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ZIMBABWE: A STRATEGY OF TENSION

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1. Introduction

For months the political crisis in Zimbabwe has attracted international media attention. At first sight it is not clear that this is warranted. By comparison with the concurrent crisis in Sierra Leone, for example, the human consequences might seem less severe. The reason for much media interest, without doubt, is racist: the high profile victims of the Zimbabwe violence are white. This is a poor reason for media concern, even within the Zimbabwean context, since the violence has been overwhelmingly directed at black supporters of the opposition rather than the numerically and politically insignificant whites.

However, there are a number of other reasons why Zimbabwe is deserving of attention and analysis. The most important of these is the potential of the Zimbabwe crisis to destabilize the entire Southern Africa region, which is just beginning to emerge from a long history of war and institutionalized racism. The second is that the violence is the response of an entrenched oligarchic elite to a relatively new style of opposition politics - based upon the urban and rural working class rather than upon ethnic affiliation. A third reason is that the situation in Zimbabwe is bound up with the crisis in Central Africa. It is Zimbabwe's entanglement in the war in the Congo - for the personal enrichment of a few individuals - that has exacerbated the country's economic crisis and brought political opposition to the current pitch. If, as is still possible, the Zimbabwean economy collapses, it will be just as much a casualty of the Great Lakes crisis as those countries that are more obviously affected. The prospect of large-scale forced migration from Zimbabwe - probably in the guise of economic migrants rather than asylum seekers - should be focusing the minds of regional leaders, especially in South Africa. But it is unclear that they perceive the gravity of the crisis or how closely it is bound up with the regional conflict.

2. Origins of the present crisis

2.1 The Matabeleland crisis

When ZANU (PF) won the 1980 independence elections, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe promptly proclaimed his commitment to reconciliation with the white community and "drawing a line through the past". This was widely hailed as an act of statesmanship. But whereas a similar process of reconciliation in South Africa in the 1990s was underpinned by strong guarantees of human rights, in Zimbabwe it had the effect of strengthening a culture of impunity and an apparent wish to override individual rights. The Rhodesian state of emergency, which suspended certain fundamental rights and allowed detention without trial, remained in force for the first 10 years of Zimbabwean independence. The draconian colonial Law and Order (Maintenance) Act remains on the statute book to this day. Rhodesian military personnel had been protected from prosecution under the 1975 Indemnity and Compensation Act, which was retained after independence. The transitional British administration in 1980 passed the Amnesty (General Pardon) Act, the terms of which had been agreed at the Lancaster House pre-independence agreement, which gave immunity from prosecution for acts committed by either side in the liberation war. The head of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization was retained in office and the Minister of State for security even boasted that one of the officers on his staff

had been responsible for torturing him during the war. The implications of this were to be seen very shortly.¹

There are two major ethnic groupings in Zimbabwe. The Shona, who make up at least 70 to 75 per cent of the population, mainly live in the north and east of the country. The Ndebele, part of the nineteenth century Nguni diaspora, account for most of the remainder at about 15 per cent and live mainly in the south and west in the provinces of Matabeleland North and South. Midlands province in the centre of the country is ethnically mixed. Matabeleland is semi-arid, with an economy based upon livestock husbandry. The Shona-speaking provinces are topologically more varied, but include all the country's best farmland with much higher rainfall. The ethnic divisions are schematic, of course, but are important to the extent that they also correspond to political loyalties. In the 1980 election Matabeleland overwhelmingly supported the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo, while the Shona areas supported ZANU (PF). In November 1980 and again in February 1981 there were clashes between members of their two respective military wings, ZIPRA and ZANLA, awaiting integration into the new national army in Bulawayo. The government deployed Rhodesian army and air force units against ZIPRA, leading many former guerrillas to flee to the bush. When ZIPRA arms caches were later uncovered and Nkomo sacked from the government, the flood of desertions increased. This was the origin of the low-level "dissident" insurrection in Matabeleland - the much trumpeted South African connection was always marginal, although it was widely believed because of the apartheid regime's documented support for armed opposition groups in Mozambique and Angola.²

In 1982 Mugabe deployed a military task force in Matabeleland, led by a former Rhodesian officer. Villagers were detained without trial, tortured and in some cases killed. In the rainy season of early 1983 things got worse. A new army brigade, the Fifth, was sent to Matabeleland North. Unlike other units this was not integrated but composed entirely of former ZANLA personnel and had been trained by North Korean advisors. Despite being ostensibly there to deal with the "dissidents", the Fifth Brigade made no effort to engage the rebels in combat. Indeed, eyewitnesses generally observed that the army avoided contact with the "dissidents". What the Fifth brigade did do, however, was to massacre several thousand villagers. Nkomo fled into exile as it became clear that the political structures of the opposition party and its supporters were being targeted.

There was a measure of international protest about the Matabeleland killings. The Fifth Brigade was withdrawn from the province and retrained by the British military team responsible for the overall integration exercise. Then in early 1984 it was deployed to Matabeleland South where the events of 1983 were essentially repeated. The main difference was that more effective travel restrictions were imposed to attempt to stop news of the killings from leaking out. This time the level of international protest was somewhat greater, although the response to thousands of

¹ Richard Carver, "Zimbabwe: Drawing a line through the past" in Naomi Roht-Arriaza (ed.), *Impunity and human rights in international law and practice* (New York: Macmillan, 1995)

² *Ibid.*

deaths in the mid-1980s never remotely approached that prompted by a few dozen in 2000.³

In the mid-1980s government control over the mass media was almost total. Most Zimbabweans were simply unaware of what was happening in Matabeleland - many probably remain ignorant, although the brutal intolerance of political dissent there holds important lessons for the present. Mugabe initiated commissions of inquiry into the ZANLA-ZIPRA clashes and the Fifth Brigade massacres, but neither report was ever published.⁴ The Fifth Brigade was withdrawn a second time, but in the following couple of years hundreds of civilians in Matabeleland and Midlands were detained under emergency powers and tortured, or simply “disappeared”, never to be seen again.⁵

Finally, in 1987, at ZAPU’s initiative, a Unity Accord was signed between the two main parties, with the minority party being swallowed up by ZANU (PF). The agreement was accompanied by an amnesty, which benefited both “dissidents” and members of the security forces accused of human rights violations. For a second time a conflict was ended with a line drawn under the past and impunity for those who had carried out appalling crimes.⁶

2.2 Economic crisis

Independent Zimbabwe inherited a strong economy from illegal Rhodesia. One source of its strength, paradoxically, was the international sanctions that had been intended to bring it down. The *cordon sanitaire* around the Rhodesian economy had permitted - indeed encouraged - industrialization in the manufacture of goods substituting for imports and in agricultural processing. In the immediate post-independence years the economy boomed, with the large commercial agriculture sector now able to trade openly with the region and the world. It was during this period that Zimbabwe saw its greatest social achievements, especially in health and education. Yet these were not sustainable. The Rhodesian economy was not especially efficient; it was simply shielded from competition. And crucially it was not geared towards social provision for the masses. Combine all this with an environment of global economic decline and by the early 1990s the Zimbabwean economy was in serious trouble - a problem compounded by several years of drought.

In 1990 Zimbabwe adopted an Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). For reasons of political pride it was described as a home-grown phenomenon, but it was revealing that the programme was drafted in U.S. English - like World Bank documents - rather than in British English, like other Zimbabwe government documents. With its characteristic menu of easing exchange controls, public spending cuts and removal of subsidies, ESAP hit the poor hardest - particularly the urban poor - and became popularly known as “Eternal Suffering for the African People”.⁷

³ *Ibid.*; Bill Berkeley, *Zimbabwe: Wages of war* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1986); Catholic Commission for Human Rights and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the silence, building true peace: A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980 to 1988* (Harare, 1997)

⁴ Article 19, *Zimbabwe: Media monopoly and popular protest* (London, May 1998)

⁵ Carver, “Zimbabwe: Drawing a line through the past ...”

