenge is to coordinate these efforts to reinforce one another and not use one to the exclusion of the other.

It is in this vein that COSATU actively seeks to play a role in the unfolding process of Africa's development and democratisation. COSATU has a right and duty to make its own intervention in pursuit of that goal, and to act in solidarity with our fellow trade unionists in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). The federation itself is a product of international solidarity and understands the value of support from the international community.

Apartheid South Africa would not have been brought down in 1994 purely through diplomatic pressure. Apartheid was ended firstly by the struggle of the mass liberation movement, assisted by an international solidarity campaign. While Zimbabwe is not of course equal to apartheid South Africa, there is still a need to express our solidarity with our fellow workers in their fight for trade union rights and for political space.

COSATU has consistently taken a similar view of attacks on trade unions rights in Swaziland, Nigeria and other places and will continue to do so. In the case of Swaziland, we organised a blockade of the border with South Africa, in support of human rights and democracy on no less than four occasions, with the last blockade lasting two full days. The COSATU General Secretary was also unceremoniously booted out of Swaziland at one stage. He is practically banned from Swaziland. This has been widely reported in the South African media.

Recently we organised demonstrations in protest against President Olusegun Obasanjo's attempts to de-unionise Nigeria and muzzle the voice of labour through de-registration of the Nigerian Labour Congress.

Throughout our history we have consistently embarked on similar actions, including in support of the people of Burma, Palestine, Cuba, Colombia, etc. We have on some occasions paid a heavy price for this consistency. We are determined to do so in the future. We will not be intimidated or blackmailed into becoming something else that we have never been. COSATU cannot be held responsible for either the ignorance of those who suggest we have suddenly woken up to target Zimbabwe nor we can be made to account for selective amnesia of others.

Nor can we be held responsible for views expressed by the media, opposition parties and political commentators, in response to the expulsion of the COSATU mission. Most of the time our views are freely available in our public positions and resolutions.

The aim of our mission was not to undermine the Zimbabwean government, nor to embarrass the ANC or President Mbeki. We reject any insinuation that COSATU seeks to unseat the ZANU-PF government. All we have called for is free political activity, repeal of repressive legislation and ending of routine harassment of trade unionists.

It is also preposterous to say that the expulsion of the mission somehow suggests a split in the alliance or that COSATU both deserved and invited expulsion from the Zimbabwe government.

In the most transparent manner, we sent a fact-finding mission in order to appraise ourselves of the developments in that country. We sought to meet with all stakeholders and it is unfortunate that the Zimbabwean government chose not to meet with COSATU.

If other groups such as the DA opportunistically derive political capital out of the COSATU mission, this should not serve as grounds to delegitimise our position.

The letter to COSATU from the government of Zimbabwe stated that the mission was "not appropriate" because it bypassed a process agreed upon between the governments, labour and business leaders of South Africa and Zimbabwe which was to address the political dimension of labour in Zimbabwe.

An article in ANC Today refers to this as a 'Joint Tripartite Commission' between South Africa and Zimbabwe. But in fact no such structure exists. This untruth is being peddled in order to create an impression that COSATU and the ZCTU failed to use existing structures to address their concerns and therefore had other intentions when it sent the mission to Zimbabwe.

The facts of the matter can be corroborated by the ZCTU and the Zimbabwe and South African employer representatives. They are that at the 2003 ILO annual conference, after an acrimonious debate in plenary where Zimbabwe was being accused of violating workers rights, in a totally informal gathering, literally standing around, the South African Minister of Labour suggested to the COSATU leadership (Ebrahim Patel and Alina Rantsolase) who were with a business representative (Mr Bokie Botha) that South Africa's tripartite parties should initiate a more constructive engagement between the parties in Zimbabwe. Both the ZCTU and the Minister of Labour of Zimbabwe agreed that a meeting involving all the tripartite parties of both countries could be held.

Since then a meeting to facilitate the meeting referred to above was held in South Africa at the end of September 2003 between the Minister of Labour of South Africa, Ebrahim Patel representing labour and Bokie Botha representing South African employers. An attempt was then made to convene the meeting for 3 November 2003.

This did not materialise not because the ZCTU 'refused' to travel to South Africa but because the ZCTU genuinely was unable to make the date. It proposed alternative dates to the Ministry of Labour in Zimbabwe. In the 2004 ILO Conference the Minister of Labour of South Africa convened another meeting, now with the President of NACTU, Joseph Maqhekeni, and General Secretary of the ZCTU, Wellington Chibebe, in attendance. This was another attempt to resuscitate the initiative that honestly never took off the ground.

Giving the initiative a name 'Joint Tripartite Commission' is an attempt to give a non-existent structure political weight. This forms part and parcel of a strategy to launch a political attack on COSATU and ZCTU

by the Zimbabwe government. The question that must be asked is when was this so-called Joint Tripartite Commission inaugurated? Who are the commissioners? When was its first or last meeting? Who attended such a meeting? Certainly COSATU and ZCTU were not part of the meeting. Neither were the employers.

While this was an excellent initiative, agreed very informally at an International Labour Organisation meeting in 2003, meetings to launch it failed to take place and it has unfortunately not become a reality. The initiative could not bear fruit largely because of the timing of meetings not because any party was not committed to the informal mediation.

This process was however never seen as an alternative strategy to the decision by the COSATU National Congress in September 2003 to send a fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe and certainly not a reason to call off the mission.

There has been much quibbling about the content of the letter COSATU wrote to President Mugabe, setting out the aims of the mission. It is very unfortunate that discussion of such a serious matter should have been trivialised around issues of protocol. Giving such prominence to protocol or quoting selectively from the letter in order to show the supposed arrogance of COSATU side-steps the real issues.

No one, except the author of the Zimbabwe government letter, would believe that the reason why our delegation was treated in the manner that it was treated was because the letter requesting audience with President Mugabe did not observe protocol. The letter was merely an expression of a wish to meet with the government. It answers those who have argued wrongly that the mission intended to be 'selective' in its discussions.

The real reason for booting out the COSATU mission is in fact in the letter from the Zimbabwe Government to COSATU. Mr Simon Moyo, the Zimbabwe High Commissioner to South Africa, who admitted that COSATU was kicked out because its visit was seen as being 'predicated on political domain', has corroborated this. Whether protocol was observed or not, this is the mentality of the authors of the letter that the mission was in the political domain. This is the cold reality – that the Zimbabwe government has so much to hide that it would risk such a negative publicity by kicking out a team from a genuine trade union movement from a neighbouring country.

Equally, hiding behind spurious notions that the Zimbabwe government is within its right to enforce its immigration laws and other such conditions in order to justify ill treatment of COSATU leaders is not useful. Of course all countries, including Zimbabwe, have a right to admit or not to admit persons seeking entry in the country. We reiterate however that our members did not transgress any immigration rules – a fact which the Harare High Court confirmed when it ordered the government not to deport the COSATU delegation. In fact the Zimbabwean government was acting politically in defiance of the ruling by the High Court. All democrats should have condemned this political act in defiance of the judiciary instead of blaming the victims.

Moreover COSATU remains opposed to the argument that the government of Zimbabwe had an inalienable right to deport the mission. As a signatory to international conventions, it is bound to respect the right to free movement between countries. The mission members broke no immigration laws and were entitled to enter the country.

With the advantage of hindsight indeed we do accept that the letter to President Mugabe could have in some few parts been written differently.

The issue is however that the government of Zimbabwe would not allow COSATU, the biggest civil society formation in the country to meet with other civil society formations in Zimbabwe, just as the apartheid and the Ian Smith regimes used to do. In fact many trade unionists from all over the world, in particular those who have been acting in solidarity with the ZCTU, get turned back frequently at the Zimbabwe airport.

