

## WHITHER ZIMBABWE?

This paper is one of the more difficult papers that I attempted to write to date. The crisis in Zimbabwe is currently a global focus and with this paper I will attempt to analyse the Zimbabwean situation from another perspective and to draw parallels with the South African situation. I hope this will enable us to look beyond the current fighting between the ZANU-PF and the MDC.

### **Historical Overview**

A feature of the Zimbabwean crisis as it unfolds, is the emergence of a revived nationalism, with race as a key proponent and selective narrative of the liberation history as a ideological policy debate in the public discourse. Gramsci explained it in this manner: “intellectual and moral unity, posing all questions around which the struggle rages not on corporate level but on a “universal” plane, and thus creating hegemony of a fundamental group over a series of subordinate groups.” The strategy adopted by the ZANU- PF has been to monopolise the national media to develop an intellectual and cultural strategy within a historical discourse around national liberation, which also has sought to capture a broader Pan Africanist and anti-imperialist audience. In other words these “radical nationalists” claim that they are the only social force that can speak on behalf of the population. However, it is historically evident that most, if not all anti-colonial liberation movements consist of a broad alliance where all social classes form part of these struggles and it is mostly under the aegis of a petit-bourgeois leadership that is prone to align itself with the dominating class at any given time and it is riddled with factionalism. The established press (opposition, pro-government and the international bourgeoisie) is dealing with the split in the MDC while the ZANU- PF factionalism has largely been neglected. The leadership struggles in all these movements bear testimony to it. The new ANC elite is using these same ideological arguments. We find a situation where most of the discussion is focussed on the role of the state, and taking little account of the popular democratic processes that took place during these struggles. The ruling party claims to be the sole custodian of the achievements of these struggles.

### **The Degeneration of a Radical Nationalist Movement to a Bourgeoisie Neo-Liberal Party**

It is fundamentally important to know that Zimbabwean Independence came through a political negotiated settlement brokered by imperialism. Infighting amongst these liberation movements under the leadership of the nationalist petit bourgeoisie left various kinds of economical and political remains in the “Rhodesian” hands. The Lancaster House agreement also ensured that Mugabe compromised with white owned capital. The land question, which to all of us in this conference, is the central axis of all struggles within the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggles, has been expounded upon by different radical nationalist movements. This was because 55% of fertile land was owned by 6000 white farmers while over a million peasants subsisted on 45% of the land, coupled with a small working class. Mugabe of ZANU and Nkomo of ZAPU agreed at the Lancaster House negotiation that Margaret Thatcher and her Tory party would address the land question based on a willing buyer, willing seller process.

A direct parallel can be drawn to South Africa and even Namibia with its skewed land tenure systems. Post Independence saw a Mugabe espousing a lot of socialist rhetoric while walking right. The 1980 -1997 period saw the agrarian reforms to be implemented being severely compromised when it was stalled by Margaret Thatcher and John Major and subsequently shelved by the Labour Party of Tony Blair. ZANU- PF was unable to fast track this process

due to inadequate financial resources based on the willing buyer willing seller agreement. By 1997 the state had achieved less than then half the resettlement targets and only your rich peasant (Kulak) had access to arable land.

I wish to quote Lazarus Nzareybani a left wing Zanu PF member in parliament “The socialist agenda has been adjourned indefinitely. You don’t talk about socialism in a party that is led by people who own large tracts of land and employ cheap labour.”(1989). The country embraced the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) programme of the Woods institution that same year. The power of financial institutions and the media grew tremendously, while manufacturing stagnated and there was a shift of capital flow into finance and speculation (local commercial estate and stock market).

Between 1980 -1990 the ZANU PF government pursued a mixed economy and it still has at its disposal the state enterprises and the regulatory regime which it inherited from the Rhodesian state, that could have been employed to develop a new elite. The developmental social politics that were introduced were in education, health etc. It is important to understand that at that time ZANU- PF saw itself more as a liberation movement than a party. There was an high uneven ideological training of its cadres and a small group of intellectuals came to the fore to absorb the positions of a black elite.

A few managers and subsidiary shareholders emerged within the private sector, while the parastatals were poorly funded due to the idea that those would be privatised on the basis of the Economic Structural Adjustment Plan, with its resultant failure.

A Department (Indigenisation and Empowerment) was established to place businesses in the hands of black Zimbabweans and to provide them with the necessary resources and skills. This is similar to the South Africa Black Economic Empowerment Policy although it is from a different position, because South Africa uses a BEE charter which awards points that guarantees state contracts while the Indigenisation Act stipulates that 51% of all business must end up in black Zimbabweans hands. It is my contention that this act will result in a comprador bourgeoisie.

