

Difficult rebirth of socialist politics in Zambia

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On Monday, January 29, an odd article appeared on the front page of Zambia's *Daily Nation*. The headline read: Socialist Party Recruits. The article was written by Bennie Mundando who is a reporter at the paper. The article begins fairly innocuously, about the formation of the Socialist Party of Zambia - led by Dr. Cosmas Musumali, an economist. But then it takes a mischievous turn. The reporter quotes an anonymous source who offers wild allegations about the party. 'We were also taught to make and detonate petrol bombs as a protective weapon against the police,' the anonymous insider said to Bennie Mundando. The source said that this training was held by the Socialist Party in Matero and Kasupe - two sections of Lusaka, the capital of Zambia.

On that same day - January 29 - swiftly, Thandiwe Mhende - the Chief Registrar of Societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs - wrote a letter to the Secretary General of the Socialist Party. Mrs. Mhende brought to the notice of the Socialist Party the article in the *Daily Nation*. This was remarkably efficient for the Registrar of Societies. It had taken an entire year to allow the Socialist Party to register its name and gain official status. Now, without minutes of the newspaper falling on the front door of the ministry, its head had penned a letter of warning to the Socialist Party. Pointing out the allegations about bombs, the Chief Registrar wrote, 'I request that you state your position in terms of the authenticity of these serious allegations that have been made against your party'.

What was of interest is that Thandiwe Mhende did not ask the editor of the *Daily Nation* - Richard Sakala - or his reporter - Bennie Mundando - to offer any evidence. Instead it asked the Socialist Party to answer wild charges that appear to be entirely manufactured.

Or at least that is how the Socialist Party sees the situation. Early in the morning of January 29, Dr. Musumali called the story a 'fabrication'. The Party said later in the day that the story was 'laced with malice and non-factual comments'.

As a party 'rooted in the working-class ideology of Marxist-Leninism,' the Socialist Party statement reads, it has every right to 'reach out to the Zambian people irrespective of where they are found'.

Zambia, despite being on top of one of the largest reserves of copper, has a population that lives in poverty and hunger. [Sixty per cent of the children who live above the copper cannot read](#). The copper is controlled by multinational companies that have eviscerated any hope of democracy in Zambia. The Patriotic Front government, under Edgar Lungu, that rules Zambia has moved the state into near authoritarianism. It has sought every avenue to close down the work of trade unions and dissenters - including the Socialist Party.

But the Socialists continue. I spoke to some of their leaders who were busy in eastern Zambia holding meetings of sympathisers. The trade unionists look exhausted, their faces lined with anxiety

and fatigue. But they are relentless. They have no choice. There is only one road out of hunger and it is not paved by the multinational copper conglomerates. These Socialists believe that they are building that road. Perhaps it is because they have touched a chord that the government seems determined to go after them. Some of the Socialists fear that this newspaper article and the letter by the Chief Registrar sets the stage for a crackdown on the party. This would not be the first time.

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