



Nkomo: Forced to negotiate

Harare Turns Right

Three closely-connected events were supposed to take place in Zimbabwe at the end of 1987. Robert Mugabe would take over as the country's first executive president. At the same time, the theory ran, political unity would be secured between Mugabe's Zanu (PF) and PF-Zapu, at the end of two and a half years of notoriously unconstructive negotiations between the two nationalist parties. These two events would provide President Mugabe with the opportunity to implement the Zanu leadership code, the document passed by the 1984 party congress which limits the amount of property party leaders can own. The code was designed to eliminate corruption. It has never been implemented.

Zapu president Joshua Nkomo was forced back to the negotiating table in the middle of December after the lifting of the ban which had been placed on Zapu in September. For two and a half months, Zapu's main offices in Harare and Bulawayo were closed, party rallies were banned; the elected district councils were effectively made powerless.

At that stage Zapu was still holding out for a number of concessions from any merger agreement: a guaranteed

number of seats in government, politburo and central committee; a new name for the new party; and perhaps recognition that Zapu had something to offer in finding a political solution to the crisis in Matabeleland.

This crisis centres on the five-year-old problem of armed dissidents, but has been highlighted by the prospects of a poor harvest because of last year's drought and, more generally, the political crisis of expectations unfulfilled. The feeling inside Zanu was that a military solution to the dissident problem was close. The army operations in Matabeleland may be costly but, they say, there are now no more than about 300 armed bandits, and they have become desperate. Politically and physically isolated, probably short of ammunition, the government believes that the dissidents have resorted to headline-grabbing attacks like those on white farmers or foreign missionaries.

On this view, then, having seen off the dissidents and broken Zapu with the two-month ban, the time was right to call the party back to the negotiating table to achieve merger on Zanu's terms. Few people have any illusion that the deal signed by Mugabe and Nkomo on

December 22 was anything else.

However it's a mistake to regard this deal as just about Matabeleland, or just about dissidents. Land shortage is acute in some provinces in Zimbabwe and squatting is on the increase once again, particularly in the eastern province of Manicaland. There is the feeling that the government has not been able to come to grips with the seven-year-old issue of land resettlement. For that reason it's interesting that the Zapu members appointed to the new government on January 2 are concentrated around the portfolios of resettlement, rural development, housing, welfare and so on. Although at the moment it's anyone's guess whether they will fare any better than their Zanu predecessors, they'll be working in ministries whose budgets may be cut as the recession that most predict begins to bite.

A wage freeze has been in force in Zimbabwe for the last six months and is due for review. The real value of minimum wages for manual and agricultural workers a year ago was already 10% less than it had been at independence in 1980. The wage freeze last July was seen at first by grassroots trade unionists as a potential rallying point for opposition to the centrist bureaucracy of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), and also for opposition to the 'anti labour' employment and labour act. In practice the dominating ethos of 'production for national development' seems to have kept the labour movement very much on the sidelines. At the same time, the last 12 months have seen the expulsion of leftist leaders in Zanu such as Edgar Tekere and Eddison Zvobgo to the borders of the political wilderness. As much as anything else, the Zanu/Zapu unity agreement continues those trends and represents an amalgamation of the centre-right leadership of both parties, leaving the once-powerful Left of Zanu in particular even more isolated than before.#

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