

## ZIMBABWE

### POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS: A LUTA CONTINUA

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Events at the end of 2010 signalled that the political, social and economic crisis that has engulfed Zimbabwe since the late 1990s, whilst having become somewhat less acute, has not gone. It has not disappeared despite the compromise of a global political agreement (GPA) and resultant Government of National Unity (GNU) that was cobbled amongst the elites in the opposition and the Mugabe dictatorship on 15 September 2008 and 11 February 2009 respectively. Indeed several events showed that, notwithstanding appearances of return to normalcy, serious social and political tensions remained simmering just beneath the surface. Such events included conflicts around the constitutional reform exercise; the crisis triggered in the GNU by various unilateral state executive appointments by President Robert Mugabe disregarding his supposed co-principals in the GNU, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC-T and Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara of the smaller MDC-M; and finally the fate of the GNU as it reaches its expiry date in February 2011 with Mugabe insisting on fresh elections by June 2011 – a call vehemently opposed by Tsvangirai and business and civic society elites and the Western powers.

Alongside all these intra-elite tensions there is growing anger below from workers, youths and the urban and rural poor at the growing poverty, unemployment and rising prices of basic goods and services like food, education, accommodation and fuel, in the middle of escalating, conspicuous and corrupt consumption by elites as the economy has relatively stabilised.

Thus the fundamental underlying causes of the Zimbabwean crisis remain unaddressed, namely, the political authoritarianism and dictatorship of the Mugabe regime and, the failure of neoliberal policies adopted by local and global elites to stem the continuing local and global crisis of capitalism. Policies which have resulted in severe decline and de-industrialisation of economies particularly in semi-industrialised countries of the Global South like Zimbabwe, South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt. This has spawned unprecedented impoverishment of workers, un-employment and social inequalities that have, in turn, triggered massive revolts from below. Probably the most important being the on-going Tunisian revolution, which may yet have immense regional and international

implications and signal what has been referred to by some as a potential turning point in world affairs and the emergence of a new era of revolutionary upheaval after decades of neoliberal triumphant reaction.<sup>1</sup>

#### INTRA-RULING CLASS CONFLICTS

By the end of 2010, less than two years from its inception, the GNU was facing a terminal crisis. President Mugabe had unilaterally appointed or re-appointed provincial governors, ambassadors and senior judges and refused to appoint Tsvangirai's designated deputy minister of agriculture, Roy Bennet, arguing that he was an unrepentant former Rhodesian. Yet these were the GPA outstanding issues which were supposed to be resolved by SADC and the AU. Tsvangirai declared that he would not recognise these appointments along with those of the Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono and Attorney General Johannes Tomana. He wrote to the UN, AU and major regional and international powers urging them not to acknowledge them either. He also filed a High Court action against Mugabe challenging the appointments. Mugabe and Zanu PF dismissed Tsvangirai's actions as non-consequential and instead stated that elections would now be held by mid - 2011 to do away with the GNU, with or without the constitutional and electoral reforms envisaged in the GPA as its life-span would expire in February. The Zanu PF Conference held in December 2010 endorsed this position.

There were further elite tensions around the constitutional process following the national consultation, led by the political parties-dominated committee, COPAC (Commission of Parliament on the new Constitution). While claiming to have reached over a million people, the process was clearly dominated by Zanu PF especially in the rural areas. The party went all out to mobilise, using both party and state machinery, in particular, the security forces in a manner reminiscent of the June 2008 terror campaign. Many rural meetings were characterised by large turnouts with choreographed and rehearsed positions under the so-called Operation Chimumu - i.e. attend but do not speak at the meeting in deference and support of chosen party speakers. Intimidation and coercive tactics as had been used in the June 2008 Presidential election were effectively used. This was complemented by the total disorganisation and non-mobilisation by the two MDCs. Whether because of lack of a real cadreship base or shortage of strategic planning and mobilisation capacities, even in their traditional strongholds like Harare and Bulawayo, Tsvangirai's MDC and its civic groups were completely outmanoeuvred by Zanu PF. The then deputy secretary general of the smaller MDC, Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga, was later to reveal that it had never been the intention of the three COPAC parties to undertake a serious outreach programme but only to get a sense of what the people wanted and then subsequently negotiate the real constitution amongst them! Ironically Zanu PF, which had initially opposed the process, went out of its way to mobilise and was consequently richly rewarded. Some resistance was mounted by

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<sup>1</sup> WSWS, Editorial, 17 January 2011: "The mass uprising in Tunisia and the perspective of permanent revolution" <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2011/jan2011/pers-j17>, quoting the German newspaper Deutsche Welle – "What happened in Tunisia is a historic event and a strong signal to the entire Arab world. It shows that populations can successfully rise against authoritarian and corrupt rulers and that 'regime change' is possible on its own without internal and external military intervention, even without leadership from opposition politicians and civilian players."

radical civic groups like DUF<sup>2</sup> [Democratic United Front for a People Driven Constitution] in Harare, Chitungwiza and Bulawayo, but this was only tokenism in the overall scheme of things, given the domination of the process by Zanu PF nationally. At his party's December conference Mugabe claimed that 80% of the contributions to COPAC would be from his party.