According to Patrick Bond, Zimbabwe was overwhelmed by a rise in the new elite, unprecedented property and stock market speculation, and an increasing search for external markets due to local market stagnation. We are aware that this is a phenomenon that was introduced by the IMF and World Bank. High levels of foreign debt was experienced by this nation state. International financial interest was dominant and Zimbabwean Free Processing Zones came into being. The economy was run along corporatist lines with strict governmental controls as per the ESAP guidelines. Controls were placed on wages, prices and there was a massive increase in government spending, resulting in budget deficits. They then introduced a 40% devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar and price and wage controls were removed at the behest of the technocrats of the ZANU-PF government. Growth, employment, wages and social service spending declined sharply, while inflation did not improve. The deficit remained well above target and many industrial firms especially in the Textiles and Footwear Sector closed in response to increase competition and high real interest rates. Another indicator to our Clothing, Textile, Footwear and Leather Sector which had at the same time felt the heat of cheap imports and bilateral agreements.

An economic depression was faced by the Zimbabwean market. Droughts in the early to mid 1990’s contributed to this situation.

The workers' standard of living dropped and as I earlier pointed out there was a decline in the state's contribution to socio and economic welfare due to the financial liberal policy influenced by the Bretton Wood organisations' neo-liberal policies. But in the final analysis it was the greed of the local and international bourgeoisie that expedited this process.

### **The Response of the Zimbabwean Population**

It was during this period that Zimbabwe experienced considerable political and economic upheaval due to worsening economic and human rights conditions. During the 1990's students, trade unions and workers often demonstrated to express their discontent with the ZANU-PF government. The students protested against plans of government to increase control over universities. The response of government in 1992 was to prevent the trade unions from holding anti-government protest actions. In 1994 widespread industrial action weakened the economy and in 1996 a civil servants strike took place over salary issues. While in 1996 a national strike paralysed the economy. The government cracked down on this public discontent and responded through authoritarian rule. It is important to understand that from a Marxist perspective these were spontaneous actions, no political forces could claim that they were the agents of these popular uprisings.

The Zimbabweans only started to align their forces from 1996 -1999 through the National Working People's Convention and in February 1999 the National Constitutional Assembly which led to the launch of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999. It is important to look at this organisation's policy and utterances, what has started as a anti-neo-liberal movement has now attracted conservatives of the Ian Smith regime, Trade Union Bureaucrats and the Black Petit Bourgeoisie in their leadership, while being backed by Imperialism which is very vocal with it's plans for regime change under the disguise of democracy. Please take note that I am not saying that ZANU-PF is a good example of a democratic leadership but I will deal with these issues later.

### **MDC Actions and ZANU PF Reaction**

I start this paragraph with a quotation from Eddie Cross, a leading MDC economics spokesperson and formerly vice-chairperson of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, in 2000 outlining their economic strategy "We are going to fast track privatisation. All fifty government parastatals will be privatised within a two-year time frame, but we are going far beyond that. We are going to privatise many of the functions of government. We are going to privatise virtually the entire school delivery system. And you know, we have looked at the numbers and we think we can get government employment down from about 300, 000 at the present time to about 75,000 in five years."

So much for the champions of the ordinary Zimbabweans who came into being on an anti-imperialist ticket of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, Civic Movement's and Non Governmental Organisations.

The MDC started its campaign from the late 1997, criticising the government for every action that they took without any concrete alternative policies. Urging the whole world and even South Africa to apply sanctions on Zimbabwe by cutting electricity and transport links. (January 13, 2002 BBC interview). It was also during this period that the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Bill was signed by George Bush cutting off Zimbabwe's lines of credit from all multilateral lending institutions.

Although the ZANU-PF government contributed to the imploding of the economy through the land reform programme, mismanagement, commerce and industry have been pursuing operations that could only be to the detriment of the Zimbabwean population. They have embarked on exploitation strategies which will destroy the very Zimbabwean economy that they and the MDC professed to want to save. It is these businesses and the main supporters of the two opposing sides that conducted business without morals, as if any businesses are run according to moral principles. The Reserve Bank governor called for a social contract and these businesses radically increased the selling prices of goods and services to an extent far higher than the prevailing inflation rate and priced their products out of the reach of the consumers. They even changed their prices on a daily base. Local product prices with a single export content are being raised as if they are of imported products.

