

ZIMBABWE

*The struggle for land,
the struggle for independence.*

By Rob Gowland
Sydney District Secretary
Communist Party of Australia



**Demonstration in Harare in support of the ZANU-PF government and
President Mugabe**

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On February 16, 2002, Dr Simbi Mubako, the Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the United States, gave a speech to the US national conference of the Schiller Institute. “There has been a veritable media blitz on Zimbabwe by the Western powers in the last three years”, said Dr Mubako.

“Yet for the previous 19 years, the West showered endless praises on Zimbabwe and its President, as a beacon of stability and democracy in Africa. Zimbabwe won many international awards for its advanced agriculture and economic management.

“American universities awarded President Mugabe several doctorates, adding to his own six very good degrees in education, economics, law and international relations.

“Now, suddenly, the West condemns the country, and portrays Mugabe as a leader who has developed the horns of a demon, and a tail. He is called a tyrant, a thief, and a corrupt monster, with all the epithets that the West heaps upon Third World leaders.”

Sanctions

The “blitz on Zimbabwe” that Dr Mubako spoke of is not limited to the media. Britain, the former colonial overlord of Zimbabwe (then called Southern Rhodesia), has in effect maintained economic sanctions against the country for several years.

The European Union formally imposed sanctions in 2001, banning President Robert Mugabe and 19 senior Zimbabwean government and military officials from travelling to the EU. In addition, their assets held in the EU were frozen as a sign of EU displeasure.

Blacklist

On July 22, 2002, the EU Council meeting in Brussels, broadened the sanctions against President Mugabe and his ZANU-PF government.

An additional 52 Zimbabwean political, business and military figures were made subject to the travel ban and the freezing of assets held in Europe. Among the 52 names added to the list was Grace Mugabe, President Mugabe’s wife.

“All the members of his cabinet and leading members of the ruling ZANU-PF party are now on the blacklist”, Reuters quoted an EU diplomat as saying.

In addition, all sales of arms by EU members to Zimbabwe were stopped. “The imperialists were never so quick in the past to bar access



President Mugabe and his wife Grace; both on the EU blacklist.

to guns and money for the racist regimes of the region, like apartheid South Africa and North and South Rhodesia, or the Portuguese rulers of Mozambique and Angola. Yet they have the gall to claim now, as they did then, to be the ‘civilising’ force.’¹

Howard presses for more sanctions

The week before, John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia had called for Commonwealth sanctions to “reign in” the Mugabe regime.

New Zealand’s Prime Minister Helen Clark has also advocated “tougher economic sanctions” against Zimbabwe and its “full expulsion” from the Commonwealth.

Why This Sudden Assault on Mugabe?

Zimbabwe was conceded political independence only after an armed liberation struggle. At the time of independence, 5,200 white settler farmers owned most of the productive land and the 4.5 *million* black peasants were confined to the infertile “tribal lands” that they had been forced to live on by the racist colonial regime.

Under the independence agreement, Britain and the US actually pledged money *for land reform* – US\$2 billion to compensate white planters for the loss of “their” land (which the whites had previously stolen from the Africans at the point of a gun).

Britain and the US however reneged on their obligations and land reform was effectively stymied.

Zimbabwe’s colonial legacy

Zimbabwe’s economy remained neo-colonial. The great majority of the people were left landless, impoverished and unemployed.

Mining remained almost entirely in the hands of trans-national corporations. Business in general in Zimbabwe is still run by Western firms (400 British companies alone).



Zimbabwe adjoins Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia. The capital is Harare. Bulawayo was the capital of King Lobengula of the Ndebele before Cecil Rhodes’ agents arrived looking for gold and land in the late 19th century.

Black participation

The Mugabe government has moved to transform this situation by redistributing farm land originally seized by the white colonialists to the landless black majority, and simultaneously by insisting on indigenous participation in the country's mining and business operations.

“After land, mining”

Pointing to the foreign-owned companies in Zimbabwe, Mugabe asserts, “There must be Africans in there as owners, not just as workers”, and (*most* alarming to imperialism) “after land, we must look at the mining sector”.