## **COSATU and Zimbabwe: signalling left, turning right**

Viewpoint: Fikile Mbalula

ANC Today

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For some years now, Zimbabwe has occupied a prominent place in the international discourse. President Mugabe and the political situation in Zimbabwe have served as a central focus of this discourse. Certainly in the Western countries it is taken as given that President Mugabe is an evil and demonic dictator, and the political order in Zimbabwe the very epitome of a vile anti-democratic dictatorship.

The most extraordinary statements have been made in this regard. For example, the well known conservative scholar on African affairs, Professor Robert Rotberg, Director of the Harvard Programme on Intrastate Conflict and President of the World Peace Foundation, has written that "Africa has its very own Pol Pot. Everything that President Robert Mugabe has done to Zimbabwe since the stolen March (2002) elections qualifies him for that despicable allusion".

In 2001, the British 'Telegraph' newspaper carried an article entitled "Murderous Mugabe should be treated like bin Laden". After mentioning the Taliban, the author, Alice Thompson, said "America and Britain are looking for their next target in the war against terrorism. Zimbabwe hasn't even been mentioned. Yet it is full of terror. Imposing sanctions or sending in troops could tip the country over the edge".

What made it possible for these outrageous statements to be made, that Robert Mugabe stood in the same league as Pol Pot and Osama bin Laden, was the fact that a very powerful global propaganda machine had succeeded to paint an entirely negative image of the President and the government of Zimbabwe, as well as the political situation in that country.

Hard realism dictates that we accept that in this situation it is most unlikely that, as of now, the truth about the situation in Zimbabwe is likely to see the light of day. Lies and half truths will continue to prevail because some in our country and elsewhere in the world have a vested interest in the prevalence of a particular perspective about Zimbabwe, regardless of the real situation in that country.

What accounts for this, and why should we, a liberation movement, surrender to such fatalism!

In the aftermath of the 2002 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Australia, 'The (British) Guardian' correspondent, Seamus Milne, wrote: "Since Blair's ministers began openly to champion the cause of the white farmers who made up the backbone of the former Rhodesian regime – while denouncing the black leadership which defeated it as 'uncivilised' – British interference in Zimbabwe has been ceaseless.

"There are only two possible explanations for Britain's role. One is a racist concern for the privileged white minority. The other is that, unlike Zambia and Kenya, Mugabe is no longer playing ball with the west's neo-liberal agenda and talking, credibly or not, of taking over private businesses and a return to socialism. That cannot be tolerated and, in the new world order, the US now appears to have subcontracted supervision of Africa largely to the former colonial powers, Britain and France."

This had been preceded by another report in the same newspaper, 'The Guardian', written by one of its veteran correspondents, Jonathan Steele. He said:

"It was a disgraceful election which European Union observers and local monitors severely censured. The media were controlled. Criticising the president risked criminal charges. The police regularly moved in to prevent opposition candidates campaigning and the vote-count was marked by irregularities. This sorry spectacle happened three weeks ago in a former British colony in southern Africa.

"Statements of indignation from Jack Straw? Not a murmur. Furious coverage in Fleet Street? A few column inches on inside pages. Talk of "smart" sanctions to punish the men who stole the election? You must be joking.



"So what is it that keeps Zambia, where this travesty of a poll was conducted, safe from the west's outrage-stirrers, unlike Zimbabwe?"

Jonathan Steele answered this question as follows:

"The issue is racism. Zimbabwe's best land is still in white hands, and this provokes inordinate interest in Britain. Mugabe's approach to land reform has been inconsistent and volatile. His methods have often been violent and unlawful. But for largely racist reasons he had very little support from successive British governments. They put a 10-year block on changes in the land tenure system in the constitution drawn up at independence, and have failed to provide much cash for the international fund which they promised to set up to buy the settlers out. Racism pervades other aspects of Whitehall's (the British government's) approach."

Another commentator, Decca Aitkenhead, writing in the same newspaper in August 2001 about the experience of white farmers in Zimbabwe, as reported in the British press, said: "Reporters who cover Africa will be more familiar with the spectacle of atrocity, of course, but less accustomed to the swell of foreign horror. Not known for our sympathy for African misfortune, all of a sudden we are appalled.

"Bad things should obviously not happen to white people. How else to explain the indignation? The knowledge of unspeakable horrors inflicted on black Africans is seldom allowed to interfere with our peace of mind, as if they were in the natural order of things. Over there it is hot, zebras live in the wild, and bad things happen to blacks. But when white families are dispossessed, it is another matter altogether."

This explains why we accept that cold realism dictates that we understand that we will not succeed in the near future to have the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth told about the situation in Zimbabwe. Where racism pervades the approach on a (British) Labour Government, who else in the West will be immune to the cancerous disease of racism!

Our movement and Government have disagreed with ZANU PF and the Government of Zimbabwe about a number of issues relating to the situation in Zimbabwe. We have not hesitated to discuss any and all these matters with both ZANU PF and the Government, as well as intervene practically where this was necessary.

We did this, and will continue to do, not because somebody else demands that we do so. We will continue to engage the broad spectrum of the Zimbabwe leadership because it is in our country's direct and immediate interest that our neighbour, Zimbabwe, should overcome its political, economic and social problems.

We fully understand the challenges facing Zimbabwe. At the same time we understand other things about Zimbabwe, which self interested and ideologically driven propaganda against the Government of Zimbabwe is determined to deny and hide from the public eye.

Zimbabwe has an elected parliament, in which the MDC is a formidable elected opposition. Because of its electoral strength, the MDC is the predominant representative of the urban population of Zimbabwe. The main urban municipalities of Zimbabwe are controlled by elected MDC councils.

In some instances where the MDC has challenged specific constituency election results, the courts have upheld the petitions of the MDC, resulting in the removal of ZANU PF members of parliament. Accepting the bona fides of the judiciary in this regard, the MDC has asked the courts of the land to rule on the legality of the 2002 election of Robert Mugabe as President of the Republic.

In 2000, the Government and ZANU PF were defeated in a referendum to approve a draft Constitution which, among other things, sought to establish a new constitutional framework to address the land question. ZANU PF and the Government accepted this outcome.

At the suggestion of COSATU, South Africa deployed a civil society Observer Mission to observe the 2002

Presidential Elections. The Mission included trade union, business, religious, NGO and other representatives.

Properly to discharge its responsibilities not only to observe the elections, but also to ensure that they were free and fair, the Observer Mission intervened promptly in all instances where it felt that the integrity of the elections could be compromised. To facilitate its access to the Zimbabwe Government, our Government deployed two Ministers in Harare who helped to ensure that the Zimbabwe Government addressed the concerns of the Observer Mission expeditiously.

In its Report, and having expressed itself on the negative factors relating to these elections, this Observer Mission said:

"It appears that the will of the people was demonstrated to a degree reflected by the number of people who came out to vote and who did get an opportunity to vote. The turnout at the polls and the number of people who voted was second only to the first election following the liberation of Zimbabwe. This view must be seen in the context of the obstacles and problems that characterised the pre-election period that is described boldly and frankly in the body of this report. The Mission is, therefore, of the view that the outcome of the elections represents the legitimate voice of the people of Zimbabwe."

Being certain about the integrity of the eminent South Africans who constituted the SAOM and the thoroughness with which they did their work, we accepted this determination that President Mugabe is President by virtue of the legitimate voice of the people of Zimbabwe. In this context, we have repeatedly made the statement that we respect the right of the people of Zimbabwe to determine their own destiny and that Zimbabwe is not a province of South Africa.

The last fact about Zimbabwe we would like to mention is that the pervasive impression created that Zimbabwe has no privately owned and so-called "independent" media is completely false. The story that has gained currency as the absolute truth, that only the "Daily News" was such an "independent" paper is an outright falsification of reality. In this regard we must also say that, in time, the real truth will also be told about the circumstances that led to the "Daily News" ceasing to publish.