The government had no other alternative but to announce a price freeze to protect the population. This resulted in black marketeering or the so-called parallel economy. The land reforms of the government, due to large scale land occupations was another contributing factor to the rapid acceleration of super inflation and this resulted in a movement into the cities and urban areas due to hunger and the search for a better livelihood. The ill-conceived launch of “Operation Murambatsvina /Restore Order” in the urban areas of “informal” settlements rendered a large group of people homeless. According to United Nations estimations 700, 000 people have been left without homes and jobs as a result.

The question that we need to ask ourselves is - who benefited really from this politicking of both sides; the people they claimed to represent or a small elite Zimbabwean class?

### **South Africa's Role as a Regional Force**

It is often said that the Zimbabwean crisis has had a negative impact on South Africa and the rest of the SADC region as a whole. This had led to calls from imperialism, the South African opposition and even COSATU to deal with this issue. Let us stop for a while and examine why Pretoria took this approach. Many political reasons were given and I don't think it is the task of the paper to deal with that because volumes of documents have dealt with this issue.

South Africa's position should be seen in broader context of its regional co-operation and the shared history of struggle. South Africa enjoys a huge trade surplus with Zimbabwe due to the export industry and due to the latter's proximity and South Africa's relatively advanced economy has benefited the most from trade agreements with Zimbabwe. According to figures from Zimbabwe's Central Statistics and the South African Department of Trade and Industry, South Africa has become Zimbabwe's principle source of imports at 55.7% in 2006. Zimbabwe's total global imports of US\$ 1.996bn in 2006, a US\$ 1.094bn came from South Africa and it was paid in cash. The same pattern was recorded in 2005. Out of Zimbabwe's total imports of US\$ 2.20bn, 1.176bn representing 53.4% of imports came from South Africa and this was also paid in cash. South Africa on the other hand imports amounted to only 39.4% in 2006 and these were on credit.

The Beit Bridge border post is South Africa's gateway to the rest of the continent, in other words all northbound goods from South Africa pass through Zimbabwe. This is a very good reason for Pretoria's quiet diplomacy. You don't cut you nose to spite your face. All countries putting pressure on South Africa have large business corporations and are making huge profits in Zimbabwe through agriculture, mining, tourism and real estate. Various international banks are operating within the Zimbabwean economy and are in a race to exploit her resources and once again the question that needs to be asked is; to whose benefit?

The MDC with its manifesto of a rapid acceleration of the neo-liberal policy is currently the favourite of Western Imperialism. Its emphasis is regime change while Pretoria and SADC seem to opt for a Government of National Unity. The latest news is that even the Zimbabwean aligned media is starting to propagate this position. The concern of both camps now is the question of who will “lead” this marriage of convenience for Western and African Imperialism. It seems to me that the proponents of Hard line and Quiet Diplomacy are trying to find a middle ground to map out a path for Zimbabwe. Hence this pressure from both sides to release the election results and the presence of different mediators and “powerbrokers”.

### **Still a Bumpy Road Ahead**

According to Chris Hart, a senior economist at Investment Solutions, Zimbabwe now shifts from a path of decline to a path of recovery. “A full recovery is probably only 5 to 7 years away.” It is a fact that 4 out of 5 Zimbabweans are unemployed. The government responded to this crisis by printing more money and thereby reducing the Zimbabwean dollar to a worthless currency and while the petite bourgeoisie exacerbated the situation by fanning imported inflation by the luxurious consumption of the elite. The new government will have to rely heavily on foreign donor funding with its regulatory policies. It is already mooted that they will have to follow Brazil and other nations in the 1990s that means that the neo-liberal experiment is going to be pursued. This “new” government will face conflicting pressures, with foreign investors looking for it to restore credibility to fiscal and monetary policy and Zimbabweans demanding a swift improvement in their standard of living. We all have experienced this policy in the South African context where the ANC is slowly starting to lose political popularity and the legitimacy to govern.

### **Conclusion**

With a weak left, nationally and regionally, it became important for all progressives in Zimbabwe and the region to make strategic alliances and to advance a programme to move away from this political discourse where the slogans of human rights and good governance are based on models of developed countries. This could only happen with a leadership that understands programmatic struggles and how to use this programme in the day-to-day struggles of the region. Solidarity with all progressive forces in this region should take our struggle forward. The non-aligned intellectuals are currently driving this discourse. Previously the NGO leadership was the dominant force. The time has come for the revolutionary left to take active steps to intervene and to stamp down a revolutionary perspective upon the current epoch.

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