Neo-colonial status

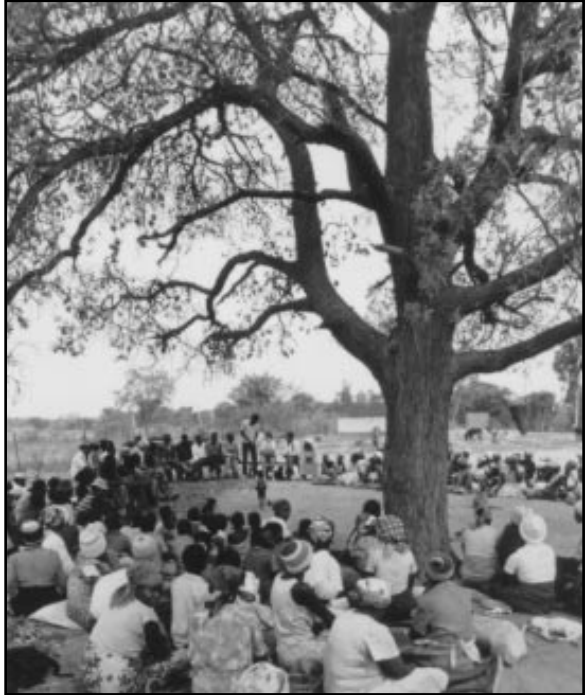
The Zimbabwe government's attempts at land-reform and other economic reforms designed to shift economic power in the country from whites to blacks, if allowed to succeed in Zimbabwe, would threaten the neo-colonial status of most of “post-independence” Africa.

But this is not all the Zimbabwean government has done to get up imperialism's nose. Unlike most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Zimbabwe

is still governed by the political movement (ZANU-PF) that led it to independence from British rule. In most other countries in the region, the national liberation movements that led them to freedom from colonialism were subsequently ousted from government as the consequence of varying degrees of imperialist intrigue and interference.

ZANU-PF

ZANU-PF is the result of the amalgamation of the Zimbabwe African National Union



Zimbabwe's colonial legacy was a neo-colonial economy: the great majority of the people were landless, impoverished and unemployed.

A community meeting at Gweru in 1984.

(ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) to form the People's Front (PF).

Separately, then later together, ZANU and ZAPU led the national liberation struggle first against British colonialism and then against the white racist regime of Ian Smith.

Both organisations affirmed their Marxist orientation. They drew their support primarily but not exclusively from the poor black peasants, the farm laborers, urban workers and mine workers, and the incipient African middle class, intellectuals and professionals.

It is the pressure to satisfy the long-delayed economic aspirations of these various sectors that drives the ZANU-PF government's efforts to reform Zimbabwe's economy. And the attempt to transform the economy, and the direction of that transformation, is one of the main reasons for the Western-backed campaign to remove it from power.

Western intrigues and economic "aid"

"In 1999, after our diplomatic quarrels with Britain had started, our annual application to the IMF was vetoed by Britain and the United States. The reason given was that Zimbabwe – which had sent troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo – was too poor to involve itself in the war in the DRC; and therefore, they should be denied any further funds, so that they could not indulge in those kind of adventures.

"Yet, at the same time – in fact, on the same day – Rwanda and Uganda had their applications approved by the IMF. These two countries also have troops in the DRC; they are the aggressors; and both countries are actually poorer than Zimbabwe. Yet, they received, and continue to receive, loans and grants from the Bretton Woods institutions, while Zimbabwe is quarantined. That is the effect of the big-power monopoly of these institutions."²

But the ZANU-PF government, despite whatever concessions it may have made to the developing black middle class of Zimbabwe, has so far managed to stand up to Western pressure and assorted intrigues. Although it accepted for a while Western offers of aid that were subject to World Bank/IMF restructuring of the economy – to, amongst other things, totally demolish the country's public sector, for example – this "aid" has subsequently been rejected as having too high a price tag.

In fact, in his speech to the Schiller Institute, Zimbabwean Ambassador to the US Dr Simbi Mubako issued a strong anti-IMF/World Bank call, a call that embraced the formation of a new world economic order.

A New International Economic Order

"We have learned that we should encourage everybody to join the movement for the establishment of a New International Economic Order. That movement is already afoot. And it is in our interests as developing countries, to join these progressive forces, which already exist. There is no long-term solution in the present system of international order."

Although Dr Mubako went on to praise (as a “progressive thinker”) the US populist LaRouche, “and those in other countries, as in Russia, Italy, Malaysia, who have all shown that they are willing to embrace the establishment of a new international order”, the key elements in his speech from imperialism’s point of view would have to have been the Zimbabwean government’s advocacy of resisting IMF prescriptions and establishing or joining a New International Economic Order.