Concerning the foregoing, it is clear that Zimbabwe is a "dictatorship" of a special type. It has regular multi-party elections in keeping with the prescripts contained in the National Constitution. It has elected national and local legislatures in which the opposition has a strong presence. Regularly the courts rule in favour of the opposition. It has many "independent" publications that are registered according to the law, appear regularly, and are highly critical of the Government.

The reality is that in the Zimbabwe case, we are dealing with a very peculiar kind of "dictatorship". However, powerful forces in the contemporary world have decreed that none of the foregoing exists.

Instead, they argue that we have a dictatorship that should be treated as an equivalent of the Cambodian Pol Pot and Afghan Taliban and bin Laden dictatorships. It therefore follows that like these, the Mugabe Government must be overthrown, destroyed, and replaced by another acceptable to those who are ready to tell lies about the real Zimbabwe.

COSATU has now intervened forcefully to make its own statement about Zimbabwe. This was preceded by a strange demonstration it held in Cape Town to oppose the re-election of President Bush and urge the US electorate to elect the Democratic Party candidate, Senator John Kerry!

But interestingly, as reported by a determined Zimbabwe opponent of the Mugabe administration, the Zimbabwe journalist Basildon Peta, President Bush's Ambassador in South Africa, Jendayi Frazer, had expressed the same views about Zimbabwe upheld by the COSATU that is seemingly opposed to the re-election of President Bush.

Reporting in August this year for the London newspaper 'The Independent', Peta said that, at "a meeting with journalists in Johannesburg", Ambassador Frazer had indicated that: "The United States has called for the building of a 'coalition of the willing' to push for regime change to end the crisis in Zimbabwe. The new American ambassador to South Africa, Jendayi Frazer, said quiet diplomacy pursued by South Africa and other African countries in its dealings with the Zimbabwe president needed a review because there was no

evidence it was working. She said her country would be willing to be part of a coalition if invited."

The Peta report went on:

"She noted that repression in Zimbabwe had worsened and was making it impossible for the opposition to operate ahead of elections next year.

" 'So we have got to re-look at the approach, that South Africa is taking in terms of quiet diplomacy ... It's not evident that it's working at this point.

" 'We have always talked about building coalitions of the willing and I, for one, believe that the coalitions of the willing are going to be the new force in global affairs ...

"Instead of quiet diplomacy, Ms Frazer suggested an open admission by regional countries that there is a crisis in Zimbabwe. That was an important first step followed by pressure to force Mr Mugabe to return the country to democracy."

On November 6, COSATU stated this position more delicately when it said:

"Diplomacy has its role and place, but we cannot afford to place all our eggs in the basket of diplomacy. Mass mobilisation and solidarity have an equally important role. The challenge is to co-ordinate these efforts to reinforce one another and not use one to the exclusion of the other."

The day before COSATU made this statement, the Zimbabwe 'Daily News Online' reported on a conversation it had held with one Roger Bate, whom it described as a "Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute". This is one of the neo-conservative institutions of the US that have helped to define that country's right wing agenda. 'The Daily News Online' said "A fellow at the Institute, Roger Bate, the powerful think-tank, the American Enterprise says there is need to step up pressure on the government of Zimbabwe by increasing sanctions on President Robert Mugabe and his cronies. Bate said there was need for the international community to put more pressure on President Mbeki to help facilitate the restoration of democracy in Zimbabwe."

Obviously, like Ambassador Frazer and COSATU, Mr Bate thinks that our "quiet diplomacy" needs to be "coordinated" with some other kind of action, such as the sanctions proposed by COSATU.

All this had been foreseen by the conservative newspaper, "The Washington Times" which, in January this year opined: "Despite all of South Africa's misplaced support, the government of Zimbabwe has no qualms about publicly embarrassing Mr. Mbeki. What will it take for South Africa to finally change its approach?"

In the immediate aftermath of the deportation of the COSATU "fact finding mission" from Zimbabwe, this same newspaper, one of those COSATU thanked for their expression of solidarity, said:

"South Africa's self-deprecating silence in the face of Zimbabwe's escalating contempt is defining the Mbeki government's Africa policy. As despotic leader Robert Mugabe continues his catastrophic dictatorship in Zimbabwe and puts the South African government in increasingly difficult positions, Pretoria continues to respond with its ineffectual "quiet diplomacy." That policy is becoming a national embarrassment for South Africa."

Obviously Ambassador Frazer, COSATU, the Zimbabwe Daily News and the American Enterprise Institute are not alone in challenging the approach we have taken towards the resolution of Zimbabwe's problems!

Denigration of the reasons for Zimbabwe's land redistribution programme and charges of gross economic mismanagement have been part of the armoury that has been used to justify the right wing demand for regime change in Zimbabwe.

As long ago as 2001, communicating through its General Secretary, COSATU spoke in the same terms about these two matters. Speaking at a conference in 2001, the General Secretary said:

"However, we could not associate ourselves with the chaotic and anarchic fast track land resettlement programme unleashed by the Zimbabwean government in 2000. This programme was in flagrant disregard of

the law and unleashed a wave of violence that threatened the very stability of the society. What is even more disgusting was that the violence by party hooligans was also directed at farm workers.

"We are not convinced that this was a genuine programme since government has failed for 20 years to address the central question at the centre of the revolution in Zimbabwe - the land question. In order to mask its failures and faced by prospects of a credible opposition government opportunistically used the land question to deflect attention from its failures. The fast track land resettlement programme was nothing less than an election gimmick."

With regard to the economy, the General Secretary said: "What we have witnessed in Zimbabwe is a study in irony. Government for a long time failed to address critical issues facing the masses but in a rather Orwellian fashion turn up revolutionary rhetoric to try to whip up support. Additionally, government embraces neo-liberalism only to discard it towards election and immediately after the elections adopt IMF-World Bank-type adjustment programmes."

The reality however is that the economic problems of Zimbabwe emanated from the implementation from independence in 1980 onwards, of precisely the same policies that COSATU demanded of our government, as part of its opposition to GEAR.

These included high budget deficits to fund social spending on health and education as well as rural development. Borrowed money was also used to pay an expanded public service required to implement these programmes. At the same time the budget was used to sustain a whole range of food, transport and other subsidies on items of direct benefit to the masses that the COSATU General Secretary falsely claims the Zimbabwe Government failed.

These distinctly pro-poor policies were financially unsustainable. A large domestic and international debt became a fetter on further development. The domestic capital market dried up. These and other developments and the responses of the Government to the then growing crisis led directly to macro-economic imbalances of high interest and inflation rates, a rapid decline in the growth rate, and so on.

In these circumstances, Zimbabwe had to turn to the IMF and the World Bank for support. Not unexpectedly, these imposed a structural adjustment programme on Zimbabwe, which necessarily required cuts in public expenditure and therefore a roll back of the social programmes that had been put in place to ensure the upliftment of the formerly colonised millions.

Had our movement and government succumbed to the pressures from COSATU to abandon GEAR, sooner or later we would have ended up in the same situation as Zimbabwe, having to appeal to the IMF and the World Bank to bail us out.

We have said this many times that we will never allow ourselves to be forced into this situation.

The "study in irony" consists in the way that COSATU attacks the Government of Zimbabwe for the consequences of economic policies that it sought to impose on our movement and government, even through resort to the instrument of general strikes.

But even more of an irony is the very strange coincidence of the positions of COSATU on Zimbabwe with those of the domestic and international right wing forces.

COSATU considers and describes itself as belonging to "the left". Others who also consider and describe themselves as "left" hold somewhat different views about the situation in and the contest about the future of Zimbabwe.

For example, the US "Workers World" wrote in 2001: "The art of public relations goes back a long way, as the old expression "a wolf in sheep's clothing" shows us. Disguise something bad or give it a cuddly name and by the time people find out it has fangs, it may be too late.

