Strikes in Malawi

Presented by:
Kawerama Sonjo
Outline

• Social economic context
• Muzzling of workers rights 1964 to 1992
• 1992 strike activity
• Wave of strikes in 2012
Socio-Political & Economic context

• Malawi has relatively been the lowest wage paying country in Southern Africa (Prof. L. Dzimbiri)

• **Real wages** in Malawi have continued to decline since the 1960s (Prof. L. Dzimbiri)

• UNDP Human Development Report of 2010 indicates that 80 percent of people employed live on less than USD 1.25 a day
Muzzling of Workers Rights
1964-1992

• By the end of 1964, 14 trade unions out of 19 had been de-registered by the MCP government.

• In 1965, the then ruling party (MCP) called for a compulsory affiliation of the federation of trade unions to the party

• Only 5 unions were allowed to exist since 1964
1992 Strikes in Malawi

- Negative socio-economic impacts of the IMF/World Bank sponsored SAPS
- Wind of change that was blowing across Southern Africa in the early 1990s, provided fertile ground for the rejuvenation of a vibrant trade unionism in Malawi from 1993.
- March 1992 Lenten Pastoral letter by the Catholic Bishops against the one party state regime
- Arrest of trade union veteran Chihana in April 1992
1992 Strikes in Malawi

• strike activity against poor working conditions and low wages which started with employees of David White Head & Sons on 5th May 1992

• In 1993, the civil service too experienced two huge strikes that for a while crippled the country’s health, education, transport and other sectors.
Outcome of 1992 strikes

- Tripartite meetings to address the causes of the strike activity
- State appealed to employers to form Joint Consultative Committees (JCC) in all workplaces to facilitate amicable resolve of employees’ grievances
- 1992 strikes contributed immensely to the transition from one party to multi-party state (1993-1994)
- 1996 Labour Relations Act which provides for mechanisms for dispute resolutions and strike activity as last resort
2012 Wave of strikes

Impact of May 2012 devaluation of 49 percent following 10 percent devaluation in August 2011:

• Incremental rising cost of living
• Further decline of real wages
• Further loss of purchasing power
• Decline of demand for goods and services
• Increasing number of strikes since May. About 20 since June 2012
End