Independent foreign policy

At the same time, the way the Zimbabwean government has been able to see off blatant outside interference in the country’s elections and continue to pursue an independent foreign policy that vigorously opposes imperialist intrigue in southern Africa has made Zimbabwe and President Mugabe a rallying point for anti-imperialist sentiment in Africa.

That anti-imperialist foreign policy saw Zimbabwe despatch 8,000 troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo, to support the progressive government of Laurent Kabila against the US-backed invasion by Rwanda and Uganda. This intervention assuredly did not endear Mugabe or ZANU-PF to Washington or London.

Intervention in the Congo

According to Ambassador Mubako, “the intervention of Zimbabwe troops in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)” is “one of the two main reasons for current Western hostility to Zimbabwe”.

“In 1998”, he told the Schiller Institute, “the DRC was invaded by Uganda and Rwanda, with the tacit support of the United States of America and Britain. The declared aim was to overthrow the young government of President Laurent Kabila.

“The DRC appealed to SADC [Southern Africa Development Community] for help; SADC agreed to send troops from Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola. The invading forces were checkmated, and the plan to overthrow the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was foiled.

“The invading forces are still occupying, and exploiting the diamond and other mineral resources of the DRC, on behalf of the West.

Western silence over the Congo

“Two and one half million people have died in the process, in the occupied territories,



Zimbabwe’s support for the Congo and Laurent Kabila did not please imperialism

as a result of war, starvation, and diseases. There has been no outcry in the West about the occupation, exploitation, and atrocities committed by the occupying forces, and the deaths of so many millions of people. The West singles out Zimbabwe for vilification, because of their own failure to plant a puppet regime in [DRC capital] Kinshasa.

“Zimbabwe’s presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was a SADC decision, aimed at saving the people of the DRC from imminent danger and genocide; and this was part of the wider SADC goal, to assist the African people everywhere.

“Zimbabwe is proud of its role in the DRC, and we know that the Congolese people are happy and grateful for the assistance they receive from the government and people of Zimbabwe.”

Defying the pressure being applied by the US and its imperialist allies, the Zimbabwean ambassador stated bluntly: “Zimbabwe will continue to stand ready to assist, and to defend and consolidate the independence and territorial integrity of the DRC, as long as it is necessary to do so.”



President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. His consistent opposition to imperialist intrigues in Africa, especially in the mineral-rich Democratic Republic of Congo, has earned him the wrath of Britain, the US and the EU

Land reform

The other “main reason” for Western hostility is land reform. As Ambassador Mubako put it: “The second and even more important reason for the West’s assault on Zimbabwe, is that the Zimbabwe government decided to take control of its land; of the land which remained the monopoly of a small racial monopoly from the days of British colonialism.

“Land”, he said, “was one of the principal objectives of the war of liberation, through which Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain in 1980. Yet, 19 years after independence, that land was still in the hands of British settlers.

“The colonial racial division of the land left the white farmers [one percent of the population] owning 65 percent of the best farmland of the country, while over 9 million blacks were crowded on small, infertile, sandy plots, or were made landless and jobless.”

Semi-arid land for blacks

So until the land reform program began, the majority black population were squeezed into semi-arid and rocky communal areas, very susceptible to drought.

Robert Mugabe rightly called this situation “immoral”. His ZANU-PF government has sought over the years to obtain funding from the West to acquire white farms on the “willing seller, willing buyer” basis, the only basis approved by the country’s independence agreement with Britain, the Lancaster House agreement.

Western funds however, although offered in various forms more than once, have proved a chimera.

“The Zimbabwe government, therefore, was left with no choice”, said Ambassador Mubako, “but to announce its own plan of land reclamation, at an accelerated pace.

They embarked on that; and, as of now, 7000 farms – or about 90% of the land which was formerly occupied

Grossly unjust colonial legacy

“Zimbabwe can no longer tolerate the grossly unjust distribution of land created by colonial expropriation.

“The average white farmer owns approximately 100 times more land than a black farmer, and the land he owns is far more suitable for agriculture.

“Farms belonging to the Oppenheimer family alone total an area exceeding the size of Belgium, while other large tracts of land belong to absentee owners.”

Gregory Elich in the Harare Herald



ZANU supporter wearing a Mugabe and Qaddafi T-shirt. All three are giving “Red Salutes”.

by the white farmers – have now been acquired for African settlers. Most of the people who are being resettled, had been landless, or jobless. And by the end of December 2001, over 360,000 families had been resettled on new land.”

