



WORKS

Worker unity

Concern that workers' interests are protected also informs the shopstewards' views on the disaffiliation of their union from the ZCTU. They believe that it is very important for workers to speak with one voice through a united national trade union movement. They believe that trade union disunity has contributed to the government ignoring their views on economic restructuring.

Michael Hichintu, the vice-chair of the shopstewards committee, says that the general membership of the NUCIW was not consulted about disaffiliation. The majority of members are demanding that the union should rejoin the ZCTU: "We have demanded that the national union leadership should come and address the workers, but they do not come. If they do not come to address us soon, workers at our factory will consider leaving the NUCIW and re-affiliate directly to ZCTU."

This contrasts with the attitudes of national union leaders. Whereas they seem to place the greatest importance on competing with one another for positions in union elections (as was shown by the acrimony at the 1994 ZCTU congress that contributed to the split), the NUCIW workers place a premium on solidarity as the means to defend their interests.

Old divisions

Differences between trade union leadership and rank-and-file membership are by no means a new development in Zambia. Such conflicts were common in the 1960s and 1970s when the Kaunda government sought to enlist the unions in a project of rapid economic development. This was done by banning strikes in much of the economy, making conciliation procedures compulsory in the remainder and by extending direct control over the unions.

The ZCTU itself was formed on the orders of government which wanted a federation which could be closely monitored. Systematic attempts were also made to co-opt union head offices into the national political elite.

All of these efforts failed to halt worker resistance. Although the national union leaders committed themselves to policies such as wage restraint and increasing the pace of work, mineworkers in particular continued to resist work discipline. There was an increase in the number of strikes, in some cases in direct opposition to the ZCTU itself. While union leaders reaped rewards from their 'co-operative' attitude, workers were not rump to tighten their belts any further.

In the late 1970s the ZCTU moved into opposition against Kaunda and conflicts between union leadership and membership were reduced. They seem set, however, to take off once again.

