

MOZAMBIQUE:

# The establishment of O.T.M. and recent industrial trends

By ALFRED MAFULEKA\*

**T**he Mozambican Workers Organisation (OTM) was an umbrella trade union established by Frelimo as part of the "organs of the masses". The union was officially launched in 1983. Its mandate was "to organise all Mozambican workers in production, services and public sectors, improve conditions for higher production, more active participation in planning and control and a better environment at work". OTM acknowledged that it was established by Frelimo "at a time when there existed a project to construct a socialist society under the leadership of the Party". For the next six years OTM had to exist under the leadership and shadow of the party.

The Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) came in 1989, and the austerity measures adopted ate into the workers' meagre wages. The union movement remained almost dormant throughout. The decline in workers' standard of living and other social ills brought about by the World Bank measures found expression in a wave of wildcat strikes in January 1990.

At the time of OTM's foundation in 1983, 14 National Industrial unions were denominated (see block on page 89). However these demarcations indicated a general intention rather than any expression of organisational reality on the ground.

The National Workers Union of the Commerce, Bank and Insurance Industry, has since split into two independent unions: (a) National Union of Banks (SNEB), and

(b) National Union of Commerce, Insurance and Services (SINECOSSE) SINTEVEC has broken down into four divisional unions, still affiliated to OTM, they are: Leather, Clothing, Textile and Shoe manufacturing unions.

The changes taking place in the country as a whole after the introduction of the new constitution in 1990, prompted a "new realism" in OTM. At its 2nd National Congress in 1990, the federation took the following far-reaching decisions:

- ❑ "to become an independent organisation from the state, political parties, employers and all associations of a non-trade union nature.
- ❑ to transform itself into a Trade Union National Centre which embodied the national trade unions.
- ❑ to create new structures and programmes geared to defending workers interests whose living standards have been eroded by the structural economic adjustment".

The advent of political pluralism and the easing of the military situation in the country has provided further problems and challenges to the trade union movement. The union mentions the "pluralism of ideas" which developed within the trade union movement which led to administrative and relationship problems. That ended up with a breakaway of the three unions, SINTICIM, SINTIHOTS and SINTRAT from OTM.

Under the new trade union legislation, affiliated and non-affiliated unions have to register. This entitles a registered union to a status of judicial persona, financial, administrative autonomy.

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1990: Striking Maputo workers listen as their employer explains wage scales

*“The SAP led to a wave of wildcat strikes – 1990”*

To consolidate its new-found profile, the OTM Executive Committee undertook the following measures:

- ❑ The suspension of some clauses in the OTM-CS statutes which contradicted the present circumstances.
- ❑ Decentralising the system of collecting and management of membership subscriptions.

Constructive dialogue and communications have developed between OTM and its affiliates. The convening of the Third Session of the Trade Union Central Council to analyse the circumstances and challenges facing the union movement enjoyed the full agreement and participation of all the trade unions.

OTM council policy states that it defends “trade union unity” and independence, so that unions can be strong and better able to protect workers’ interests effectively.

OTM claims that it realises the challenges posed by the *market economy* conditions and the need to readjust its

strategies. However it is aware of its inexperience in this regard. It also plans to launch a National Public Workers Union in Mozambique.

OTM operates under the terms of the 1990 Mozambican Constitution which contains provisions affecting workers directly.

Under the section on “Economic and Social Rights and Duties”, the following articles guarantee workers’ rights thus:

**Article 88**

- (3) Forced labour shall be forbidden, with the exception of work performance in the context of penal law.

**Article 90**

- (1) All employees shall have the freedom to organise professional associations or trade unions
- (20) The law shall limit the right to strike in essential services and activities, in the interest of the overriding needs of the society.
- (30) Lockouts shall be prohibited. ✧



# Interview with OTM central leadership

ALFRED MAFULEKA from TURP interviews\* the General Secretary of OTM, together with other senior leaders.

**Question:** Can you briefly give the history and background of trade unions in Mozambique?

**Answer:** We can say that the history of the trade union movement in Mozambique is divided into two periods: the first belongs to the colonial period and the second period is that after independence.