Support for Libya

As if initiating land reform and thwarting US schemes in the Congo was not enough to arouse imperialism’s ire against Zimbabwe, the ZANU-PF government’s determinedly independent and overtly anti-imperialist foreign policy includes support for and close co-operation with another African *bête noir* in the eyes of US imperialism, the government of Lybia’s Muammar al Qaddafi.

Zimbabwe similarly maintains continuing co-operation with socialist Cuba.

Co-operation with Cuba

The pro-ZANU Zimbabwean *Herald* reported in uncompromising terms on July 22, 2002: “President Mugabe arrived home yesterday after a successful working visit to Cuba during which Zimbabwe got more doctors from its ally while more assistance in the health sector is in the pipeline.

“Comrade Mugabe and his delegation spent four days consulting with his Cuban counterpart President Fidel Castro and officials from his government to explore ways on how the Caribbean country could increase its support to Zimbabwe.

Castro “confident of Zimbabwe’s victory”

“Consolidation of co-operation between the two countries was also discussed. President Castro, who met with President Mugabe for three consecutive days during the visit, said Zimbabwe would triumph in its quest to equally redistribute land, saluting Zimbabweans for their heroic efforts to control their resources.

“He added that the country would overcome the present problems despite pressure by some powerful Western countries.

“There is no country weak enough to be crushed. That is why I am confident in Zimbabwe’s victory despite the obstacles’, said President Castro, whose country has for 43 years resisted a United States-led isolation.

African support

“African ambassadors accredited to Cuba met President Mugabe and reiterated their countries’ support for Zimbabwe in its fight against imperialist forces.

“Cuba has helped Zimbabwe since the days of the liberation struggle. After independence it continued to assist in developmental programs such as training of science teachers and of late has been providing Zimbabwe with doctors.”

Key to Western hostility

For all the noisy fuss in the capitalist media about “abuse of democracy” in Zimbabwe, it is Zimbabwe’s rejection of neo-colonialism and its government’s independent and determinedly anti-imperialist foreign policy that are the real key to the hostility of the Western powers towards ZANU-PF and President Robert Mugabe.



Presidents Mugabe and Castro in Cuba, July 2002. Fidel Castro told President Mugabe that he was “confident in Zimbabwe’s victory despite the obstacles”.

This hostility has manifested itself in many forms: as the “media blitz” that Dr Mubako referred to; as EU and Australian sanctions on government members; as economic pressure and sabotage; as overt and covert interference in the country’s political system and blatant attempts to bring about “regime change”.

Media blitz



Robert Mugabe at the Earth Summit. “Ruthless dictator”, “senile”, “corrupt”, even “racist”, no epithet is too harsh for the Western media to use against him.

For more than three years, as previously mentioned, the daily press and the television networks in Europe, Australia and the US, have joined with their governments to outdo each other in denigrating President Mugabe and his Zimbabwe African National Union – People’s Front (ZANU-PF) government.

The Western media have labelled Mugabe a “ruthless dictator”, accused him of being massively corrupt, even called him “mad” and

generally tried to identify him as an enemy of democracy.

With remarkable unanimity, the Western media outdo themselves with horror stories about the alleged situation in Zimbabwe now. Full page articles are devoted to detailed accounts of ritualistic gang rapes allegedly carried out as policy by supporters of land reform. There is even reference to the keeping of “sex slaves” by ZANU activists.

Land reform portrayed as a “gimmick”

The desperate *need* for land reform in Zimbabwe is ignored in the Western media, even called into question. The claim is constantly repeated that the best of the farms taken over from the white commercial farmers under the country’s land reform program have not gone to landless black peasants but have been “appropriated” by President Mugabe himself, or else by his wife and his “cronies”.