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Patrick Bond, *Uneven Zimbabwe: A study of finance, development and underdevelopment* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998)

Politically the impact of ESAP was worsened by a perception that corruption by the elite was becoming a more serious phenomenon. While it was not entirely absent in the 1980s, there was no general perception that political leaders were enriching themselves. The turning point was the “Willowgate” scandal of the late 1980s. The government-controlled *Chronicle* newspaper revealed that a number of ministers had corruptly resold cars they had received at subsidized rates from the Willowvale assembly plant in Harare. A number were obliged to resign and one committed suicide. But the corruption of the 1990s dwarfed Willowgate. The allocation of farms to members of the elite was widely resented (see below). The head of the army, General Solomon Mujuru, inexplicably became a major business figure. But the greatest popular indignation surrounded the behaviour of the presidential family. Robert Mugabe’s nephew Leo was suddenly associated with a number of publicly awarded tenders, such as the awarding of a cellphone licence and the contract to build a new airport.⁸ The President’s Ghanaian wife Sally was generally perceived to be a moderating influence. By the time she died in 1992 he had already fathered a child by his secretary Grace Marafu. The new “First Lady” was popularly reviled for her lengthy shopping trips in London - Britain was not at this stage regularly denounced for being the “former colonial master” - often entailing the diversion of flights by the national carrier, Air Zimbabwe. Grace Mugabe received a low cost loan from a public housing fund to build a mansion (“Graceland”, as the wags inevitably dubbed it), which was resold at a massive profit without her ever having lived in it.⁹

For a population burdened by rapid inflation and unemployment, these goings-on were highly provocative. The extent to which the ZANU (PF) government came to be seen as a kleptocracy is important in explaining a serious contradiction within successive opposition parties. Although popular economic hardship was caused by structural adjustment, opposition parties from the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (1990), Forum Party of Zimbabwe (1995) and the Movement for Democratic Change (2000) have all been to the right of ZANU (PF) economically. They criticized the government for its failure to comply adequately with the demands of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank - even though these were precisely the requirements that were causing popular suffering. This contradiction is most marked in the case of the MDC, since its leadership, largely of trade union origin, rose to prominence because of its leading role in popular protests against structural adjustment.¹⁰

2.3 Land

The liberation struggle is often described as having been “about” land. This is an oversimplification: it was at least as much about the political disenfranchisement of the black majority. But there is no question that redistribution of land was a major priority for the vast majority of rural Zimbabweans. At independence agricultural land was divided roughly half and half between several million black peasants and a few thousand white commercial farmers.¹¹ The Lancaster House agreement meant that the

⁸ Article 19, *Zimbabwe: Media monopoly...*

⁹ *Guardian* [London]. “Something rotten at the heart of an ailing country”, 26 April 2000; *Financial Gazette* [Harare], “Probe into VIP housing scam opens”, 29 June 2000

¹⁰ *Green Left Weekly*, Norm Dixon, “Zimbabwe: Can the MDC solve the crisis?”, 24 May 2000 (electronic format: <<http://jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/~greenlft/2000/407/407p21.htm>>)

¹¹ Sam Moyo, “The land question” in Ibbo Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The political economy of transition 1980-1986* (Harare: CODESRIA, 1987); Colin Stoneman, “Agriculture” and Daniel Weiner,

government could only purchase land on a “willing buyer, willing seller” basis for the first 10 years of independence. In the course of the pre-independence negotiations there had been much talk of a multi-million dollar fund to finance land resettlement. In the event, the money available was less than expected. However, the government resettlement programme was badly conceived and poorly executed. By the end of the 1980s the government had resettled fewer than its target of 162,000 families.¹² It had failed to spend even the money that had been provided, mainly from the British Government.

Meanwhile commercial agriculture was booming. The white farmers rapidly became an enthusiastic pro-Mugabe constituency, as producer prices were kept high and the country became a major grain exporter. Zimbabwean tobacco went back on the world market and is the country’s main foreign exchange earner. Commercial horticulture has also benefited from the growing European taste for having mange-tout peas and baby sweet corn on the dinner table all year round. A prominent farmers’ leader, Denis Norman, was even a government minister for a number of years. Because of the government’s professed resettlement plans sales of commercial farm land required an official “certificate of no interest” stating that the authorities did not wish to acquire it in the future. The point is an important one, since many of the farms occupied in 2000 - a majority according to some accounts - were bought since 1980 with certificates of no interest. That is to say, their present white owners had not seized them from the original African occupants.

Once the 10-year entrenched clauses of the Lancaster House Constitution expired, the government introduced the Land Acquisition Act (1992), but this too made no difference to the plight of the landless. A recent parliamentary question by the opposition MP Margaret Dongo elicited information that only confirmed what was already common knowledge: land acquired under the act had been distributed to government ministers and other senior officials.¹³

Government rightly criticizes the commercial farmers for underutilizing their land. Because of government acquisition programmes the share of land held on freehold tenure has fallen from 39 to 30 per cent since independence. But the government and the state agricultural company, ARDA, hold large areas of former commercial farm land that remains underutilized and not resettled.¹⁴

In 1998 the government held a donor conference on the land issue, which agreed a number of principles for external financial support for resettlement: it should be transparent, it should benefit the rural poor and it should be in accordance with the

“Land and agricultural development” in Colin Stoneman (ed.), *Zimbabwe’s inheritance* (London: Macmillan, 1981)

¹² United Kingdom, Department for International Development, “Land resettlement Zimbabwe (interim evaluation)” [c. 1988] (electronic format: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/public/what/evsums/africa/ev_s434.htm>)

¹³ *Daily Telegraph* [London], “Mugabe gives white farms to his cronies”, 29 March 2000; *The Times* [London], “Mugabe cronies let prime farms wither”, 31 March 2000

¹⁴ *Financial Times* [London], “Zimbabwe reaps rich rewards from commercial farmers”, 23 April 2000

law.¹⁵ The government's failure to develop a programme along these lines has meant that pledged donor funds have not been disbursed.¹⁶

To summarize: the background to the government's mobilization on the land issue is this. Its policies since independence have favoured the commercial farmers, including the transfer of agricultural land with a certificate of no interest. It has failed to spend all the money available to it to resettle poor peasants. It has acquired commercial farmland to distribute to government ministers and other members of the elite.

2.4 Concentration of political power

Another major source of popular disquiet has been the concentration of political power in the hands of the President. In 1987, the first series of entrenched clauses in the Lancaster House Constitution expired. This allowed the abolition of three provisions in particular: the Senate, the office of Prime Minister and the 20 reserved seats elected on a separate white voters' roll. The removal of the Senate meant one less check on executive power. The replacement of the Prime Minister by an executive President concentrated more power in the hands of one man. And the end of the white reserved seats, clearly a democratic move, was undermined by the fact that these were replaced by 30 nominated members of parliament whose seats were in the gift of the President.

As has been noted, until 1990 Zimbabwe was under a state of emergency - a situation that was not remotely justifiable by external threat or internal disorder. The Presidential Powers Act allows the President to rule by temporary decree for up to six months.¹⁷ This was the power, for example, that President Mugabe used to enact an amendment to the Land Acquisition Act in 2000 after Parliament had been dissolved. The judiciary, at least in its upper ranks, has been of a high calibre and independent-minded. It has defied the government on a number of human rights and civil liberties issues. However, on several occasions when it has lost constitutional cases in the Supreme Court, the government has simply used its massive parliamentary majority to amend the constitution - there have been 16 amendments since independence.¹⁸

2.5 Rise of domestic opposition

The growing unpopularity of the government was unable to find any effective party political expression. After ZANU (PF) had swallowed ZAPU, the remaining opposition largely consisted of parties led by the former leaders of pre-independence black parties, Bishop Abel Muzorewa and the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole. Both were irredeemably tainted by their association with the Rhodesian regime, although Ndabaningi Sithole had a small Ndaue ethnic constituency in Chipinge in southern Manicaland, which ensured him a continued representation in parliament.