The fundamental positions his party had been pushing for include:

- retention of an authoritarian and dictatorial executive presidency in a highly centralised authoritarian state with Mugabe still allowed to run for office despite having already been in power for over three decades;
- reactionary provisions like retention of the death penalty and denial of dual citizenship to the millions of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora;
- prohibition of the rights to abortion and free sexual orientation;
- the non-inclusion of fundamental socio-economic rights like the right of all to free quality and fully funded health, education, water, food security, support for the disabled, the elderly or children and denial of workers' rights like the right to strike and to a living wage; and
- the permanent entrenchment of the grab by the Zanu PF aligned elite of vast tracts of the richest land during the land reform programme, guaranteed state funding for their agriculture activities as well as a share by them in the country's mineral's wealth, currently dominated by the multinationals.

Totally outplayed, the MDC was in disarray in its response initially stating that the COPAC outcomes should be disregarded in favour of a negotiated constitution. When this did not run with Zanu PF, the party changed its position to state that, although it still regarded the COPAC process as flawed, illegitimate and not people-driven it would continue to participate in the process in order to pave the way for the impending elections. When subsequently in power, the party would then give the people of Zimbabwe a truly democratic people-driven constitution! With this docile surrender to the regime by the cowardly MDC-T leadership, the constitutional reform process has once again resumed and is now scheduled to end with a referendum in September 2011 with a draft substantially similar to the original Kariba Draft (a compromise document drafted in secret by a few representatives of the three political parties in September 2007), but probably worse in many respects.

With MDC in tow, Mugabe, a few days after his rabble-rousing party Conference, made a surprise about turn, abandoning the militant rhetoric of the conference at a dramatic press conference with Tsvangirai and Mutambara where the three affirmed that the GNU was

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<sup>2</sup> DUF was established on 22 May 2009 amongst heated debates in civic society whether or not to take part in the constitution making process. While many NGOs, often in support of the MDC, chose to join, both the ZCTU (Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions) and the NCA (National Constitutional Assembly), decided not to participate at all because, they argued, such a process cannot be led by politicians and parliament. A number of ZCTU affiliates, while agreeing with this argument, decided to still participate, but under strict conditions, as they saw it as an opportunity for publicity and conscientisation by raising their views and concerns. They were joined by a range of movements and organisations like the Chitungwiza Residents and Rate Payers Association, the Harare Residents Trust, the Zimbabwe Cross-borders Traders Association and many AIDS support Groups. The secretariat of the grouping is held by the Zimbabwe Labour Centre.

generally in good shape and working. Although elections were still to go ahead, this would be after the conclusion of the constitutional reform process and other electoral reforms envisaged under the GPA and that the timing of the elections would be by consensus of the three political leaders. Tsvangirai affirmed this and soon thereafter, COPAC announced the revised schedule of the constitutional process with the Referendum scheduled for September, meaning elections would either be at the end of 2011 or more likely early 2012. The GNU thus survived the mortal threats it was facing but with Mugabe having successfully changed the main political focus away from his gross violations of the GPA to the issue of the impending elections – a brilliant demonstration of what USA ambassador Dell, in the leaked WikiLeaks cables, had described way back in July 2007 – namely that Mugabe *“is a brilliant tactician and has long thrived on his ability to abruptly change the rules of the game, radicalise the political dynamics and force everyone to react to his agenda.”*

#### WHICH WAY FOR THE ELITES?

The above raises various key questions including why Mugabe backed down on the mid 2011 elections; the prospects of MDC and Tsvangirai to lead a successful democratisation struggle in the context of the stark strategic and tactical weaknesses so far exhibited; and finally whether the regime and local ruling elites have successfully weathered the revolts from below that posed potentially fundamental threats to them as the Zimbabwean crisis unfolded more than a decade ago.