"A bill called the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) now making its way

through Congress is a case in point. Democracy, economic recovery--who could argue with that? But this bill is an open attack on Zimbabwe's economic and political independence. It was passed by the Senate on Aug. 1 and is now before the House.

"President Robert Mugabe and the Patriotic Front government are the targets of ZDERA. In the name of democracy, the bill would allow the U.S. Congress to spend \$6 million to influence the upcoming national election, in the name of "voter education," and would put sanctions on the country's leaders." Reflecting an understanding of the land question different from that expressed by the General Secretary of COSATU, The "Workers World" said: It is obvious that the whites are into farming as a lucrative business, not for survival. The Black people, however, are desperately poor and need the land just to live. The land question has become the focus of a giant political battle."

There is another "left" NGO, the Independent Media Centre (IMC), with branches in various countries, including Zimbabwe. It describes itself as "a volunteer non-corporate effort to provide news coverage and media resources to the disempowered". Commenting about the situation in Zimbabwe, a contributor to its "chat room" has written:

"The point that we are all aware of should perhaps be reiterated, ie. That not all "civil society" actors are engaged in a struggle against neoliberalism, not all trade-unions are progressive, and not all NGOs are "grassroots". In fact it is precisely on the issue of what a "grassroots" organization is that I have the most trouble.

"The National Constitutional Assembly in Zimbabwe for instance receives funding from the US congressionally funded National Endowment for Democracy, (which has been used to finance the attempt to overthrow President Chavez in Venezuela), and most NGOs with a web-presence receive some assistance from major donor governments. In fact 85% of recognized professionalised NGOs receive assistance from Northern governments.

"Professionalised NGOs need to be distinguished from truly grass-roots movements in that they lack a mass-base, are usually urban based, staffed by middle-class individuals, and have widespread access to international networks. Many of these groups already have sufficient space on the Internet and a strong voice in it as well.

"What I am concerned about is the marginalisation of rural voices, of those poor Zimbabweans who support the land-reform program (including youth, women, etc.), the views of black workers on white farms (who often face terrible conditions and are also victims of intimidation and biased/narrow news sources (i.e. exposed to corporate media instead of government media), etc.

"These are all important questions that should be addressed, instead of only airing the views of the Western funded MDC and its supporters. I am not against critical debate and input from any party or faction in the country, but I think it is important to consider what IMC's role should be in this process.

"There are plenty of good reasons to criticise Mugabe and his inner-circle -and I'm not suggesting that their positions that should be placed front and centre - but there are millions of Zimbabweans who support ZANU, its sectoral organisations and its democratic-mass-base that are also disillusioned with Mugabe in a way very different from most of the MDC.

"It is difficult to find such voices online, especially since ZANU supporters are overwhelmingly concentrated in rural areas with low access to computers.

"It is interesting to note that there is very little on land reform on the Zimbabwe IMC site even though this is a major issue in the country. Anyway, I trust your judgement overall, but just wanted to prod you guys a bit to consider some of these issues and to throw a little more critical eye on that broad term "civil society".

"I really have nothing against the ISO and especially not the Zimbabwean students struggle in the face of

repression, but I also think the other side of the story should be told - i.e. the repressive acts carried out by white-farmers, the land-question, and the grass-roots activists within the ZANU-PF, which hold critical views of the government as well but are also far more critical of Western interference in the country and collusion

between the racist white-settler elite, corporate interests in the country and the whole discourse of "economic emancipation" and the "Third Chimurenga (liberation war)" that is the core of ZANU's beliefs (including even

industrial action to seize ownership of factories and indigenise these).

"Anyway no point in continuously repeating the same points...Of course the difficulty is finding out why/how these voices are marginalised, and how they can be brought into the mainstream."

Opposed to these left groups are others such as COSATU, the US parastatal NED and the US International Republican Institute, which is funded by the NED, the ICFTU, the AFL-CIO and others, standard bearers of anti-left policies throughout the years of the Cold War.

With regard to Zimbabwe, the NED itself said: "The American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) used NED support to provide vital assistance to the trade unions during the (2002) elections in Zambia and Zimbabwe, and both NDI and IRI helped democrats in Zimbabwe's sadly unsuccessful process."

The International Republican Institute, one of the four principal channels for NED funds has said: "We're very active in Zimbabwe, which does have an extremely authoritarian government. And that is one country in Africa where we're not working with the majority party; we're working with democratic reform activists in that country, both with the opposition political party and with civil society there because we believe that our work can help them achieve results."

These "democratic reform activists" promoted as part of the US right wing agenda in Africa and the world, are the same "civil society organisations" COSATU and US Ambassador Frazer want to join in a "willing coalition" to bring about regime change in Zimbabwe.

The positions of the US Ambassador in this regard do not surprise us. What is of the greatest interest is where COSATU will end with its policy of indicating left and turning right.

\*\* Fikile Mbalula is President of the ANC Youth League.

## **Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, in the NCOP**

**16 November 2004**

Rev E Adolph ask Deputy President Jacob Zuma: Whether any further engagement is planned with the Zimbabwean government to ensure free, fair and peaceful parliamentary elections next year; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?

REPLY:

The South African Government is constantly engaging both the Government of Zimbabwe and the Opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to ensure that there is a conducive climate that will give rise to free and fair elections as outlined by the SADC Principles and Guidelines on Elections in the region.

During September 2004, President Mbeki and President Mugabe held talks while they were in the United States to attend the United Nations General Assembly. A number of issues regarding the forthcoming Parliamentary Elections were discussed. On 25 October 2004, President Mbeki met with Mr Tsvangirai, leader of the MDC in Pretoria where issues pertaining to talks between the MDC and the ZANU-PF were discussed as well as the upcoming Parliamentary elections.

During discussions both sides have indicated that they are committed to the principles of free, fair and peaceful elections, and are taking the necessary measures to ensure that elections will be conducted in a transparent manner.

The foundation for a climate conducive to free, fair and peaceful elections has been set in motion by the adoption and commitment to the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic elections by the Government of Zimbabwe

South Africa will continue to offer all the necessary assistance to Zimbabwe to make certain that the elections are free, fair and peaceful. We will also work towards ensuring that a home-grown and sustainable solution to the challenges is found by the Zimbabweans.

### **The Zimbabwean situation – an SACP response to cde Fikile Mbalula**

18 November 2004

In its most recent issue, the on-line publication *ANC Today*, has an intervention by cde Fikile Mbalula, president of the ANC Youth League, entitled “COSATU and Zimbabwe. Signalling left, turning right” (12th November, 2004). The SACP welcomes the initiative taken by *ANC Today* to open up space for what could become a more extensive discussion on the current situation in Zimbabwe. The SACP believes that within the Alliance and, indeed, within the ANC itself, we have not created adequate space to discuss and debate Zimbabwe. As a consequence the cadreship of our movement has not been empowered to provide clear leadership to our country on the Zimbabwean situation. There is very considerable popular confusion within all of our formations. Our awkwardness and silences on Zimbabwe have also left gaping holes in the public debate that conservative opposition forces have been quick to exploit.

Unfortunately, cde Mbalula’s relatively extensive intervention doesn’t really help. Instead of laying the basis for a comradely and informed analysis of the crisis in Zimbabwe, he has chosen to direct a litany of sarcasm at COSATU. We can (we should) debate the merits of COSATU’s fact-finding mission to Harare. What were its strengths and weaknesses? What has it revealed about democratic culture in Zimbabwe? Perhaps there were some rough edges in the COSATU approach? (General secretary, cde Zwelinzima Vavi, has conceded as much in regard to the COSATU letter addressed to President Mugabe.) But are the niceties of protocol really what is fundamentally at issue in Zimbabwe at present?