¹⁵ *Financial Gazette* [Harare], "CFU director hails just-ended land conference as a success", 17 September 1998; *Daily News* [Harare], "Britain wants its policy on land reform understood", 21 March 2000

¹⁶ *Zimbabwe Independent* [Harare], "Govt abandons donors' land reform proposals", 12 May 2000

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Zimbabwe: A break with the past? Human rights and political unity* (New York, 1989)

¹⁸ Article 19, "Zimbabwe", *Media law and practice in Southern Africa* [London], No. 6 (February 1997)

Before the 1990 election a former ZANU (PF) leader, Edgar Tekere, broke away to set up the Zimbabwe Unity Movement. This had a following in Manicaland and Harare, but Tekere was a largely discredited figure. In 1995, the Forum Party of Zimbabwe, led by former Chief Justice Enoch Dumbutshena, seemed a more credible alternative but lacked any party machine. The ruling party also kept tight hold of the electoral machinery through the person of the Registrar General, Tobaiwa Mudede, a party stalwart.¹⁹

But at the same time as this succession of political parties was failing to make an impact, popular discontent with the government was manifesting itself in a series of other ways. One of the first expressions was the emergence of the privately-owned press. The new government in 1980 had inherited the propagandist Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation and placed its own people in key positions, continuing with a broadcasting monopoly whose output is of extremely low quality, stultifyingly boring and trusted by no one.²⁰ The monopoly continues in 2000, one of the last in the region. Also in 1980, the government used Nigerian money to buy out the South African owners of the main newspaper group and place the new company under the control of a Mass Media Trust, which purported to reflect the views of the public. In practice it rapidly became clear that editors were hired and fired by the Minister of Information, who also determined editorial policy. But journalistic standards never quite plumbed the same depths as the ZBC and the *Chronicle's* revelation of the Willowgate scandal was a crucial development. The paper's editor was "promoted" out of harm's way and left for the private sector. This sign of the political power that the press could wield stimulated the growth of the private media. First among these were popular monthly magazines such as *Parade* and later *Horizon* and business papers such as the weekly *Financial Gazette*. Such was the thirst for independent sources of information that Modus Publications, publishers of the *Financial Gazette*, launched a weekly general newspaper followed by a daily, although that collapsed in 1994. In the mid-1990s the editor and some staff from the *Financial Gazette* left to set up the *Zimbabwe Independent*, while in 1999 a new independent company launched the *Daily News*, which has rapidly become the largest circulation daily, breaking the stranglehold of the government-controlled *Herald* and *Chronicle*. The private newspapers are generally of a high professional standard and, if they inevitably lean towards the opposition, they are forums for serious independent journalism, not political flag-waving. In the past decade they have played an incalculable role in opening the government to public scrutiny.²¹

The other crucial institution in the development of popular opposition has been the trade unions. Historically, Zimbabwe has had strong trade unions concentrated on the mines and the railways. In the pre-independence period ZAPU rather than ZANU was the party that had links with organized labour. When the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions was set up at independence it was initially as an adjunct of the ruling party, under the leadership of Mugabe's brother Albert. After Albert Mugabe had died suspiciously amid a corruption scandal, party control of the ZCTU loosened and by the end of the 1980s a miners' official, Morgan Tsvangirai, had become general

¹⁹ Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, *A question of balance: The Zimbabwean media and the constitutional referendum*, (Harare, March 2000)

²⁰ Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, *A duty to inform: A report on Zimbabwe's publicly-owned media* (Harare, 2000)

²¹ Richard Saunders, *Dancing out of tune: A history of the media in Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1999)

secretary. The government still did not expect labour to act independently. A group of engineering union members were detained under emergency powers in the mid-1980s and Tsvangirai himself spent a period in detention in 1989.²²

By the 1990s, however, the ZCTU had emerged as the chief representative of the victims of the economic crisis: the urban and rural proletariat. Union membership had extended far beyond its traditional heartlands to key sectors such as farm workers - the largest sector of employees in the country. In the mid-1990s the ZCTU organized a series of mass strikes in protest against unemployment and price rises. These were often greeted with serious police violence and Tsvangirai was badly beaten by unidentified thugs in his office in 1997. But Tsvangirai and the entire trade union leadership emerged as credible and respected figures.²³

These were not the only organizations that played a part in the emergence of civil society opposition in the 1990s. Non-governmental human rights groups had maintained their scrutiny of government performance for many years - in some cases since before independence. In the mid-1990s two of these, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation published a well-researched report on the Matabeleland killings that brought the issue, for the first time, to the attention of the entire Zimbabwean population.²⁴ The government was predictably dismissive, but the credibility of the human rights groups continued to increase as they monitored abuses and harried the government in the courts.

What was remarkable about this emerging opposition was that for several years it existed entirely within the sphere of civil society. In 1995, with its popularity plummeting, ZANU (PF) still won 117 out of the 120 elected seats in parliament. If part of this can be attributed to the work of the Registrar General's department - Zimbabwe has had a very high number of posthumous voters for many years - it was largely because there was still no alternative in the political arena. This began to change with the emergence of a movement for constitutional reform. This was spearheaded, not surprisingly, by the relatively small human rights community. But the reason it succeeded in gaining such popular currency was that it centred on the issue of government accountability and the excessive concentration of power in the hands of the President. When the National Constitutional Assembly was set up as a coalition for reform, Morgan Tsvangirai and his colleagues threw the weight of the ZCTU behind it.

2.6 The war in the DRC

In August 1998 Zimbabwe sent troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to support the government of Laurent Kabila against rebels backed by Uganda and Rwanda. Nearly two years later the troops, estimated at around 11,000, remain there at a cost sometimes put at US\$ 1 million a day. (Even official figures put the cost at US\$ 3 million a month.)²⁵ It was this economic burden that led the International Monetary Fund to withdraw its lending to Zimbabwe - along with the lack of

²² Human Rights Watch/Africa

²³ *Green Left Weekly*

²⁴ Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation

²⁵ *Sunday Telegraph* [London], 'Mugabe's money mine', 8 November 1998; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), 'Zimbabwe's Congo intervention in official figures', 27 October 1999

transparency of the government about the real costs of the war.²⁶ The DRC intervention is widely unpopular in Zimbabwe, partly because it is seen as a source of economic woes, but also because of the unknown number of casualties sustained by Zimbabwean troops, possibly more than 200.

The Zimbabwe Government has always (inaccurately) described its presence in the DRC as being obligatory because of its membership of the Southern African Development Community. The foreign troops fighting on the Kabila side in the civil war - Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe - are routinely described as "SADC Allied forces", even though important SADC members such as South Africa do not support Zimbabwe's military involvement.

The reason for Zimbabwe's involvement seems to be largely economic. Zimbabwean companies closely associated with the ZANU (PF) leadership have acquired important concessions. Cobalt marketing was ceded to a company called Ridgepointe, headed by Zimbabwean businessman Billy Rautenbach, an associate of the former justice Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa who is a key figure in the party leadership. Rautenbach was nominated as head of the Congo's state mineral company Gécamines in 1998, although he was recently ousted. A Zimbabwean company called Osleg has been established, with the Zimbabwean Defence Force Commander, General Vitalis Zvinavashe, as a director. Osleg is a partner in a new diamond mining company Oryx, which sought but was refused listing on the London Stock Exchange in June 2000. It has become clear that militarily the "allied" operation in the DRC is about keeping the Kasai diamond fields in government hands - an operation for which some people are being richly rewarded.²⁷

3. The actors

3.1 ZANU (PF)

For much of its 20 years in power ZANU (PF) has presided over a *de facto* one-party state. This means, inevitably, that the ruling party has become a very broad church, containing within it many who were unhappy with Mugabe's leadership but unwilling to challenge it in the absence of a secure political alternative. There has always been a smattering of independent-minded backbench MPs ready to criticize the government (although never enough to ensure that it came under real parliamentary scrutiny). Increasingly Mugabe's power base within the party has become an ethnic one. A number of the internal party factions are identified with Shona sub-groups, with Mugabe's own Zezuru being particularly favoured. For many years the chief alternative has appeared to lie among the Karanga of Masvingo Province. Eddison Zvobgo is one of two key political figures in Masvingo - the other being Vice-President Simon Muzenda with whom Zvobgo is scarcely on speaking terms. Zvobgo's distaste for Mugabe's leadership and his aspirations to the presidency have been widely known in Zimbabwe for nearly two decades.

²⁶ *The Guardian* [London], "Zimbabwe loans cut off as leak shows war costs", 7 October 1999

²⁷ *Africa Confidential* [London], "Big Wheels", 14 May 1999; "Zimbabwe/Congo-Kinshasa: Rhodies to the rescue", 5 November 1999; "Zimbabwe/Congo-Kinshasa: Bye bye, Billy", 31 March 2000; "Zimbabwe/Congo-Kinshasa: A military trap", 28 April 2000; "Zimbabwe/Congo-K: Glittering prizes from the war", 26 May 2000

Another ethnic fault-line within the ruling party is the Shona-Ndebele divide - which is almost the same as the old division between ZANU (PF) and ZAPU. It is generally assumed that most key Ndebele figures in the party would align with Zvobgo in the event of a faction fight or a split.