The Mugabe concession on shifting the election date is most likely merely a tactical shift: to accommodate and not alienate a powerful but tricky regional ally, President Zuma of South Africa, as well as to ensure the finalisation of a constitution from which the regime stands to gain so much including shaping the political frame-work of the country long into the post-Mugabe era. The primary strategy of ZANU's December Conference however remains intact, namely, that of fundamentally changing, if not dismantling the present GNU through a quick election and restoring the regime's full powers, whilst Mugabe is still able and alive. For the regime, the GNU has fully and truly served its purpose and must now give in to a new stage.

By mid-2008 into early 2009 the regime was facing an unprecedented impending economic, social and political implosion with a hyperinflation never experienced before, empty supermarket shelves, a useless local currency and collapsing public and private utilities. Ambassador Dell, as revealed by the WikiLeaks cables had correctly predicted this one year earlier stating: *“...I'm convinced the end is not far off for the Mugabe regime...(my predecessors and many others ... have all said the same thing, and yet Mugabe is still with us). I think this time could prove different, however, because for the first time the President is under intensifying pressure simultaneously on the economic, political and international fronts...In the past, he could always play one of these off against the other ...But he is running out of options and in the swirling gases of the new Zimbabwean constellation that is starting to form, the economic, political and international pressures are concentrating on Mugabe himself.”* And how prophetic he was... for indeed for the first time since 1980, Zanu PF lost the March 2008 elections and Mugabe, coming second to Tsvangirai, only survived defeat because of the split opposition vote and, ominously by January 2009, junior soldiers were rioting in the streets.

What saved the Mugabe dictatorship was the Thabo Mbeki brokered 2008 GPA, which was naively accepted by Tsvangirai. The hyper-inflation dragon was tamed and Zimbabwe's international isolation reduced as Tsvangirai begged his Western backers to lift the sanctions because Mugabe had changed and was a well-meaning statesman concerned about his legacy - advice that went unheeded. Instead of building on the growing popular discontent, Tsvangirai and MDC naively rushed into an ill-conceived compromise that in fact left Mugabe potentially holding the key levers of power. Long before the deal in 2007 the International Socialist Organisation (Zimbabwe) had warned:

*"... (The MDC – T leaders') primary preoccupation is towards reaching a sell-out agreement with the Zanu PF dictatorship that will not benefit the poor and working people ... the opposition is dominated by the petite bourgeois elite, who long ago prostrated themselves before western neo-liberal forces and are now eager to get into state power, even as junior partners, and accumulate as a neo-colonial dependent capitalist class<sup>3</sup>"*

And on conclusion of the GPA on 15 September 2008, the Socialist Worker, the organ of ISO, further warned:

*"On the other hand Tsvangirai, supported by a duplicitous and largely cowardly civic society, actively undermined any attempt at serious mass action solely relying on western sanctions. Not surprising they have been forced into a deal which gives a desperate dictatorship breathing space to renew itself, whilst laying the foundations for massive long term assaults on the living conditions of working people. Make no mistake: despite the above concessions MDC is the definite junior in this deal with very unclear chances of success whilst the future of the deal itself is very uncertain..."*

*"...Thirdly, unlike the Patriotic Front, MDC has no real fallback position if the deal collapses. Its only guarantor is a mediator<sup>4</sup> who has now been ousted. Having consistently neutralised the mass action route, MDC has solely relied on the western sanctions. But MDC is not in full control of this. Tsvangirai seems to have signed a deal that does not meet the full approval of his western allies..."*

*"With economic siege continuing, especially in an environment of global economic crisis, the deal looks very fragile and may unravel sooner rather than later. Popular acceptance of such an expensive and over bloated coalition government, proportionately the biggest in the world in a country with the world's highest inflation, is likely to wane rapidly if the promised economic recovery fails to take place, with the draft national constitution a possible flash point. At such stage Mugabe's continued control of the security apparatus, the state and treasury will be decisive and the opposition's nakedness and foolishness in signing such deal exposed.<sup>5</sup>"*

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<sup>3</sup> Gwisai M, Revolutionaries, Resistance and Crisis in Zimbabwe: Anti neoliberal struggles in periphery capitalism, 2nd ed. (ISO, Harare, 2007) p 47.

<sup>4</sup> The text refers here to Thabo Mbeki's resignation as South Africa's President on 21 September 2008, after his recall by the National Executive Committee of the ANC.

<sup>5</sup> Socialist Worker October 2008 Special Supplement.