Above all, what is the collective way forward? Mbalula is largely silent on this. Instead, the message from his intervention tends to be: leave it to your betters. COSATU, he scoffs, “thinks that our ‘quiet diplomacy’ needs to be ‘coordinated’ with some other kind of action”. How impertinent of COSATU!

### **Guilt by imperialist association**

At the core of Mbalula’s strategy of sustained sarcasm there appears to be an attempt to disparage and even intimidate any principled, progressive assessment of Zimbabwe’s government and ruling party. He portrays any critique as the witting or unwitting ally of an imperialist agenda. And so we have several pages of quotations from various conservative US and UK commentators: Robert Rotberg, the British Telegraph, the Washington Times, Robert Bate (“a Fellow of the American Enterprise Institute”), the International Republican Institute, etc. Some of these interventions invoke all manner of rabid hyperbole. The Zimbabwean ruling party is likened, for instance, to the horrendous Pol Pot regime. What does this all prove? It proves (if we needed proof) that conservative forces in the North do not like President Mugabe for a variety of racist, anti-liberation, Cold War recidivist and other neo-colonial reasons.

But these quotes do not prove that each and every critical appraisal of the Zimbabwean government and of ZANU PF is, therefore, right-wing. Neo-conservatives in the US are, for instance, constantly disparaging the UN. Our own government has (correctly) criticised the deeply flawed architecture of the UN and particularly

its Security Council. These are both critiques of the UN, but they are made for diametrically opposed reasons.

Moreover, Mbalula appears to be blissfully unaware that the simplistic guilt-by- imperialist-association allegation that lies at the heart of his attack on COSATU is particularly vulnerable to an equally simplistic counter-attack. After all, during his most recent visit to South Africa, it was President Mbeki and not COSATU's Vavi that President Bush patronisingly anointed as "my point-man on Zimbabwe".

We are not for a moment suggesting that our President sees his Zimbabwean interventions as being at the behest of the US administration, on the contrary. But we are suggesting that Mbalula's line of argument isn't going to get us anywhere.

A constructive left critique of the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe is both possible and absolutely necessary. Even Mbalula, at one point, but more or less in passing, concedes that there are "problems". "Our movement and Government have disagreed with ZANU PF and the Government of Zimbabwe about a number of issues relating to the situation in Zimbabwe", he tells us. "We have not hesitated to discuss any and all these matters with both ZANU PF and the Government, as well as intervene practically where this was necessary."

But what are these "issues" around which there is disagreement? What are the practical interventions? How do we help to reinforce such interventions? Mbalula does not provide us with any information whatsoever. We are not looking for juicy gossip. We are asking an analytic question: What are the underlying, systemic factors that underpin what Mbalula politely refers to as Zimbabwe's "political, economic and social problems"? This is a crucial question if we are to develop a coherent and helpful South African solidarity position. Mbalula offers us nothing.

On the contrary, Mbalula portrays a society with a healthy electoral system, the rule of law and an independent judiciary, an empowered parliamentary opposition, and press freedom. Needless to say, in order to make each of these claims, he has to argue with breathtaking one-sidedness.

### **A robust, independent judicial system?**

To clinch his argument that Zimbabwe has a healthy judicial system, Mbalula tells us that: "In some instances where the MDC has challenged specific constituency election results, the courts have upheld the petitions of the MDC, resulting in the removal of ZANU PF members of parliament."

Unfortunately, Mbalula has got his facts wrong. No ZANU PF MPs have been removed. In the immediate aftermath of the June 2000 parliamentary elections, the MDC filed petitions to the High Court challenging the ZANU PF victories in 37 constituencies. To date only 11 of these petitions have been heard and judges have ruled in favour of the MDC in seven of these cases. Yes, this does, indeed, demonstrate that there is still a residual if diminishing judicial independence. However, with parliamentary elections ostensibly less than four months away, the seven ZANU PF MPs whose victories were declared null and void continue to sit in parliament pending appeal hearings in the Supreme Court. Six of these appeal cases have been with the Supreme Court for over three years!

### **A healthy parliamentary democracy?**

"Zimbabwe has an elected parliament, in which the MDC is a formidable elected opposition", Mbalula tells us.

What Mbalula doesn't tell us is that 30 of the 150 MPs are unelected ZANU PF appointees hand-picked by the President. Mbalula doesn't tell us that Parliament is a largely toothless entity in which back-bench ZANU PF MPs themselves are marginalized.

Mbalula also fails to remember that, just two weeks ago, an elected MDC MP (Roy Bennett) was sentenced by a parliamentary committee (made up of a majority of unelected ZANU PF MPs) to one year's hard labour. He was sentenced for having pushed a fellow (unelected) MP, the Minister of Justice, Patrick Chinamasa in a scuffle that was considerably milder than the one in which our own current deputy Minister



of Justice, cde Johnny de Lange once floored a former NNP MP. We will be told, of course, that Bennett's sentence is "perfectly legal" in terms of Zimbabwean parliamentary rules. It may well be, but then that is the problem.

Minister Chinamasa is a leading government negotiator in the stop-start South African government facilitated talks. When Bennett, who had honourably tendered an apology for his behaviour, was led off to prison, Chinamasa is reported to have taunted other MDC MPs that they "would be next". None of this remotely approaches the horrors of the Pol Pot regime, but Mbalula is asking us to believe that Zimbabwe is a relatively stable democracy and, what is more, the two main political parties are very close to making a deal on the way forward...if only COSATU were not clumsily butting in. Is that really how things look?

### **MDC urban municipal power?**

To further buttress his claim that Zimbabwe is a relatively healthy multi-party democracy, Mbalula reassures us that "because of its electoral strength, the MDC is the predominant representative of the urban population of Zimbabwe. The main urban municipalities of Zimbabwe are controlled by elected MDC councils."

In theory, this might be true. The MDC won control of all 12 major cities in municipal elections. However, the reality is different. Despite having a clear mandate from the people, most MDC mayors have found it impossible to operate due to the interference of the government through the offices of the Minister for Local Government, Ignatius Chombo. In Harare, in particular, the MDC-council has been prevented from carrying out its most basic duties, and MDC councillors have resigned en masse. President Mugabe last year appointed special governors to Harare and Bulawayo to over-ride and undermine MDC mayors and MDC led councils.

### **Press freedom in Zimbabwe?**

Mbalula tells us that Zimbabwe "has many 'independent' publications that are registered according to the law, appear regularly, and are highly critical of the government". Who provided Mbalula with this information? Could it have been Minister Jonathan Moyo?

There is an abundance of information indicating a growing and targeted intimidation of independent journalists and non-governmental media, including the bombing of premises. Here are just a few recent developments:

- Since the promulgation of the draconian Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in April 2002, over 30 journalists have been arrested for criticising the government.
- However, no journalists working for the state media have ever been arrested under AIPPA, despite the plethora of distortions that are published in the state media on a daily basis.
- The editor of the Independent and a senior reporter are due to appear in court in January 2005 to face charges of undermining the image of the president - they ran a picture of President Mugabe trying to hold up his trousers while visiting an agricultural show in Harare.
- The government is currently tabling amendments to AIPPA that will result in journalists operating without accreditation being fined or sentenced to two years imprisonment.
- There are, indeed, still three "independent" papers in Zimbabwe, following the forced closure of the Daily News and the Tribune. Of the "independent" newspapers, the Independent and the Standard are fairly limited print-run weeklies. While the third, the Mirror is a daily paper with a sister publication that comes out on a Sunday. The "independence" of the Mirror could be somewhat qualified by the fact that it is owned by Ibbo Mandaza, who is strongly aligned to a particular faction within ZPF.