However, this ethnic interpretation of internal party politics is hardly adequate. In recent years party conflicts have revolved as much around local opposition to the centralizing tendencies of the party leadership. Primary elections were introduced for all public elections. These have often been characterized by the central party leadership overriding local choice to impose a member of the hierarchy. In 1995 Margaret Dongo, a war veteran who had previously worked in the President's office, stood as an independent against the official party candidate in Harare South. The vote was rigged so that the official candidate won - a result that was overturned after a legal challenge. This was followed by the development of a movement of "independents", who often had no more in common than the fact that they had been chosen by grassroots activists for local and municipal elections and then replaced by nominees of the ZANU (PF) apparatus. By the time of the 2000 elections Dongo had finally established her own party, the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats. But still some 100 independent candidates stood in the parliamentary elections, most of whom had been passed over for nomination by ZANU (PF). These included a number of former members of parliament - usually those with a reputation for being independent-minded.²⁸

Opposition to the Mugabe leadership within ZANU (PF) could best be characterized as a mixture of genuine principle, ethnic factors and a desire for self-preservation. The last of these was clearly seen in February 2000, when the Central Committee met for an examination of the recent referendum defeat. Two years previously, Dzikamai Mavhaire, a Masvingo MP from the Zvobgo faction, had stated publicly that Mugabe should not stand again for President for the good of the party. He was suspended from office. Now the same sentiment was being constantly repeated and no one was being punished for it. Many within ZANU (PF) simply feared that Mugabe was leading them to disaster.

3.2 War veterans

The emergence of the "war veterans" as a political force has been a defining characteristic of the political crisis in 2000. The use of the inverted commas is necessary for two reasons: first because many of those claiming to be veterans are not (and are patently too young to have fought in the liberation war). Second, the role of some veterans in acting as shock troops has been denounced by other former guerrillas who consider that it demeans their status as the country's liberators.²⁹

It was as late as 1997 that the war veterans became a political factor. The prologue to this was the revelation that a number of senior officials had been plundering the compensation fund established under the 1980 War Victims Compensation Act. The key figure in this was a physician named Chenjerai Hunzvi, who signed medical certificates stating that those he examined had serious and previously unimagined disabilities that entitled them to massive compensation payments. One official in the President's office, for example, claimed 101 per cent disability, although the

²⁸ *Zimbabwe Independent* [Harare], "ZANU PF in desperate bid to win back independents", 23 June 2000

²⁹ *Daily News* [Harare], "Ex-fighters dismiss threat of civil war", 21 June 2000

Compensation Commissioner found her to be a mere 96 per cent disabled - entitling her to nearly Z\$ 800,000. The President's brother in law was found to be 95 per cent disabled (Z\$ 822,668). Hunzvi himself claimed to be 117 per cent disabled, but was only awarded compensation (Z\$ 361,630) for 85 per cent.³⁰ After the public outcry, Mugabe was obliged to set up a commission of inquiry into the scandal and Hunzvi now faces fraud charges.³¹ As the former independent MP Margaret Dongo remarked: "There are so many cabinet members, army officers and police officers who are claiming funds for serious disabilities, it is a wonder the government can function at all."³²

The scandal over the plunder of the compensation fund undoubtedly alienated many ordinary ZANU (PF) supporters. The government ignored submissions to the Commission of Inquiry recommending that the fund also pay out to non-military victims of the war. The result is that many victims of serious human rights violations in the 1970s have still received nothing by way of compensation.³³ More immediately it prompted protests from the 70,000-strong Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, the organization led by Hunzvi. These protests were highly audacious, involving disruption of Mugabe's diplomatic engagements in Harare. Less politically sensitive protests by the trade unions prompted the police to use live ammunition and tear gas. Instead, in October 1997, Mugabe caved into the veterans' demand. Apparently without consulting his hapless Finance Minister, he conceded an unbudgeted Z\$ 50,000 to each veteran, plus a monthly pension of Z\$ 2,000. The overall cost of the package was Z\$ 4 billion. This was a measure of the leverage enjoyed by the veterans in general and Hunzvi in particular. The payments to veterans are usually credited with provoking Zimbabwe's economic downturn. In fact, there are many other underlying structural factors, but there is no doubt that it prompted a general crisis in government finance. This had the immediate effect of the World Bank withdrawing a US\$ 62.5 million balance of payments credit and sending the Zimbabwe dollar into freefall.³⁴

Hunzvi's leverage over senior government figures is significant, as is his popularity with members of his association who appreciate the financial benefits he has brought them. There are others in the ZNLWVA, however, who are unhappy with Hunzvi's mismanagement of the association's own funds. An alternative veterans' organization has been established, the Zimbabwe Liberators' Platform, which is highly critical of Hunzvi's methods.³⁵ Hunzvi himself comes, curiously, from ZIPRA rather than ZANLA. He took no part in any military activity during the war, most of which he spent studying in Poland. Yet he has come from nowhere to become, many would argue, the second most powerful man in the country and probably the most feared. His surgery in the Harare suburb of Budiro is alleged to have been used to torture opposition supporters.³⁶ Also, the status of war veteran creates a sort of freemasonry.

³⁰ Zimbabwe, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Administration of the War Victims Compensation Act [Chapter 11.16]* (Harare, May 1998), Annex 1

³¹ *The Herald* [Harare], "Hunzvi defence calls for discharge", 3 May 2000

³² *The Guardian* [Harare], 26 April 2000

³³ Local residents, Zambezi valley, personal interviews, December 1999

³⁴ *Africa Confidential* [London], "Forgotten fighters", 21 November 1997

³⁵ *Daily News* [Harare], 21 June 2000

³⁶ *Daily News* [Harare], "War vets, Zanu PF supporters denied bail", 30 May 2000

When the status is shared by the Commissioner of Police and his deputy and all senior army officers, it is easy for the veterans to behave as if they are above the law.

There appears to be no affection between Mugabe and Hunzvi, but the President turned to the veterans in February after he had been berated by the party Central Committee for the referendum defeat. Mugabe's political background was a Maoist one and it may not be a coincidence that this tactic was essentially that of the Red Guards in the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Amidst the revolutionary rhetoric, the war veterans stand for nothing other than violence and intimidation - and the expectation that they (not the landless peasants) will gain title to the land they have occupied. But crucially they provide a power base for Mugabe outside the party. Some within the party, such as Eddison Zvobgo, have scarcely tried to conceal their opposition to the veterans' tactics throughout. When the land occupations first started, the Minister of Home Affairs, Dumiso Dabengwa, ordered them off. They took no notice of his instructions (nor did the police), making it quite clear where power lay.³⁷

3.3 MDC

The rise of the Movement for Democratic Change has been spectacular. Since 1985 no other opposition party has ever won more than 2 out of the 120 elected parliamentary seats. This is all the more remarkable for the fact that the MDC was only established in September 1999, just nine months before the June 2000 election. The explanation for this lies largely in the MDC's pre-history.

The issue that mobilized popular opposition to the government throughout the 1990s was the economy - or more accurately the impact of structural adjustment on the urban and rural working class. The trade union movement took the leadership of this popular opposition. As it became clear that questions of economics and living standards could not be disentangled from issues of power and human rights, the ZCTU began to occupy itself more explicitly in politics. Its sponsorship of the NCA, most notably, was an indication that it recognized that these economic issues required a political solution. Nevertheless, Morgan Tsvangirai was clearly reluctant to play his hand too soon. Almost certainly he remained undecided about whether to launch a political party until very late. The obvious precedent - the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy in Zambia, led by the former trade unionist Frederick Chiluba - was not an inspiring one. Tsvangirai must also have calculated that coming out into the open as a political party would invite all sorts of repression, as well as infiltration by the feared Central Intelligence Organization. Consequently the public launch of the MDC was delayed until Tsvangirai had assembled the coalition of forces that he needed.³⁸

The leadership, or key movers, in the new party can be roughly divided into three groups. First is the trade unionists, who remain numerically the most important in the national executive. The key figures are Morgan Tsvangirai himself and the former president of the ZCTU, Gibson Sibanda. Politically this group could be described as pragmatic social-democrats, not dissimilar to politicians with a labour background the world over. Second, is a group of radical intellectuals, mainly young. Many of these are people with a background in human rights activism such as the secretary general, Welshman Ncube, lands spokesperson Tendai Biti and Mike Auret, formerly of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. The third group consists of those who are political liberals but economic conservatives, such as the party's legal

³⁷ *Daily News* [Harare], "Dabengwa throws in the towel over invaders", 30 May 2000

³⁸ *Green Left Weekly*

spokesperson, David Coltart, a human rights lawyer, and its economics spokesperson Eddie Cross, a prominent representative of the business community. The failure to win the elections probably means that the contradictions between these three groups will be contained but they are bound to cause strains at some stage. Figures such as Eddie Cross favour stringent structural adjustment measures that would hit hardest at the party's trade union base and would be scarcely popular among the former Trotskyists who make up part of the second group.³⁹

The party's real strength, however, lies less in its ideology than in its social base of support. Both ZANU (PF) and many outside observers have assumed that politics in Zimbabwe is still conducted according to a supposed African norm, in which political power is determined by the loyalties of peasants whose principal allegiance is an ethnic one. The general lack of popular interest in the land issue shows how miscalculated that view is. Waged workers (and the unemployed) are the most significant social class. Of these the single largest group is the farm workers, a rural proletariat many of whom are trade union members. Ethnicity does not figure at all in the MDC's politics. The party's leadership is a healthy mixture of Shona and Ndebele. That Matabeleland voted solidly against ZANU (PF) is not surprising, given the history of the 1980s. What is interesting, however, is that Ndebeles voted for the avowedly non-tribalist MDC rather than the ethnic Ndebele nationalists of the ZAPU 2000 party.

