



WORKS

The Voice from Below - Zambian Workers Speak Out **Sakhela Buhlungu and Lucien van der Walt** **(1997)**

Descriptions of workers resistance in Zambia during the transition to multiparty politics after being a single party state throughout the 70s until 1991. Showing the grassroots resistance workers put up to privatisation of formerly state owned firms and the associated job cuts.

Shopfloor workers and lower level management in Zambia are extremely critical of the economic policies of the MMD (Movement for Multiparty Democracy) government. Interviews conducted with shopstewards at Nitrogen Chemicals of Zambia (NCZ) give an insight into these views.

The factory

NCZ was established as a parastatal in 1968 to produce mine explosives. It later diversified into other chemicals and 1 fertilizers. Based at Kafue, an industrial town outside Zambia's capital city, Lusaka, the NCZ is a large plant, but its capacity is underutilised and it is poorly maintained.

As is typical in the parastatal sector, the plant used to offer employment to large numbers of workers in relatively protected conditions. However, in line with trends in other sectors of the economy, NCZ has been shedding workers and many employees work fewer shifts than they are paid for. In 1992, the workforce numbered 1600. By 1996, this had been reduced to 1073.

The union

The union at the plant, the National Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers (NUCIW), has been hard hit by the retrenchments, losing at least 400 union members in the process of downscaling. It is one of the unions which disaffiliated from the ZCTU at the federation's 1994 conference. In 1994, the NUCIW had a total membership of 26 000. At the time of the interviews, it had 900 members at NCZ. The union is based on strong shopfloor structures, illustrating the resilience of the labour movement despite decades of repression and government attempts at co-option.