In short, once more it is true that the Zimbabwean situation is not remotely analogous to the Pol Pot regime, for instance. But it is equally true that the trend on the media front is towards greater repression and less democratic tolerance. As South Africans, anxious to foster the conditions for the consolidation and advance of the national democratic revolution in Zimbabwe, we should ask ourselves whether these developments are positive or negative.

## **The real truth about the closure of the Daily News?**

In dealing with media realities in Zimbabwe, Mbalula remarks that “the real truth will also be told about the circumstances that led to the Daily News ceasing to publish”. Again, characteristically, he doesn’t condescend to provide us with any facts or explanations. Seemingly, others know best, and in the fullness of time the rest of us will also come to understand.

We assume, however, that Mbalula is alluding to the Daily News declining to register with a new Media and Information Commission run by Minister Jonathan Moyo in terms of AIPPA. If this is indeed what Mbalula is referring to, then the truth that will presumably emerge in the fullness of time is that “the Daily News was responsible for its own downfall”. The facts are somewhat more complex. The newspaper refused to register while challenging the constitutionality of AIPPA in the courts. Chief Justice Chidyausiku ruled that the Daily News had come to court with “dirty hands”, that is, they could not challenge the constitutionality of an Act without first complying with it! When the Daily News consequently tried to register, Moyo’s commission refused. It is hard not to draw the conclusion that the closure of the newspaper was a calculated political decision.

It could well be that the Daily News management was tactically outsmarted in all of this, but is that really what we should be criticising or applauding? For progressive South Africans, surely the key issue is: Are the various political and social formations in Zimbabwe contributing to the positioning of their society, its institutions and its mass constituencies in ways that foster a consolidation of an ongoing people-centred and people-driven national democratic revolution? Or are they going backwards, while seeking to score tactical victories against each other?

When a parliamentary committee acts as a kangaroo court to remove an annoying political opponent, or when newspapers are shut down, then Zimbabwean laws, rules and regulations are invoked as justification by those who do not want to concede that there are serious problems in Zimbabwe. But when the Zimbabwean government acts in defiance of its own judiciary, as it did when it ignored a High Court order and expelled the COSATU fact-finding mission, then the same sources abandon “rule of law” arguments and evoke liberation struggle solidarity (as if COSATU had not been in the struggle with us).

## **Macro-economic populism?**

While Mbalula concedes that there are “political, economic and social problems” in Zimbabwe, nowhere does he tell us what they are. There is, however, one partial exception - Zimbabwe’s economic crisis.

Mbalula ventures briefly into this area ...but he only does this because he thinks that he can score some polemical points against COSATU in the process. “The reality”, he tells us, “is that the economic problems of Zimbabwe emanated from the implementation from independence in 1980 onwards, of precisely the same policies that COSATU demanded of our government, as part of its opposition to GEAR.”

We will come back briefly to the GEAR debate in a moment, but let’s focus on Zimbabwe itself...

Mbalula’s argument is essentially that from independence the Zimbabwean government ran up “high budget deficits to fund social spending on health and education as well as rural development.” However, these “distinctly pro-poor policies were financially unsustainable. A large domestic and international debt became a fetter on further development.” By the mid-1990s the Zimbabwean government was forced into a structural adjustment programme by the IMF and World Bank and had to “roll back...the social programmes that had been put in place to ensure the upliftment of the formerly colonised millions.”

The SACP agrees that the social redistribution policies pursued by the ZANU government, while achieving some important early successes, were financially unsustainable and there are major lessons for progressive South Africans to take on board. But, once more, Mbalula’s portrayal is seriously skewed in key respects.

Basically, over more than twenty years, the ruling party in Zimbabwe has tried to perform an economic balancing act with three ultimately contradictory class projects:

1. it has used budgetary resources to “uplift” (to use Mbalula’s instructive and entirely liberal philanthropic term) the poor, peasants, workers and middle strata professionals - the great majority of the formerly colonised;
2. it has used bureaucratic power to placate and advance the narrow sectarian economic interests of competing inner-party factions, whose class character is essentially that of an aspirant and actual (as the case might be) parasitic bureaucratic capitalist stratum; while
3. leaving the dominant productive capitalist agricultural and mining sectors largely intact, apart from some limited board-room indigenisation, or (as we in South Africa would now call it) “narrow BEE”.

Since independence, deepening contradictions between the diverging class interests of these different projects have tended to be resolved in favour of the latter two, at the expense of Zimbabwe’s peasants, workers and productive and professional middle strata.

For the first twenty years of independence, Lonrho and Anglo American, for instance, owned large tracts of land consisting of mining areas, sugar estates, farms and cattle ranches. Both Lonrho (which, under CEO Tiny Rowland was a major contributor to the ruling party) and the Oppenheimer family were untouchable. The Oppenheims alone owned over 960,000 hectares of idle land. President Mugabe had met Harry Oppenheimer in May 1980, promising to respect “his private property”. It was not until the farm invasions of 2000 that Anglo American itself offered 41,000 hectares of the 960,000 for resettlement, and a mutually agreeable accommodation has since been arranged.

The most costly items on the budget in the 1980s were not pro-poor programmes like land reform, where the government relied almost entirely on donor funds, but on military procurement. In 1987, for instance, the government found over US\$250 million in the budget to re-equip the air-force. While this kind of crippling expenditure had a progressive justification during the height of the apartheid destabilisation years (for which Zimbabwe paid an enormous price), the continued exorbitant military expenditure into the second decade of independence increasingly acquired a class logic based on the accumulative interests of the parasitic capitalist stratum within the state and ruling party.

Contrary to Mbaluwa’s claims, it was less the pro-poor social expenditure that precipitated the latest and persisting economic crisis in Zimbabwe and much more:

- a disastrous and costly military adventure in the DRC - whose logic was fundamentally about primitive accumulation for a Zimbabwean ruling party-aligned military elite; and
- a populist concession to frustrated war veterans who mounted a siege of ZANU PF party headquarters in July 1997. The veterans, many of whom had very legitimate grievances in the face of curtailed social spending, a stalled land reform process and extensive corruption in the compensation payment of ex-combatants, were promised a massive payout of Z\$50,000 a year. This was to be the decisive trigger for the current crisis.

In short, the lesson that the SACP believes should be derived from Zimbabwe’s experience is that even moderately effective social spending is indeed unsustainable in the context of a dominant and untransformed colonial capitalist accumulation path, and in the context of the pillaging of public resources by a parasitic state bourgeoisie.

### **Very briefly on GEAR**

In the present intervention, we want to discuss the Zimbabwean challenge, not the South African government’s 1996 macro-economic policy, GEAR. But briefly and for the record:

- The SACP has NEVER questioned the need for a careful and technically proficient management of our budget deficit and other key macro-economic factors like foreign currency reserves, inflation and interest rates.
- The SACP’s critique of GEAR was directed at the policy’s wider ambitions and claims - notably, that the route to sustained growth and development lay in macro stabilisation that would of itself

attract major flows of foreign direct investment (FDI). For this reason, the SACP has been supportive of the formula that first emerged at the ANC's mid-2000 National General Council that macro-stabilisation in mid-1996 was "necessary but not sufficient".

- Contrary to Mbaluwa's claim, the two major general strikes led by COSATU (which were supported by the SACP) in 2001 and 2002 were NOT directed at a demand for "unsustainable social spending". They were directed at government's privatisation programme unveiled in late-1999. This privatisation acceleration was basically the default position into which government retreated after GEAR's hopes of major FDI flows on the strength of macro-stabilisation were not forthcoming. Thankfully, the full-blooded privatisation process has itself now been halted, but the impact of what happened in previous years is still being felt. For instance, cde Smuts Ngonyama is telling us that we should all be patriotically proud that his imminent, multi-million personal enrichment from Telkom shares represents a return of wealth into South African hands. In fact, the US and Malaysian owners of Thintana Communications will be walking off with an estimated R9 billion profit from their 1997 30% purchase of Telkom, half of which they are now selling to the Ngcaba-Serote-Ngonyama consortium (Business Day, November 15, 2004). That R9 billion, creamed off a parastatal that was once one hundred percent publicly owned, will be repatriated out of our economy - so much for attracting foreign investment into our economy...and so much for macro-economic populism.