The rise of the MDC has not only changed the balance of power at the parliamentary level. It has also significantly altered the way in which politics are conducted at a local level. That may prove to be one of its most important contributions.

3.4 The army

The shadow of the Zimbabwe National Army has loomed over political developments of the last two years. There has been repeated speculation about the possibility of a military coup d'état, most famously in an article in the weekly *Standard* in January 1999. The paper's editor, Mark Chavunduka, and the author of the story, Ray Choto, were taken into illegal custody by the army and tortured. The army and the Defence Ministry defied a High Court order to release the journalists. Shortly afterwards the *Mirror* ran a story about the death of a soldier in the DRC. The paper's publisher and the journalist responsible were both arrested.⁴⁰ In both the *Standard* and the *Mirror* cases, the raw nerve exposed was discontent in the army ranks about involvement in the DRC. The refusal to comply with a High Court order in the *Standard* case shows the reluctance of the military to be bound by the law. But whether this amounts to a military coup d'état in the making is far from clear.

There is little doubt that, with discontent mounting within ZANU (PF), Mugabe feels happier trusting senior officers who are also war veterans. Many of these officers are also involved in money-making ventures in the Congo. Mugabe has appointed army officers into several key positions in the civilian administration - for example in the national oil company - when the regular office-holders are judged to have failed. But discussions of the "militarization" of politics seldom take account of the fact that in the 1980s politics were entirely dominated by military solutions. An entire army brigade acted as a party militia and large numbers of personnel at all levels were liberation war veterans. None of this is true now. Only the upper echelons of the army

³⁹ *Guardian* [London], "Historic movement has deep contradictions lurking within", 23 June 2000

⁴⁰ Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, *A duty to inform ...*

are of the liberation war generation, while it is reasonable to assume that the other ranks reflect the divisions within society at large.

The involvement of the army in the farm occupations has been documented, although it seems that the personnel assigned were hand-picked.⁴¹ There is every reason to question whether the army, like the police, is doing its job as an impartial defender of the Zimbabwean state and nation. But a military coup d'état seems a remote possibility at present.

3.5 White farmers

Both the international media and the Zimbabwe Government have presented the recent political crisis as revolving around the country's white commercial farmers. Foreign media reports have tended to portray them as the principal victims of the veterans' violence, while the government sees their supposed intransigence as the cause of the land problem. And ZANU (PF) propaganda has portrayed the white farmers as the principal funders of the MDC.

In fact the natural political home of the white farmers in post-independence Zimbabwe has been ZANU (PF). The few farmers who have been active in politics have, until very recently, supported the ruling party. For the most part, however, commercial farmers learned to weather the rhetoric about land reform every time an election approached and remained content at the government's apparent lack of interest in doing anything concrete about the land issue.

In recent years this quietist approach has changed slightly. Farmers have felt themselves to be badly affected by two particular aspects of the economic crisis and the government's handling of it. First, the foreign exchange shortage has made it difficult to acquire essential inputs, most importantly fuel. Second, an overvalued currency has made it commercially increasingly uneconomic. The effect of this was seen most clearly at this year's tobacco auctions when many farmers withheld their crop not, as the government alleged, in protest at the land occupations but because the rate of the Zimbabwe dollar meant that they could not cover their costs by selling.⁴²

It was probably economic factors more than political ones that pushed some white farmers into funding the MDC. It should be noted that many more white farmers continued to provide support to ZANU (PF). Most notable among these was the British multi-millionaire Nicholas van Hoogstraten, who is probably the largest private landowner in the country. He acquired some celebrity when he fought an unsuccessful court battle to stop the public from walking on rights of way across one of his estates in Britain. He described the British public as the "great unwashed", leading to speculation about how he would react to war veterans turning up on his Zimbabwe properties. Curiously, however, his land was not occupied, despite the fact that he owns at least nine farms.⁴³

⁴¹ *Zimbabwe Independent* [Harare], "Government deploys army to direct farm invasions", 20 April 2000; "Army steps up role in farm invasions", 5 May 2000; *Financial Gazette* [Harare], "Army brains behind Zim farm intrusions", 4 May 2000; "Mugabe enlists army to crack down on opposition", 11 May 2000

⁴² *Financial Times* [London], "Zimbabwe tobacco depressed", 26 April 2000

⁴³ *Guardian* [London], "British multi-millionaire bankrolls Mugabe's party", 21 April 2000

The white farmers appeared to be propelled more rapidly into the MDC camp when the farm occupations began. But the solution taken by their representatives, the Commercial Farmers' Union, was to engage in negotiations with both the government and Chenjerai Hunzvi. Farmers themselves began to turn up at ZANU (PF) rallies and those who continued openly to support the MDC were a small minority.⁴⁴ Most of the five farmers who died in the political violence, however, appear to have been targeted because they were MDC office-holders.

4. The development of the crisis

4.1 The constitutional referendum⁴⁵

All the ingredients of the current crisis have been in place for a while: sharpening economic decline, waning popular support for the government and the gradual shaping of a political alternative. Yet the evolution of the crisis has been remarkably rapid. The crucial dates are 12-13 February - the days when a substantial majority rejected the government's proposed new constitution.

The plan for a new constitution was an attempt to appease the growing popular movement for reform headed by the National Constitutional Assembly and its membership of civic groups including the ZCTU. Yet it was apparent from the outset that this would not work. The President appointed a Constitutional Commission under the Commissions of Inquiry Act. This meant that its work was no more than a consultative exercise since Mugabe was under no obligation to accept its recommendations. The NCA boycotted the Constitutional Commission, although among its 400 members were still quite a number who were independent figures. The commission undertook an extensive popular consultation process. Yet the draft that emerged took little notice of the sentiments expressed: for example a majority of those consulted wanted to do away with the executive presidency. The draft entrenched presidential powers and, much to the disgust of some commissioners, was pushed through the final session without a vote. It was presented to President Mugabe in early December 1999.

In January 2000 a series of amendments were published - under the name of "corrections and clarifications" - vindicating the NCA's scepticism about the nature of the process. The most important of these was to Section 57, which now obliged Britain to pay compensation for farm land, which could be acquired compulsorily. If the "former colonial master" declined to do this there would be no obligation on the Zimbabwe Government to compensate.⁴⁶ The government brushed aside the objection that Britain was hardly going to feel bound by the laws of another state. The draft constitution was to be put to a referendum in February and land was going to be the centre piece of the government's campaign.

The media blitz for a Yes vote was overwhelming. The ZBC refused to screen anti-draft advertisements until a few days before the vote when the High Court ordered it to. The Yes campaign said almost nothing about presidential powers (or almost anything else in the draft) and created the impression that a Yes vote would lead to

⁴⁴ *The Herald* [Harare], "Farmers pledge their support for Zanu (PF)", 15 May 2000

⁴⁵ This section is largely drawn from Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, *A question of balance ...*

⁴⁶ Zimbabwe. "Draft Constitution" [c. January 2000] (electronic format:
<<http://www.gta.gov.zw/Constitutional/Draft/Constitution.htm>>)

land for everyone. The No campaign, spearheaded by the NCA, was portrayed as being defenders of the existing constitution, which was invariably described as being the constitution bequeathed by colonialism. This was inaccurate on two counts. First because in most of its essential features the constitution no longer bore much resemblance to that agreed at Lancaster House in 1979. Second, because the NCA owed its very existence (and name) to the widespread desire for constitutional reform. In the event the Yes campaign failed dismally. Fifty-five per cent of those who voted rejected the draft - the government's first ever defeat at the polls.⁴⁷ President Mugabe announced that he would respect the will of the people. Vice-President Joseph Msika promptly announced that the No vote was irrelevant since the government could enact Section 57 as a constitutional amendment.⁴⁸ The parliament did precisely that just before being dissolved. Someone forgot that a constitutional amendment was not sufficient to give the government powers to acquire land without compensation. An amendment to the Land Acquisition Act was needed as well. So Mugabe enacted that under his Presidential Powers.⁴⁹ Thus was the will of the people respected.