The first period is characterised by the Trade Union Corporations, organised according to the professions (each profession or craft corresponded to one union). Because of that, in the same factory there were different trade unions. This type of trade union organisation was encouraged by the colonial government and the leaders were appointed by it. It is important to mention that because of their nature, these trade unions attended only to the government interests and did not realise any effective trade union action.

□ The second era, after independence is characterised by the emergence of trade unions based on industry demarcation and preoccupied in defending workers' interests.

**Q:** When were the first unions formed in Mozambique?

**A:** According to available documentation, the first Trade Union Corporation emerged in Mozambique in 1933 and it was The Corporation for Commerce and Industry Employees. After some time, there appeared the Office Employees Trade Union, The Drivers' Trade Union, Metal Mechanic and Correlatives Trade Union, Civil Building Professional Trade Union, Bank Clerks Trade Union and many others during the period before the 1950's.

**Q:** What were the strategies followed to organise workers into unions and how do they differ from today's?

**A:** An important aspect which characterised those trade unions is the absence of any trade union bases (organisations). There were not any strategies for organising the workers in factories or enterprises, or for developing any kind of trade union activity. They had what we could call "super-structure", which were general assemblies and controls at central and sometimes regional level. At factory level, nothing. This is the main difference between the present trade union movement in which the basic structure, the Trade Union Committee, constitutes the support of the entire trade union movement since it is basically in the enterprise where the struggle for defence of workers' interests takes place. Presently the trade unions are organised in the enterprises and factories, at provincial level and central level through deliberative organs and executive structures defined in respective statutes. Different trade unions are in turn affiliated to OTM-CS, which is the centre for co-ordinating and defining general and common actions and policies.

\* The interview was conducted through an interpreter and this may have affected the language of the Mozambican participants as reproduced here.

**Q: Were non-Portuguese workers allowed to organise themselves into unions?**

**A:** Corporative Trade Unions, because of their own nature of being conceived to serve the colonial power, had affiliation mechanisms based on discrimination. For instance only workers with a certain level of education and some professional skill training could join those Trade Unions Corporations. During the same period workers were required to assimilate (ie. to undergo Portuguese formal education and adopt their habits and lifestyle at the expense of African habits and traditions). Given the high level of illiteracy in those days, we can understand easily that the majority of Mozambican workers did not have any possibility of belonging to a trade union corporation. On the other hand the colonial government prohibited any other kind of trade union not based on (its) Corporation Organisation, any one which could defend the workers. So, we can say that Mozambican workers did not have the chance to organise themselves in a genuine trade union movement which could identify with their legitimate desires.

**Q: How did the struggle for independence affect the workers at shopfloor level, who were not fighting in the bush?**

**A:** The struggle for independence continued to elevate the workers' consciousness about their condition of being oppressed and the violation of their elementary rights. This is why most workers joined Frelimo and fought against the Portuguese colonialism. On the other hand, the development of the struggle allowed insurrections and demands for better labour and living conditions, as occurred in Harbours and Railways.

**Q: What were worker organisations like after independence in 1975?**

**A:** The Production Councils (PC's) created



in 1976, were the first way of organising the workers in our country. The PC's whose structures were democratically elected by the workers, had as principal functions organisation of workers in collective patterns for the struggle against economic sabotage that was taking place after independence

amongst the disaffected colonialists.

Their structures were first created in Maputo City and later extended to the other points of the country, having as basis the working centres and structures in districts and central level. After the creation of PC's, there began the first experiences of workers organising by "branch of activity" (industry). These resulted in the creation of eight sections which later became twenty two branches of activity, which formed the basis of the 15 national trade unions still in existence today.

**Q: How did OTM come into existence?**

**A:** The Production Councils constituted the embryonic form of the Trade Union movement in Mozambique. Through their active defence of workers' rights and interests and at the same time strengthening its organisation, the PC's grew qualitatively and assumed characteristics of syndical (trade union) nature. The Constitutive Conference that took place in 1983, created OTM from PC structures.