The WikiLeaks cables confirm that around the same time, but for different reasons, the American imperialists were also deeply worried about Tsvangirai and MDC's leadership qualities. Ambassador Dell wrote that Tsvangirai was a *"brave, committed man...But Tsvangirai is also a flawed figure, not readily open to advice, indecisive and with questionable judgment in selecting those around him. He is the indispensable element for opposition politics, but possibly an albatross around their necks once in power. In short, he is a kind of Lech Walesa character: Zimbabwe needs him, but should not rely on his executive abilities to lead the country's recovery."* According to Dell, Zimbabwe's opposition was "far from ideal" needing massive handholding and more could have been achieved by the time he left if they had been better leaders. *"With few exceptions (Tendai Biti and Nelson Chamisa), the talent is thin below the top ranks."*

We now seem to be reaching the point ISO predicted when, with a relatively stabilised economy and Tsvangirai having demobilised his base, Mugabe no longer needs the GNU and is again flexing his muscles.

Despite polls showing him losing again in a free election, Mugabe and Zanu PF hardliners believe they can win an election held within the next year. Their confidence arises from the COPAC constitutional outreach programme where they were able to successfully laboratory test their election strategy based on the system they put in place with devastating consequence in June 2008. A Mugabe and Zanu PF victory will be founded on massive intimidation of the rural population. Moreover, they calculate, the indignation behind the protest vote for the opposition arising from the massive economic crisis of 2008, then attributed to ZANU, has abated. Concurrently, the neoliberal and anti-poor policies and activities of the MDC T in government, nationally and in local authorities have sparked growing discontent with MDC's performance, in particular the activities of Finance Minister Biti who is being portrayed as denying civil servants decent wages and farmers inputs and MDC councils attacking vendors.

Clearly, even if defeated in elections, Mugabe and Zanu PF have no desire to leave power soon or peacefully. Securing their takings in the mining of the large diamond deposits in the country, in the revival of agriculture and in the economic indigenisation programme will require an appropriate enabling political framework that can only be provided by untrammelled Zanu PF control of the state. The coming elections will therefore be characterised by state orchestrated violence, intimidation and the manipulation of the results to ensure a Mugabe victory, no matter what, with ample lessons learnt from Gbagbo in Cote d'Ivoire. Both the Minister of Defence, Emmerson Mnangagwa and Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri have declared that the party will not relinquish power even if it loses elections, because it brought independence through the gun and could not surrender to a Western-sponsored party through a ball point pen which costs less than 5 cents! Their resolve has been strengthened by the WikiLeaks confirmations of MDC's ties and subordination to the major Western powers.

Today Zanu PF has gone into war mode to win the constitutional referendum and the elections at all costs. Thereafter they may co-opt sections of the opposition in a more watered down GNU. Candidates for this are likely to be the MDC-M and the revived ZAPU<sup>6</sup>. It is in anticipation of this that at the MDC-M Congress of 09 January 2011, Arthur Mutambara was ousted from the presidency and replaced by secretary general Welshman Ncube. This was done to bolster its regional and ethnic appeal in its only stronghold, Matabeleland, and counter the potential threat from the revived ZAPU, which is also fishing in the same waters. With his son married to Zuma's daughter, Ncube could be in a strong position to push for credibility of such a Zanu PF controlled GNU with Zuma, helped by the likes of ANC Youth League president Julius Malema. Again Dell was spot on when he described Ncube as a deeply divisive and destructive player in the opposition ranks and of use to the regime and South Africa.

An alternative to this scenario, favoured by sections of local and international capitalists, is a post-Mugabe coalition between the moderate and West-friendly faction of a ZANU PF led by Vice President Joyce Mujuru and her husband, General Solomon Mujuru with Tsvangirai's MDC. This remains a possibility but a less likely one than the earlier one in view of the rapid pace of events and tightening of Mugabe's grip.

A complicating factor is the struggle within ZANU PF. It is seriously divided between the Mnangwagwa faction of hardliners and securocrats who want to go the Burma generals route of an open dictatorship backed by mineral resources, and the more moderate Mujuru faction that wants to protect the wealth of the business and political elites by arranging a cross-party arrangement with the MDC backed by business and the West. Only Mugabe seems to have authority over both factions acting as a unifying force that can stop the two from going for each other's throats. But at nearly 87, Mugabe cannot be in effective control for much longer. This is why the hardliners are pushing for an election now, so that ZANU PF can confront the opposition as a united force under Mugabe, but based on the coercive strategy of the hardliners, who then, after having grabbed the victory, should be rewarded with succession. Should Mugabe die in office earlier than that or before resolving the factional fight, there is a real possibility of the hard line faction making a quick pre-emptive strike against its enemies both in ZANU and the opposition to seize power.

Anything other than this will see power being surrendered to the bigger Mujuru – Tsvangirai alliance.