4.2 Farm occupations

The main significance of the February referendum was that, with parliamentary elections imminent, ZANU (PF)'s immense vulnerability had been exposed. The wave of occupations of white-owned farms that began in March was generally seen in relation to the defeat of the land clause in the draft. But it was far more closely related to the ruling party's fear of losing the elections.

At the highest point more than 1,000 farms were occupied - roughly a quarter of the commercial farms in the country. It was apparent at the time that the actions of the "war veterans" were highly coordinated. What has only emerged subsequently was that it was not only Chenjerai Hunzvi who was responsible for this, but also the air force commander Air Marshal Perence Shiri - the former Fifth Brigade commander in Matabeleland - and some 1,000 hand-picked army personnel.⁵⁰ African human rights activists have identified a generalized phenomenon in recent years that they label "informal repression", ranging from the Inkatha *impis* in the townships of KwaZulu-Natal, through the *nyau* secret societies of Dr Banda's Malawi to the *interahamwe* of Rwanda. What all these have in common is state sponsorship of a non-governmental militia, often a group with a genuine grievance, that can be relied upon to attack its political enemies. The Zimbabwe "war veterans" with their cellular telephones and army issue rifles are just as much a classic example as the Kalenjin warriors of the Kenyan Rift Valley, arriving for their "tribal clashes" by helicopter.⁵¹

This deployment of the land issue was exceptionally astute. It guaranteed that there would be no public expressions of disquiet from neighbouring governments. No one bothered to examine the small print - the government's failure to spend the donor money pledged for land acquisition, the fact that most farms squatted had been bought since independence, the distribution of farms to politicians and civil servants and the popular rejection of the government's land policy in the referendum. This was simply

⁴⁷ CNN, "Election watch" [c. January - June 2000] (electronic format: <<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/election.watch/africa/zimbabwe.html>>

⁴⁸ *The Herald* [Harare], "Outcome won't affect land reform: Msika", 15 February 2000

⁴⁹ Reuters, "Mugabe to invoke special powers to seize land", 30 April 2000

⁵⁰ *Guardian* [Harare], "Army set up farm occupations, says insider", 5 May 2000

⁵¹ Article 19, *Deadly marionettes: State-sponsored violence in Africa* (London, 1997)

presented as an anti-colonial issue. The Botswana Government has consistently expressed its disquiet; so to a lesser extent has Malawi, which stands to lose from economic disruption.⁵² But neither of these are key regional players.

Large sections of the British press, with their emphasis on white farmers in peril, played along neatly with Mugabe's strategy. It took some while for it to become apparent that the chief victims of the war veterans' intimidation were not the farmers themselves but their employees.⁵³ Farm workers, many of them unionized, are a solid base of support for the MDC. They also stand to lose from a break-up of the large commercial farms. Education, as well as health and other social provision, is usually provided by the commercial farmers. If the farmers go, all this goes with them unless there is properly planned resettlement. This was one reason for the failure of resettlement in the 1980s. The only difference in the 2000s is that the population requiring this social provision is about twice as large.

Once the constitutional amendment had been passed, along with the changes to the Land Acquisition Act, there was ostensibly no reason for the veterans to stay on the occupied land. Vice-President Msika said as much and was quickly put in his place by the President of the country and the president of the war veterans.⁵⁴ By now two things were clear: the land occupations were only partly to do with land; and the occupiers thought that they should be given the land they had squatted, rather than having it fairly allocated to the landless or to the descendants of its original pre-colonial occupants.

4.3 Attacks on the MDC⁵⁵

As the violence continued it became increasingly apparent that any connection with the land issue was tenuous at best. A report by a group of Zimbabwean human rights organizations put it thus:

The full extent of the political violence is not known at present and it is probable that it will be months before a realistic assessment is possible. What can be said at this stage is that there is sufficient testimony to be able to identify strong patterns in the organisation and nature of the violence right across the country, consistent with newspaper reports that a military-style campaign has been launched against opposition supporters. The findings of the Forum show that the real threat to the electoral process and the long-term security of the nation is coming from militia-style groups which have been established nationwide and which are openly backed by Zanu (PF) members. Their mission has

⁵² *Daily News* [Harare], "Zimbabwe crisis affects regional economies", 25 May 2000

⁵³ *Daily News* [Harare], "Workers go unpaid as farm invasions paralyze operations", 19 April 2000

⁵⁴ *The Herald* [Harare], "No going back on land issue - Msika", 22 May 2000

⁵⁵ This section draws on Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, *The unleashing of violence: A report on political violence in Zimbabwe* (Harare, May 2000) and *Who is responsible? A preliminary analysis of pre-election violence in Zimbabwe* (Harare, June 2000); Amani Trust, *Summary of political violence in Zimbabwe* (Bulawayo, May-June 2000); International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, *Organized violence and torture in Zimbabwe* (Harare and Copenhagen, June 2000); Amnesty International, *Terror tactics in the run-up to parliamentary elections, June 2000* (London, June 2000); African Rights, *Zimbabwe: The 2000 elections, making and breaking the rules* (London, March 2000)

been to wipe out opposition support and they have been licensed to terrorize civilians into voting for Zanu (PF).⁵⁶

These “militia-style groups” were composed in part of war veterans. Mugabe had paid the ZNLWVA Z\$ 20 million to “spearhead” ZANU (PF)’s election campaign. But at a local level they often came under the leadership of party figures, with the Mashonaland Central provincial governor Border Gezi a particularly important figure. The geographical focus appears to have been in the ZANU (PF) heartlands of Mashonaland. The situation in Matabeleland was less violent but equally threatening, with soldiers seen wearing red berets reminiscent of the now dissolved Fifth Brigade.⁵⁷

One local human rights organization, the Amani Trust, has maintained a statistical database of violent incidents. It identifies more than 90 per cent of violent incidents as having been perpetrated by ZANU (PF), including war veterans. Of the victims, 37.7 per cent have been identifiable MDC supporters, such as people at political rallies or party officials. More than half the total have been people of no known political affiliation, such as farm workers, suggesting that the main aim of the violence has been to deter people from voting for the opposition. Only 2 per cent of the perpetrators of violence have been identified as MDC.

The Amani Trust estimated the number of deaths at 37. All other estimates, it points out, are conservative. On its database it has 2,466 violent assaults, 27 rapes and 617 abductions. The figure of rapes, in particular, is likely to be a serious underestimate.⁵⁸

The purpose of the violence has been made particularly clear with the war veterans holding *pungwes*, all-night indoctrination sessions, for villagers and with them setting up “re-education” centres in rural areas. The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims described this forcible indoctrination as “psychological torture”.⁵⁹

Violence was also aimed at rural schools, with teachers alleged to have used the classrooms to purvey MDC propaganda. Many schools were forced to close. In some areas the campaign broadened into a more generalized attack on the rural middle class, such as civil servants.⁶⁰

4.4 Regional and international dimensions

The regional dimensions of the Zimbabwe crisis rapidly became apparent, not least because of its effect on the economy. The South African rand, which had been stable for some four years, promptly fell to an all-time low against the US dollar. South African business and government watched the unfolding of events nervously. Zimbabwe is the second largest economy in the region and South Africa’s largest trading partner in Africa.⁶¹ But this was not the only consideration. Mugabe’s playing of the land card was highly effective. South Africa also has a serious unresolved land

⁵⁶ Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, *Who is responsible?...*

⁵⁷ Archbishop Pius Ncube, “A prayer of hope for Zimbabwe: A concern on the present situation in Zimbabwe”. Pastoral letter, Bulawayo, April 2000

⁵⁸ Amani Trust. *Summary of Political Violence in Zimbabwe*. Bulawayo, May-June 2000

⁵⁹ International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims

⁶⁰ *Zimbabwe Independent* [Harare], “ZIMTA, ZimRights urge government to end violence against teachers”, 12 May 2000