**Q: What was the (political) relationship between Frelimo and OTM at the time when it started? And now?**

**A:** The OTM was created under the Frelimo Party intervention. At that time the single party was both the state and the society leader. And so there was a political influence of Frelimo concerning the trade union policy of OTM.

With the deep political and socio-



economic changes that took place in Mozambique, the introduction of multipartyism, the implementation of a Structural Readjustment Programme (SRP) introducing the market economy, the organisational conditions and functioning changed. Thus OTM-CS decided in its second National Conference in 1990, to introduce profound changes in the trade union movement, namely:

- ❑ The transformation of OTM into a Central Union to affiliate National trade unions on a free and democratic basis.
- ❑ OTM independence from the state, the employers, the political parties and any other association of a non-trade union kind.
- ❑ The definition of new tasks and strategies for more adequate functioning according to the present reality especially that which is concerned with market economy conditions. In this way, the OTM fundamentally undertook to directly defend the workers' interests.

In this context, the present reality of OTM-CS is that it is not subordinate or affiliated to Frelimo Party or any other party.

**Q: Who were the first leaders of OTM and what were their positions in the Frelimo party?**

**A:** The OTM always promoted the principle of open eligibility for leadership. So the first leaders of OTM were elected by their respective electorate and among them, there were some who were Frelimo members and some who were not. At the 2nd National Conference of OTM, the democratic principle of eligibility of leaders grew even deeper with the introduction of a secret vote and diversification of the candidature system.

The candidate's party affiliation does not have any influence on the electoral process in union matters today. That is confirmed by the fact that the union staff and leadership belong to various political parties.

**Q: What were the reasons for a change in relationships between the Frelimo party and the OTM?**

**A:** Mainly political and socio-economic changes of the Mozambican society. We are speaking about the evolution of the "monopartyism" situation to a pluralist system, in a market economy, and the necessity of ensuring that the trade union movement conducts its efforts in a manner that defend the workers' interests. This presupposed a strong, independent and autonomous trade union movement's existence.

On the other hand, workers of different political persuasions participate in the trade union movement, united by the common interest which is the struggle for the improvement of their socio-professional conditions. Thus, the independence of the trade union from political parties constitutes a condition to preserve unity in the trade union movement.

**Q: Have the structural adjustment policies, (SAP) and Economic Rehabilitation Programme (PRE) affected workers wages? And what was their response?**

**A:** Effectively all workers, especially those who belong to the "ill-favoured strata", suffer the most negative effects of the Structural Adjustment Policies:

- ❑ increasing inflation which results in prices going up and reduction of workers' wages buying power;
- ❑ mass dismissals in which reorganisation of enterprises is used as an excuse. The minimum salary is incompatible with the present cost of living and there is a lack of relevant means to protect the workers' rights and against salary levels which oblige them to live under extreme poverty conditions. This situation deserves a special conference where it can be addressed properly.

Under these circumstances workers organised themselves into their respective



trade unions and developed strategies to defend their rights and interests (either through collective bargaining with employers or through demanding their right to strike if the chances of peaceful settlement are not possible).

On the other hand OTM-CS is still negotiating with the government, looking for any solution which can improve the workers' situation, for instance by increasing the minimum salary and other ways. Recently a process of Tripartite Social Agreements began, and we hope it could contribute to the debate and the search for solutions to workers' problems.

So, we can say that the majority of workers are not satisfied with the present conditions of life, and we will carry on with the dynamic improvement of the struggle for union unity and independence.

**Q: Was OTM consulted before the above economic measures were introduced?**

**A:** No! The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was conceived by the government. And its practical implementation involved all sections of the Mozambican society. Nevertheless, we have warned the government of the negative consequences and taken some necessary measures to defend workers' interests.

**Q: Were there some workers who left the union because of the above economic measures? If so any approximation?**

**A:** Joining and not joining a trade union is a free choice (constitutionally). We do not know of any worker who left the union because of the SAP measures. But it was just the opposite, what is happening is that workers are joining trade unions to organise themselves in order to fight and defend their rights and socio-professional interests.