### **Land reform in Zimbabwe**

Mbalula pours scorn on COSATU for daring to question the credentials of the 2000 "accelerated land reform programme" in Zimbabwe. He seems to subscribe to an interpretation of the Zimbabwean land reform process that goes something like this: At the Lancaster House agreements the Zimbabwean liberation movement was tied into a cumbersome willing-seller willing-buyer approach to land reform. However, as a trade-off, the British government promised considerable funding for the process. Despite valiant attempts by the ruling party, so the argument continues, a combination of British treachery and unsustainable budget deficits slowed the programme. The 2000 accelerated land reform programme was a push to finally resolve the issue, restoring farming land to black Zimbabweans.

All of this is PARTIALLY true. But a great deal is also forgotten or left unsaid. In the first place, what Marxist-Leninist Party (as ZANU PF once styled itself) remotely worth its salt is seriously going to depend upon a former colonial or an actual imperial power to fund its "socialist" land reform programme? Can you imagine the Cuban Communist Party, or the Chinese Communist Party explaining that they had not carried through substantive land reform in twenty years because the US or the Japanese had not come forward with donor funding?

Serious, transformative land reform is based on unleashing the mobilised energies and aspirations of millions of rural poor - and not on philanthropic "upliftment" (donor-funded or otherwise). In the first two or three years after independence in Zimbabwe there were, indeed, large-scale, relatively spontaneous squatter movements onto commercial farms, particular in areas that had been central in the guerrilla war. Initially, government gave explicit support to squatters, seeing the movement as useful, bottom-up pressure on white commercial farmers. Within the constraints of the willing-seller willing-buyer formula, the squatter movement had an important market impact. Land prices plummeted in affected areas, and there were more willing sellers about. But by the end of 1982 government policy changed. Deputy Minister of Lands, Mark Dube announced that all squatters would have to vacate the land on which they were living and move to formal government resettlement schemes. Dube announced 25 January 1983 as a deadline for evacuation. He declared an "all-out-war" on squatters. Unfortunately, in 1983 the Zimbabwean economy experienced a serious depression, and considerable budget cuts were made in the land resettlement programme. The rural poor found themselves squeezed on two fronts.

Without going into the detail of land reform in the first decade, by 1990 the government had transferred 15% of white-controlled land to 6% of the peasantry on a willing-seller willing-buyer basis. Given the relatively recent history of colonial land dispossession, and the centrality of agriculture to the Zimbabwean economy, 15% is a modest figure. However, we should be quick to acknowledge as South Africans that it is, as a percentage, more than five times what we have succeeded in transferring in our first decade of freedom!

It was against this general background on the one hand, and in the immediate context of a referendum defeat in February 2000, growing social unrest, and the deepening of contradictions between the three distinct class projects noted above, that the Zimbabwean government announced a new “fast-track” land reform programme in July 2000. At the time of the launch, commercial agriculture was still dominated by 4,500 white farmers. By the end of 2002, there were just over 1,000 white commercial farmers left. The back of settler colonial agriculture had been broken - although the land-holdings of multi-national corporations like Anglo American remain another matter.

In its report, the SACP fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe in December 2003 noted: “In several interactions with ZANU-PF comrades, we found that it took us some time to convince our interlocutors that the SACP actually required no persuading whatsoever that colonial land seizures had been a great injustice, and that the persisting monopolisation of commercial farming two decades after independence by 4,500 settler farmers had been a critical blockage to any overall developmental transformation. The SACP delegation constantly reiterated that breaking the power of settler agricultural capital was a decisive step that should not be reversed - whatever other shortcomings there might have been, and still might be, in the process.”

As far as the SACP is concerned, that observation remains entirely valid. But there WERE serious shortcomings in the fast-track land reform. Its timing and its hasty launch had more to do with electoral considerations than with a well-considered and sustainable agricultural strategy. The violence and turbulence associated with the process affected not just white farming families but many hundreds of thousands of black farm-workers who suffered physical beatings, job losses and displacement.

The SACP’s December 2003 fact-finding mission found that many of the beneficiaries themselves readily admitted serious problems. The mission met with various representatives of emerging black commercial farmers, including the Indigenous Commercial Farmers Union, and the Tobacco Growers Trust. In a separate meeting it also had the opportunity to engage with the director general in the Agricultural Ministry. While they all expressed confidence that the fast-track process would begin to bear fruit “after the inevitable disruptions that accompanied any transformation on this scale”, they also spoke quite openly about many problems - including, lack of co-ordination between agro-industrial inputs and farming operations, allegedly deliberate undermining of seed provision by private seed companies, complications with accessing financing, and corruption in the acquisition of farms by elements within the ruling party.

For many Western governments and public commentators the real “scandal” of the 2000 fast-track land reform is that it marked a break in the two decades of accommodation between the class project of a black bureaucratic bourgeoisie in the state and ruling party, on the one hand, and the persisting accumulation trajectory of established white capital (at least in the commercial farming sector), on the other. Mbalula is absolutely right to say that this is what explains why much of the Western media was so vociferous on Zimbabwe and so silent on electoral anomalies or human rights abuses in, for instance, Zambia or Swaziland.

But if the fast-track land reform unleashed in 2000 broke the tacit accommodation between emergent black bureaucratic capital and white commercial agricultural capital, did it result in a greater convergence with a peasant and working class rural project? There is not a simple answer to this question. There can be no doubt that, generally, land seizures were dominated by the interests of black bureaucratic capital, but they unleashed energies, expectations and land seizures by poor peasants and rural workers in many areas as well. There is still considerable fluidity and turmoil in Zimbabwe’s rural areas, much of it intra-black class struggle over access to and ownership and control of farming land.

The national democratic path is the way forward in Zimbabwe in the current period

The real contribution that our ANC-led liberation movement can make to our Zimbabwean comrades and colleagues is to help them, as best we can, to regroup around a consistent national democratic project that is people-centred and people-driven.

This means that progressive, batho pele values must be nurtured among the cadreship located within the state. Personal accumulation through the parasitic plundering of public resources must be rooted out and punished. The security forces must be brought under democratic discipline and all violence directed at the people outlawed. Militias must be disbanded. The best defence of the Zimbabwean revolution, in the face of

any external regime change agenda, is not an increasingly paranoid laagering, but the forging of popular unity and support, based on programmes that deliver transformation to (and with) the urban and rural poor. (Perhaps Venezuelan President Chavez's successful defeat of three concerted regime change onslaughts provides an instructive topical example in this regard?)

The progressive middle-strata, much of it now aligned with the MDC, need to shift from an often narrow electoralist discourse that has, until recently, frequently been informed by a first world liberalism that has simply abandoned the national challenges of racialised under-development to demagogic appropriation by a parasitic bureaucratic capitalist stratum.

Above all, a progressive and programmatic unity needs to be forged between the Zimbabwean working class, the rural and urban poor, and progressive professional strata, including those in the state and security apparatus. A patriotic nationalism is the means for achieving this unity. Robust democratisation is the condition for fostering it.

Of course, none of this is going to be easy, given the sharp polarisation and all-round crisis in Zimbabwe. And, of course, South Africans cannot export solutions. But we can definitely contribute. The beginning of an effective contribution from this side of the Limpopo is surely an honest, forthright and constructive discussion among ourselves within the ANC-led alliance about what is actually happening in Zimbabwe. We hope that this is a contribution to such a discussion.