⁶¹ *Electronic Mail and Guardian* [Johannesburg], “Zim crisis could weaken rand further”, 26 April 2000; “Rand on the skids again”, 8 May 2000; *Financial Gazette* [Harare], “South African business body to publish cost of Zimbabwe crisis to region”, 4 May 2000

problem and, although there is little love lost between the African National Congress and ZANU (PF), President Thabo Mbeki was not prepared to make any public statement critical of the Zimbabwe Government. In fact, South African leverage over Zimbabwe is considerable. The latter is now almost entirely dependent on the South African parastatal company Eskom for its electricity supplies - and it is massively in arrears on its bill. South Africa would be within its rights to cut Zimbabwe off.⁶² Other regional governments, such as Namibia and Mozambique, also went along with the land rhetoric. Mbeki's predecessor was less diplomatic. Nelson Mandela berated African tyrants who "want to die in power because they have committed crimes".⁶³

One of the most extraordinary aspects of the crisis has been the extreme rhetorical hostility between the Zimbabwean leadership and Britain, the "former colonial master" as it is almost invariably described in the government-controlled media. Even this rhetorical label conceals more than it explains. Extraordinarily, the role of the illegal Rhodesian regime has almost been written out of history in the current official version, with all ills being placed directly at Britain's door. Another interesting dimension of the quarrel is the evidently genuine hostility that the former Maoist guerrilla feels for Britain's Labour government, by contrast with his warm relations with Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives. Much of the hostility, of course, remains at a rhetorical level. A British military team continues to train Zimbabwean personnel. London did not take the obvious step of withdrawing military co-operation when it became clear that the army were participating in the farm occupations. And until April Britain continued to supply military spares, notably for Hawk jets, in defiance of the European Union embargo on arms sales to belligerent parties in the DRC.⁶⁴

It is unclear whether Mugabe ever realistically expected that Britain would offer him the blank cheque he was seeking for land purchases. The sums pledged at the 1998 land conference remain on the table provided that the conditions agreed there were met. But whatever his genuine expectations, the tactic has been to portray Britain as the main enemy, with the MDC as local puppets. The President and the government-controlled media have churned out increasingly lurid conspiracies, usually with Britain at the bottom of it. Mugabe claimed, for example, that the fuel crisis was caused by the British intercepting fuel tankers on the high seas and bribing their captains not to deliver their cargo.⁶⁵ This matched his previous claim that the reason for the hostility towards him in the private press was that the editors were the lovers of prominent British gays. There is no question that relations took a decisive turn for the worse in October 1999 when the British gay activist Peter Tatchell tried to effect a citizen's arrest on Mugabe when he was in London for a shopping trip. (This was not occasioned by Mugabe's well-publicized anti-gay sentiments, but by the illegal arrest and torture of journalists.) Mugabe thereafter frequently repeated his claim that the British Government was composed of "gay gangsters".⁶⁶

In March 2000 there was a lengthy stand-off between the two governments over Zimbabwe's opening of a diplomatic bag in defiance of the Vienna Convention.

⁶² *Daily News* [Harare], "SA's Eskom threatens to switch off power to Zimbabwe", 26 June 2000

⁶³ Pan African News Agency, "Mandela expresses anger at Mugabe", 7 May 2000

⁶⁴ *Daily Telegraph* [London], "Hoon defends use of British Army training officers", 5 May 2000; *The Guardian* [London], 5 May 2000

⁶⁵ Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, *Weekly Update 2000/21*, 7 June 2000

⁶⁶ Reuters, "Mugabe accuses 'Blair's gays' of hate campaign", 28 March 2000

Zimbabwe claimed that it believed the consignment contained MDC propaganda produced in Britain. The British Foreign Office Minister Peter Hain responded with an ill-judged remark that this was not the behaviour of a “civilized country”, which infuriated the Zimbabwe Government. The whole episode took a nastier turn when the government-controlled press started threatening the mass expulsion - or at least the disenfranchisement - of Zimbabweans holding British passports in defiance of the country’s prohibition on dual nationality.

Anti-British rhetoric spilled over into hostility to international organizations. European Union election observers were only welcome if they included no British members, likewise the Commonwealth. Mugabe achieved something of a political coup when he extracted from the Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon a statement that free and fair elections were possible.⁶⁷ It later transpired that McKinnon’s chief adviser on Africa, the Ghanaian Moses Anafu, was a director of Oryx, the DRC-Zimbabwe diamond trading company. UNDP offers of funding for land reform were spurned.⁶⁸ Africans who criticized the Zimbabwe Government - such as the former Nigerian Vice-President Alex Ekwueme or Amnesty International’s Africa director, Maina Kiai - were contemptuously dismissed as British puppets.⁶⁹

5. Latest developments

5.1 “Election 2000”⁷⁰

Mugabe’s strategy was successful. The margin of ZANU (PF)’s electoral victory - 62 seats to 58 - was so narrow that there can be little doubt that the key was a series of improper tactics. Intimidation was important, without question, but equally striking was the willingness of so many Zimbabweans to defy this in the knowledge that their vote was secret. The state broadcasting monopoly and the endless stream of ZANU (PF) propaganda on ZBC was another factor, but again this may have been counter-productive to some extent. Certainly in the February referendum there was every sign that the No vote was galvanized by the shameless use of public resources to push the Yes cause. Manipulation of the voters’ roll played a larger part. A United Nations technical team was shocked at the state of the electoral records and offered assistance, which was refused. The Registrar General embarked on a belated registration exercise which ended up with a large number of posthumous voters on the roll (and many live ones, especially in urban areas, disenfranchised).⁷¹ This was then made the basis of a constituency delimitation exercise that took two constituencies from Harare and Bulawayo and gave them to two loyal ZANU (PF) provinces in Mashonaland.⁷² Given the level of rural-urban migration this was simply incredible. And, of course, since every constituency in Harare and Bulawayo was won by the MDC, this relatively

⁶⁷ *The Herald* [Harare], “Free, fair elections possible in Zimbabwe - McKinnon”, 17 May 2000

⁶⁸ *The Times* [London], “Harare scandal envoy forced to quit”, 6 June 2000

⁶⁹ *Sunday Mail* [Harare], “NDI report raises questions about poll monitoring”, 28 May 2000; “Observers’ impartiality in doubt”, 11 June 2000

⁷⁰ National Democratic Institute for International Affairs [Washington], “Statement of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) Pre-election Delegation to Zimbabwe”, Harare, May 2000

⁷¹ *Daily News* [Harare], “Voters roll in a mess”, 31 May 2000

⁷² *The Herald* [Harare], “Delimitation Commission presents report”, 25 May 2000

minor piece of gerrymandering was the margin between ZANU (PF) and the opposition.

Overall responsibility for the elections, which constitutionally rests with the Electoral Supervisory Commission, was given to the Registrar General in a hastily gazetted last minute amendment to the Electoral Act. This meant that the independent monitors supposedly answerable to the ESC, were now reporting to the Registrar General - the very official whom they were monitoring.⁷³ Accreditation of foreign observers was delayed until the last possible minute. The United Nations withdrew when the government broke an agreement on its role as a coordinator and observers from the non-governmental National Democratic Institute, who had produced a critical pre-election report, were refused accreditation. British observers were excluded altogether.⁷⁴

Most revealing, however, was the government's last-minute loss of nerve. An unexpectedly high turnout prompted last minute hopes or fears of an MDC victory. At which point a senior Minister, John Nkomo, announced that the President was not obliged to pay any regard to the election results in appointing a government.⁷⁵

5.2 Refugees and forced migration

Although most attention has focused on the fate of British nationals, or Zimbabweans of British origin, in fact a far larger section of the population of foreign origin is much more vulnerable. An unknown number of Malawians and Mozambicans - certainly to be counted in the hundreds of thousands - live in Zimbabwe. They came to the country as migrant workers, mainly for the large agricultural estates, which is where many still work.⁷⁶ Waged agricultural workers - working primarily for white farm owners and often organized in trade unions - are seen by ZANU (PF) as a primary source of recruits for the MDC.

Some 20,000 white Zimbabweans are estimated to be British passport holders. The crisis has prompted a flood of applications by those entitled to British passports or to certificates of entitlement giving them the right of abode in the UK. Zimbabwe residents entitled to live in the UK fall into one of three categories:

- Those who hold British passports.
- Those who are Zimbabwe citizens with a right of abode by virtue of having a parent born in the UK or being married to a British man before 1983. These would need a certificate of entitlement issued by the British High Commission in Harare before travelling to the UK but, like British passport holders, are not subject to immigration control.