**Q: In this new era in Mozambique does the OTM have any alternative Socialist vision?**

**A:** We do not advocate any political

system. We think that is political parties' business. It is not in our plans to object against the implementation of the market economy. However, we defend energetically that which can harm the legitimate workers' interests. These are the socio-professional conditions, education, health, social and labour justice. We are fighting for a democratic society in which human rights and workers' union rights, worthy conditions of life and work are respected.

**Q: Some analysts say that the 1990 wave of countrywide strikes were a sign that OTM was "completely out of touch with the Mozambican labour". Is this analysis true? If so, what were the factors that led to the existence of the gap in the first place?**

**A:** In our point of view OTM always had the workers' interests at heart. When the strikes and general unrest emerged in 1990, OTM-CS had already warned the government structures about the biggest problems which the workers were faced with, the existing risks and about the necessity of taking measures to solve them. All this did not happen.

Trade unions started and controlled the strikes according to the general policies of OTM-CS. They assumed the organisation, direction and defence of the struggle for worker's rights and interests.

**Q: What are the worker rights provided for in the new constitution adopted in November 1990?**

**A:** As we see, the new Constitution (1990) goes deeply into fundamental citizens' rights in general and in workers' rights in particular.

We can refer in particular to the right to a job, to free association and to meet freely, the right to constitute trade unions and professional organisations, the right to sanitary work conditions, the right to strike, social and labour justice.

These rights are now expressed in different laws after they were adopted by



the Parliament, such as a trade union law, the law for freedom of association and assembly, and the Minister's Counsel Decree about collective negotiations etc.

**Q: What are the critical issues presently facing the OTM?**

**A:** The main preoccupation is the consolidation of the structures, the defence of worker unity and the preparation for the coming Congress, which will take place at a time of changing processes within the trade union movement. The main preoccupation is the workers' conditions concerning the high costs of living, the wages' lower buying power, mass retrenchments, and the questions relating to the labour conditions and the violation of workers' rights as enshrined in the labour legislation.

Thus, both the National trade unions or OTM-CS direct their efforts at defending workers' rights and interests.

**Q: There is reportedly a break-up of OTM presently taking place, why?**

**A:** There is no secession within the OTM-CS in our point of view. We do not consider the disaffiliation of one or more trade unions from OTM-CS as secession. On the other hand we regard the disaffiliation from OTM-CS of the three unions in particular, as the phenomenon which resulted from the transformation process which is not only taking place in this country but in other countries as well.

If you want to know why the three trade unions disaffiliated from OTM-CS, we can say that they rushed the changing process and considered OTM-CS as being slow and consequently were dissatisfied with some articles contained in the OTM-CS statutes. Presently there are contacts being established with these trade unions to seek ways of maintaining worker unity.

**Q: What would OTM or any worker organisation see as an alternative for the Mozambican economy, as opposed to the SAP's or as against the measures Frelimo**

**government adopted since 1987 to boost the economy? Does OTM have any Economic Policy of its own?**

**A:** OTM-CS never presented to the government any suggestion of an alternative political or economical policy framework against the market economy already implemented. OTM-CS has requested, within the current economic policy framework, that the government take measures that will improve the workers' socio-economic situation and protect the right to a job to be entrenched in the Constitution, including the right to health, education, social and labour justice and a worthy life. ☆

**Immediately after OTM was founded fourteen national trade unions were denominated as follows:**

- SINPOCAF (Docks and Railways)
- SINTEVEC (Textile, Garment, Leather and Footwear)
- SINTAIB (Food and Beverage)
- SINTRAT (Road Transport and Technical Assistance)
- SINTIA (Sugar Industry)
- SINTAC (Civil, Aviation, Communications and Post)
- SINTICIM (Civil Construction, Timber and Mining)
- SINTIME (Metallurgical and Energy Industry)
- SINTIQUIGRA (Chemistry, Graphic and Paper Industry)
- SINTMAP (Mercantile, Marine and Fishery Industry)
- SINTIHOTS (Hotels, Tourism and Allied Industry)
- SINTAF (Agriculture, Forestry and Plantations Workers)
- SINTCOBASE (Commerce, Bank and Insurance Industry)
- SINTIC (Cashew Nuts Industry)