Either way, all the above intra elite scenarios imply that the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe is far from being won. Clear is that Tsvangirai and MDC-T have no viable plans for countering the above strategies of the regime as they continue to vacillate, waver and place faith in the regime's institutional processes and indeed in government being at the forefront

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<sup>6</sup> In November 2008 the ZAPU, which had been swallowed by ZANU-PF under the 1987 Unity Accord, pulled out of agreement and revived its independent presence in the two Matabeleland provinces which it previously dominated. ZAPU and ANC have maintained close ties as the party's military wing, ZIPRA, trained and operated alongside the ANC's military wing, UmkhontoweSizwe. Though Mugabe had not recognised the break-away ZAPU, in June 2009 Jacob Zuma invited them to his rural village to celebrate his ascendency to the Presidency, while not inviting ZANU-PF.

of spearheading neoliberal attacks on workers and the urban and rural poor as shown by Biti's latest budget. Their biggest weakness is their failure to organise and mobilise for resistance to defend an electoral victory or countering an electoral theft in the streets. Instead they rely on the Western powers to do the job for them.

#### **A LUTA CONTINUA: A UNITED FRONT AGAINST TYRANNY AND CAPITALISM**

What is needed is a working class-led united front of movements and organisations of working people, the socialist left, anti-capitalists and radical progressive democrats grounded in revolutionary socialist politics to independently build and renew both political and economic struggles against the Zanu PF dictatorship as well as the neoliberal capitalist agenda of the ruling class in Zimbabwe, the region and the West.

Despite appearances, the regime is in fact vulnerable. It has no solutions to the continued de-industrialisation and decline of the economy and the resultant massive unemployment, impoverishment of vast layers of the population and huge social inequalities. These arise not only from the siege on the economy from the Western sanctions and the systematic looting by the elite, but most fundamentally from the failure of the neoliberal capitalist economic policies still being pursued. Thus the economic recovery since GNU has been fragile and uneven with increasing impoverishment of workers, youth and the urban and rural poor, who are simply failing to cope under the dollar economy. The towns are once again heaving under the weight of huge numbers of hungry, angry and barely surviving informal traders and unemployed youths selling mobile phone recharge cards. Recently Finance Minister Tendai Biti even joked that "we are now a juice card economy" without realising how distasteful and offensive his remark was.

The regime is completely alienated from workers, the youth and the urban poor, who despise and hate it intensely. As events in Tunisia have shown, in such circumstances the situation could rapidly and unexpectedly unfold. Today and probably in the immediate future, persisting false expectations about Tsvangirai and MDC as well as the haunting memories of the economic horrors of 2007-2008 might still hold back open rebellion. But the possibility of such an uprising will increase over time as the economic situation and social inequality deteriorates, together with growing recognition and daily felt reality of the total inability and bankruptcy of Tsvangirai and the MDC to offer an effective solution. Currently, civil servants are on the verge of a major strike against broken promises by Prime Minister Tsvangirai and Finance Minister Biti to give them decent wages. Moreover, important sections of radical middle classes and trade union leaders are beginning to pursue an independent line, in particular the NCA-ZCTU Alliance<sup>7</sup> that boycotted the COPAC process. Their steadfastness in continuing with the boycott and not being pulled back under Tsvangirai's skirts as in the past

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<sup>7</sup> The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) was formed in 1997 with the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union, ZCTU, as the principal and founder members. The NCA then embarked on a nationwide consultative process to get a popularly drafted new constitution adopted through a referendum. Mugabe forestalled this by organising his own referendum which was consequently rejected in February 2000. In 2009 both NCA and ZCTU chose not to take part in the constitution making process on the grounds that it should not be led by politicians and parliament.

has been impressive. These are the kind of forces that must now begin to coalesce ahead of the Referendum in a united front to campaign against the imminent anti-democratic and anti-working people draft bill, which is supported by all the major parties, civic groups and local and international elites ostensibly to facilitate the next elections, but which in reality will lay the basis for a continued attack on the poor.

To succeed, such a united movement must not have any illusions about the MDC-T or MDC-M, whose leaders have shown themselves not only to be greedy, self-interested and cowardly junior partners of the dictatorship, but also overzealous promoters of massive neoliberal policies that continue violating ordinary people. The proposed Referendum should be used as a launch-pad for a bitter and long-term fight that goes beyond the constitutional reform process and against the entire system of neoliberalism, tyranny and above all capitalism in favour of a fair, just society and which can only be achieved through the mobilisation on the ground of the organised working class and the poor.

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