⁷³ *Financial Gazette* [Harare], "New regulations rejected", 8 June 2000

⁷⁴ *Zimbabwe Independent* [Harare], "New twist to UN observer team row", 16 June 2000

⁷⁵ *Daily News* [Harare], "Mugabe to hold on to power", 26 June 2000

⁷⁶ Richard Carver, *African Exodus* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1995), pp. 104-5

- Those who are Zimbabwe citizens with a British grandparent, who can usually enter the UK to work or to seek work (although occasionally they may have the right of abode). They would need entry clearance from the British High Commission before travelling.⁷⁷

Much publicity has been given to British plans to evacuate its nationals, prompting derisive comment in the pro-government section of the Zimbabwean media. Given that government propaganda has focused on how only blacks are really Zimbabwean, such publicity has had an unfortunate effect.⁷⁸ In practice, evacuation plans cover all EU nationals, under the leadership of the British since they are the largest contingent.⁷⁹

Many whites who do not have the right of abode in the UK have been seeking to go elsewhere: Australia and New Zealand are especially popular destinations.⁸⁰ Both the Zambian and Mozambican governments have been exploring the possibility of attracting white farmers to settle land in their country - an exceptionally hypocritical move in view of their support for Mugabe's stance on the land question.⁸¹

Most vulnerable, however, are black Zimbabweans. Hundreds, especially from Matabeleland, where memories of the 1980s are still strong, have crossed the border into Botswana and South Africa. The South African authorities have repatriated large numbers of the arrivals. On the basis of press reports it is difficult to know what was the legal basis for this action, if those arriving were clearly refugees or asylum-seekers. Botswana authorities, who received some 300,000 Zimbabwean refugees in the 1980s, appear to have been more sympathetic.⁸²

Most significant, however, has been the internal displacement of victims of violence, estimated at more than 10,000.⁸³ The likelihood is that most of these will return home now that the elections are over. Part of the aim of driving them from their home was presumably to stop them voting for the opposition. However, for them to return to their homes on a permanent basis will require a long-term solution to the political violence.

5.3 Economic collapse

The ZANU (PF) election victory brings the country's economic collapse closer, with serious implications for the entire region. Even before the farm occupations, foreign exchange shortages combined with mismanagement at the state oil company had led to critical fuel shortages. Despite short-term deals with Kuwaiti suppliers the underlying foreign exchange problem has not been resolved and shortages have

⁷⁷ Sarah Hart, immigration lawyer, London. Telephone interview, 9 May 2000. Michael Supperstone and Declan O'Dempsey, *Supperstone and O'Dempsey on immigration and asylum* (London: Pearson, 1996)

⁷⁸ *The Herald* [Harare], "CFU spurns British evacuation offer", 29 March 2000

⁷⁹ *Sunday Telegraph* [London], "EU agrees Zimbabwe evacuation plan for 20,000", 30 April 2000

⁸⁰ *Financial Gazette* [Harare], "Desperate Zimbabweans seek to leave country", 11 May 2000

⁸¹ Reuters, "Zim farmers eye farmland in neighbouring Zambia", 24 May 2000

⁸² Agence France Presse, "Zim villagers flee into Botswana", 22 June 2000; *Daily Telegraph* [London], "Poll violence forces thousands to flee", 19 June 2000; *Financial Gazette* [Harare], "Hundreds flee to SA, Botswana", 22 June 2000; *The Times* [London], "Refugees swim crocodile river", 19 June 2000

⁸³ Amani Trust

returned. The government has now introduced a fuel rationing system for the first time since the war in the 1970s.⁸⁴

The Congo war is a massive and unsustainable drain on resources. The international financial institutions will not entertain further loans to Zimbabwe while it continues. Meanwhile Zimbabwe has defaulted on repayments to the World Bank and seems likely to default further on its US\$ 4.5 billion debt. Its arrears in foreign payments is US\$ 350 million - equivalent to just one years tobacco earnings. But this year, because of the farm occupations and the overvalued dollar, earnings from the tobacco crop have been low.⁸⁵

The effects of the farm occupations will continue to be felt. There has been little planting of winter crops, of which wheat is the most important. Shortages of flour and bread are certain by the end of the year - with potentially explosive political consequences.⁸⁶

But the implications go much deeper. The damage to business confidence in Zimbabwe is probably irreparable. Another major foreign exchange earner, tourism, has been seriously hit. Remarks by President Mugabe about seizing foreign-owned mines may just have been pre-election demagoguery. But after the farm occupations it is unlikely that anyone will take the chance. The Zimbabwe Stock Exchange has seen record falls and companies have closed. Perhaps most seriously, the entire Zimbabwean banking system is close to collapse. The main business of Zimbabwean banks is agricultural loans. The farm occupations and the constitutional amendment simply mean that there is no security for these loans, with a potential for massive default.⁸⁷ For all Mugabe's rhetoric about neo-colonialism and foreign capitalists, the main victims of these collapses will be Zimbabwean workers, with human and social consequences that are unpredictable.

5.4 Political developments

It had been clear for some months that the parliamentary elections would resolve nothing, but simply usher in the next phase of the crisis. If the MDC had won a majority there would have been a constitutional crisis to a greater or lesser extent. Even if an MDC government had been appointed it is unclear how it could have coexisted with Mugabe. The constitution provides no answers to this, since the executive presidency was introduced when there was no thought that any party other than ZANU (PF) could win an election.

As it is, the immediate consequence of the election is that the new ZANU (PF) government will be under a degree of parliamentary scrutiny that is something quite new. It will be unable to amend the constitution at will, since the opposition hold more than the one-third needed to block this. There are a number of interesting incidental questions. For example, will the ZBC be able to continue to ignore the existence of a party that holds nearly half the elected seats in parliament?

⁸⁴ *Daily News* [Harare], "Government to ration fuel", 27 June 2000

⁸⁵ *Financial Times* [London], "Zimbabwe faces foreign debt crisis", 2 May 2000

⁸⁶ UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), "Concerns over food security mount", 3 May 2000

⁸⁷ *Zimbabwe Independent* [Harare], "Farm invasions devastate weakened economy", 17 March 2000

The next decisive event on the political calendar is the presidential election in 2002. One immediate effect of the electoral near-disaster for ZANU (PF) will be to turn its attention inwards. Those who argued after the February referendum that Mugabe should go have had their hand greatly strengthened. ZANU (PF)'s parliamentary majority is so narrow that dissident MPs will have a leverage they never enjoyed in the past. Yet the likelihood is that the President will be even less likely to relinquish power voluntarily. For this reason, among others, the war veterans will continue to exercise considerable influence. Chenjerai Hunzvi has now been elected to Parliament. He too has spoken of the need to reform ZANU (PF), and his presence is likely to polarize the internal party debate still further. There will remain the threat that the violent tactics of the veterans may be brought to bear on internal ZANU (PF) disputes.

It is not clear that the political balance in Parliament will remain as it is. The MDC has indicated that it will challenge the results in at least 10 and possibly 20 constituencies. In 1995 the High Court overruled the result in Harare South, leading to the victory of the independent Margaret Dongo on a rerun. Rerun elections in a number of constituencies will bring the almost certain prospect of further violence. If the MDC were to win just two or three seats, the constitutional crisis that was averted by ZANU (PF)'s victory might well come into play.

6. Conclusion

The political violence of the last four months has had a single aim: to keep ZANU (PF) in power. Now that that aim has been achieved the tension may ease, although there is still much scope for scores to be settled violently. But there are now a series of variable factors that are beyond anyone's control. The ruling party remains profoundly insecure, with a bare parliamentary majority and a base of support reduced essentially to the Shona peasantry. The most important political developments of the coming months will take place within ZANU (PF) as various solutions are offered to allow the party to come to terms with the end of the *de facto* one-party state. A split in the party (and potentially a collapse of the government) is not ruled out.

The land issue is now firmly on the agenda. President Mugabe has used it in an entirely cynical fashion to try to win popular support, but now he cannot retreat on the promised acquisition of white farms. Most dangerously, the "war veterans" have been unleashed. They will take credit for ZANU (PF)'s victory and expect rewards, particularly in the form of land. This will utterly undermine any planned efforts at land reform, with disastrous consequences.

Underlying all this is a process of economic decline that the government is unable and unwilling to address. Presumably, in the short term it will take emergency measures such as floating the Zimbabwe dollar (a failure to do this could bring catastrophe within weeks). The government's actions in recent months have led to a dramatic loss of foreign exchange earnings at the very moment when the country has an acute fuel shortage, is involved in a costly war and has defaulted on its debt. At best it will be a year before that damage can be repaired, but it is doubtful whether the underlying lack of confidence in the Zimbabwean economy can be repaired. The effect of this will be to increase poverty and social tension, making the government even less popular. Zimbabwe's crisis is not yet at an end.

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