

ZAPU- Life from the belly of the beast

Jonah is the name given in the bible to a prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel, about the 8th century BC. In the book of Jonah, he is ordered by God to go the city of Nineveh to prophesy against their wickedness that was not pleasing to God. Jonah instead flees from the presence of the Lord by going to Jaffa and then sailing to a city called Tarshish. Tarshish was completely opposite from the direction God had instructed Jonah to go. Whilst on the way there a huge storm confronts them. The captain of this ship realizes that this is no ordinary storm and after casting lots he learns that Jonah was to blame. Jonah admits to this knowing his transgression against divine instruction. He states and volunteers to be thrown overboard so that the storm will cease. The sailors at first attempt to get the ship ashore and upon failing decided to throw Jonah overboard. Immediately the sea calms. Jonah is miraculously saved by being swallowed by a very large fish specially ordained by God. He spent three days and three nights (Jonah 1.17). In the second chapter of the book of Jonah, he prays to God and commits to thanksgiving and to carrying out the task God has commanded of him.

I tell the story above in order to put into perspective the story that is to follow. On September 13th, Newsday ran two interesting stories which made interesting reading. What made them more interesting was that one was a survey Commissioned by the newspaper and the other was an opinion piece by the MDC-T Senator Obert Gutu, titled "MDC-T -the only game in town". The two were juxtaposed such that they came across as fact to the novice reader. The survey in question was reportedly carried out by the Public Mass Opinion Institute in August using a "nationally representative sample of 1062 people". The guinea pigs used in this survey were asked to indicate their voting intentions by stating the party candidate they would vote for on the day of that particular survey. The indicative results showed that 32% of the voters would vote for Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T, whilst 18% percent would vote for President Robert Mugabe's ZANU PF and a mere 2% would vote for ZAPU lead by Dumiso Dabengwa. Mavambo Kusile/Dawn lead by Simba Makoni and Professor Mutambara's MDC-M would get at least 1% each and the rest of the votes were attributed to the electorate refusing to disclose their preferences.

In the opinion piece, Senator Obert Gutu in apparently buoyant language, most likely instigated by the survey begins with a tirade on ZANU PF and how its failure to change and adapt to the politics of the new world will ultimately be its downfall. He proceeds to draw parallels with other liberation war parties in Africa like the Chama cha mapinduzi in Tanzania created under the leadership of Julius Nyerere and has since passed the reins of power to others and ultimately to Jakaya Kikwete. Nothing could be further from the truth. ZANU PF has failed to reinvent itself, let alone create room for the young aspiring political minds to its detriment. Most of these brilliant minds are now domiciled in other political parties like the MDC-T, MDC-M and revived ZAPU.

Going back to the story of Jonah. ZAPU as a political party was originally formed in 1961 under the leadership of Dr Joshua Nkomo. In December 1987 it merged with ZANU PF following the Gukurahundi massacres in the Midlands and Matabeleland. The unity accord was a political solution to a political problem that threatened to wipe out the residents of the Midlands and Matabeleland in Zimbabwe. Like the story of Jonah in October 2008 a group of former ZAPU and ZIPRA cadres convened a meeting and expressed their desire to exit the belly of the beast – ZANU PF. In November 2008 it was decided that ZAPU was to be revived and immediately reassert its place as the oldest liberation movement in Zimbabwe. In August this year ZAPU held its 9th congress since its formation in 1961 and it's first since its revival. Dumiso Dabengwa was elected to lead the party for the next five years at the congress.

What is interesting to note is that whilst ZAPU was either planning to or having its Congress in Bulawayo, the Public Mass Opinion Institute was carrying out its survey. In actual fact what it means is that ZAPU has already begun moving counters even before its members begin knocking on doors. This I suppose explains the panic attributed to the opinion piece written by Senator Obert Gutu, when he tries to sell the notion that the MDC-T is the only game in town. ZAPU as following the successful Congress held in Bulawayo has hit the ground running. ZAPU is now set to regain its traditional electoral strongholds in Matabeleland, Masvingo, and the Midlands and make inroads into Mashonaland and Manicaland.

ZAPU represents the true values of the liberation struggle Zimbabweans have always valued. *“Zapu is the oldest liberation movement in this country. It is the only party whose support is truly national character. There is no single area of Zimbabwe where ZAPU does not have a following”* – CG Msipa, 14 June 1978. ZAPU as the original vanguard party in Zimbabwe has the locus standi to talk about the legacy of the liberation of Zimbabwe, protect this legacy and is flexible enough through its new crop of leaders to engender the new politics of the new world order. ZAPU espouses democratic values and has on board young leaders who stand on the shoulders of tried and tested gallant sons of Zimbabwe like Dr Joshua Nkomo, Jason Moyo, Lookout Masuku, Leopold Takawira, David Parirenyatwa, Ndabaningi Sithole and many others that sacrificed for this nation.