As we say in our discussion document on Zimbabwe, (Zimbabwe: let's keep focused, Umsebenzi Online, 3 November 2004), none of us in the alliance should be unwittingly turned into spokespersons of this or that political formation in Zimbabwe. Instead of labels and long quotations, we need proper analysis, as a basis for comradely, intra-alliance debate.

### **Seeing left indicators from the right can sometimes be an illusion: response to Jabu Mbalula on Zimbabwe**

Guest column By Buti Manamela, National Secretary, Young Communist League

*(This is a response to ANC Youth League President Fikile Mbalula's article that appeared on ANC Today on 12 November 2004)*

I always heard of stories that people sometimes creates illusions of being with others in the same place at the same time, but never believed this until I read ANCYL President Fikile Mbalula's article on *ANC Today*, 12 November 2004 (COSATU and Zimbabwe: Signalling left, Turning Right). Mbalula, in the true style of other authors in *ANC Today* threw in a series of quotations from various sources, sought to create multiple impressions from this article. Firstly, that COSATU is involved in some sinister agenda with the right-wing, although it regards itself as the left. Secondly, that COSATU has no business in interfering in the situation in Zimbabwe. Thirdly, that COSATU is falsifying the situation in Zimbabwe and that the truth, which COSATU and its sinister rightwing fellows are trying to hide through propaganda, shall come out. And lastly, that COSATU condemns ZANU-PF and the Zimbabwean government for implementing economic policies that led Zimbabwe to its downfall, and alternatively argues that the same policies should also be implemented here in the country. And then Mbalula concludes that therefore, COSATU is always signalling left and turning right. The only statement missing from Mbalula's article is that COSATU supports the rightwing, neo-liberal and reactionary MDC, that is only visible in the conclusion he makes.

On all the four counts that COSATU is accused of, the author of the article commits an errors that have been made in the past. In the past, both the SACP and COSATU leadership have been accused of proclaiming themselves "left" and acting "right". This was evident when both the SACP and COSATU exposed and bemoaned the level of unemployment and poverty, and provided facts that the current economic path that the country is taking does not create jobs. A thin line was drawn between the SACP and COSATU with, for instance, the Democratic Alliance. The same line was drawn on the issue relating to the provision of Anti-retroviral drugs, of which COSATU insisted that these should be provided, arguing together with other NGO's. The other point that has been made with regard to COSATU being closer to the rightwing forces in the country was that of the Basic Income Grant. On similar lines, COSATU has initiated the debates, and, the

fact that the DA and other rightwing forces join opportunistically in the chorus does not make COSATU and the SACP rightwing. To further accuse alliance partners of being rightwing, itself, is contrary to the understanding within the alliance that name-calling and labelling does not build the spirit of building a strong alliance. COSATU, like all other political forces in the country has the right to act in solidarity to their counterparts elsewhere in the world. The freedom that we enjoy as South Africans was itself as a result of solidarity, pressure and international sanctions to the abusive and exclusionist Apartheid policy. The fact that white people participated freely in electing an Apartheid government did not make the system a 'dictatorship' of a special type. And no, nobody accused the SACP and the ANC of being liberal and rightwing when the DP (the now rightwing DA) supported the struggle against Apartheid. Part of the principles of COSATU is international working class solidarity and therefore, supporting struggles of other workers elsewhere with the full knowledge that they are building an International Working class movement is central to COSATU's support of the workers of Zimbabwe.

When George W. Bush invaded Iraq, the law that the Texan President laid was that countries were either with the US or with the Iraqi and Afghan "dictatorship", there was no middle road, and similarly, today as we speak, there is no fence in Zimbabwe. The ANC deplored both this invasions, and, in the usual troop-like manner, so did the ANCYL. This did not in anyway imply that both the ANC and its Youth League supported the dictatorial regimes that the people of Afghanistan and Iraq lived under. We cannot therefore, now, when it comes to Zimbabwe, conclude that any confrontational engagement towards President Robert Mugabe implies support for the MDC. This suggestion is flawed, and it runs heedlessly and heedlessly, that is, helter-skelter, in the arguments made by Mbalula.

Is COSATU and the "rightwing" forces whose sentiments coincides with those of COSATU falsifying information about the closure of the "Daily News", the dictatorial nature of President Robert Mugabe, and the overall situation in Zimbabwe? There are close to 3 million South Africans who fled Zimbabwe for South Africa, mainly for economic reasons, but also for fear of arrest and torture. The SA government had to tighten security in bordering lines with Zimbabwe. It further introduced a Z\$2 million (about a R1000) for a Visa for anyone crossing into SA. Further than that, there are people dying of hunger and starvation. There are daily reports of abuse from the youth militias. There are several MP's of the opposition who do not make their way back to parliament because the police either beat them up, or, if they survived their wrath, members of the Youth Militia who are card-carrying members of ZANU-PF got them. It is even worse when people come to the defence of ZANU-PF, when the very same members of ZANU-PF are also at the receiving end of the already deteriorated economic situation in that country. I will not answer whether COSATU and its so-called right-wing bedfellows lied, this, I leave to whatever is left (remaining, in this regard) of the conscience of Mbalula and many others who share his views.

COSATU and the SACP have always argued against Gear, and, to my own recollection still do. Part of the issues that both organisations raised against Gear was that there should not be a wholesale of parastatals, and that there should be more social spending on education, health and other basic needs. Only the Freedom Charter, the RDP and the ANC Elections do not contain the underlying effects and principles of Gear. Mbalula arrogantly says that the ANC will not be forced into abandoning policies that it believes serves the ordinary South Africans, this is said with reference to Gear. The DA here at home proclaims similarly, and consistently urges the ANC government not to heed the calls made by their left-wing partners. Who dared to call the ANC rightwing? Cabinet has since suspended the sale of its stake in Telkom, Eskom and Transnet, with President Mbeki arguing that the state has an important role to play in the development of the South African society. Mbalula, and others who supports Gear, are surely ignorant of this facts. But further than that, they are also ignorant of the fact that the privatisation of state's parastatals led to massive job-losses and price hiking. This lead to the majority of SA without these services. The major mistake that the Zimbabwean government made was to follow the Structural Adjustment Programme, and this is the mistake that Gear commits, a mistake that the World Bank's Report on Development 2003 equally acknowledge. Mbalula will not state this points because, under the circumstances, they do not support his argument against COSATU pledging solidarity and acting in like manner with the peoples of Zimbabwe.

Mbalula flanks through the question of Land and Agrarian Reform in Zimbabwe, and unequivocally mentions his condemnation of COSATU's criticism of it. He implies that the Zimbabwean government was right in engaging into such. But will Mbalula, and many others who support that programme, have the balls to support a similar programme in South Africa? No! They were unequivocal with their "silence" during the

SACP action earlier in the month. Pure hypocrisy. Mbalula relies further on a Report of the South African Observer Mission which deemed the elections “legitimate” when members of the SAOM themselves have become remorseful for having said that (the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches has since admitted to having authored parts of the report and regretted having done so). He further forgets that the SAOM have made recommendations on the conditions for free elections in Zimbabwe, which the Zimbabwean government have failed to uphold.

It has become clear that keeping quiet about Zimbabwe will not help the situation at all. South Africans can do the situation better in that country by assisting the parties involved to come to the negotiations table. The MDC have indicated to President Thabo Mbeki that they are willing to negotiate, but the same is not forthcoming from ZANU-PF. We should realise that a revolutionary outlook and character is not inborn in individuals and organisations. If, as Mao says, you were a revolutionary yesterday, and today you are counter revolutionary, we cannot afford to call you a revolutionary at all (The Little Red Book). Similarly, the same applies with ZANU-PF, it can happen with COSATU, the SACP, or even the ANC. As he walks around the “right” territory, Mbalula must not confuse figures that pretend to be walking left and being in the right to COSATU!

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