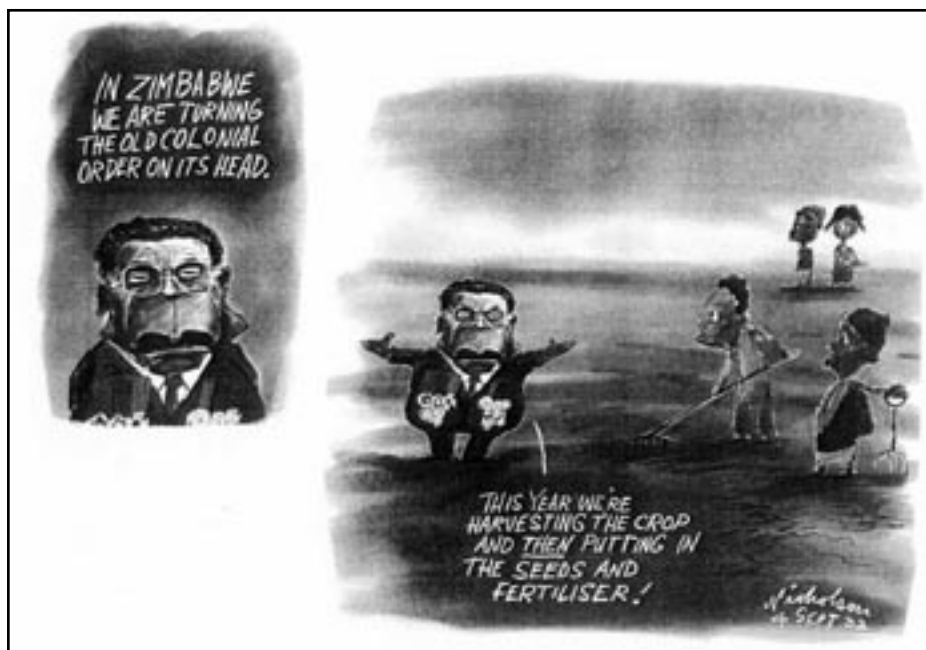
Consistently, land reform has been portrayed as a “gimmick” policy being pursued by a black racist regime intent on targeting whites.

In a media campaign of a type not seen since the height of the Cold War or the demonisation of Yugoslavia’s President Milosevic, the anti-ZANU-PF, anti-Mugabe message has been stridently pressed, with scant regard for truth or fairness.

Demonising Mugabe

The South African Communist Party’s newspaper *Umsebenzi* described the media campaign thus: “The entire South African and imperialist media throughout the world approached the question from the standpoint of demonising Mugabe as a dictator and defining the primary challenge as that of democracy, understood as a need to have a strong opposition.

“In these sections of the media the land issue did not matter and was simply reduced to an election gimmick by ZANU-PF and the question of poverty and economic misery facing the Zimbabwean people hardly featured at all.



Nicholson attempts to lampoon land reform and President Mugabe in Murdoch broadsheet *The Australian*, 4 September, 2002, but only succeeds in being racist.

“This approach would not even be deserving mention were it not for the unfortunate reality of the extent and dominance of (neo) liberal and racist media in the analysis of the Zimbabwean situation.”

Racist media

That racist element was in full view in Rupert Murdoch’s *The Australian*, of September 4, 2002. The main political cartoon in the paper, in full colour, portrayed President Mugabe as a clone of Idi Amin, his chest bedecked with medals. At the same time, the cartoon, *inter alia*, ridiculed the idea of black Africans running their own farms, exemplifying the racism that underlies much of the anti-ZANU-PF campaign.

Sam Sibanda, in *Zimbabwe and World Hypocrisy*, notes how effective this demonising by the media was: “For a considerable amount of time, the events unfolding in Zimbabwe were globally perceived as the desperate acts of a rogue regime that was intent on clinging to political power at all costs.

“President Robert Mugabe, we were almost convinced, was a desperate man about to lose the next presidential election and so was dredging up the land issue as a last gasp measure to ensure his re-election.”

During the Presidential election in March 2002, some of the anti-Mugabe media even resurrected the ultra-racist Ian Smith, the former Prime Minister of (white) Rhodesia and architect of UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence) by which the racists hoped to prolong their rule indefinitely.



Former Prime Minister Ian Smith; “things were better in his day” – but not for blacks!

A benign Smith, whose troops slaughtered thousands of supporters of independence from colonialism and made war on neighboring countries that aided the national liberation struggle, was given elder statesman treatment: “the country”, he announced, was “in a bit of a mess”.

The great man told an admiring media that “Mugabe must go so that Zimbabwe is no longer despised around the world”. As it was in his day, one might add.

Indeed Smith actually boasted about how much better things had been under his rule, telling the media that, in his day, Rhodesia was the breadbasket of central and southern Africa (producing more even than South Africa) and that the farmers were the backbone of the economy.

Mr Smith did not mention that in his day any blacks who got uppity were tossed in the slammer, and their homes burned down and their families savaged by Smith's bully boys, the notorious racist mercenaries the Selous Scouts. And the media conveniently forgot it, too, in their zeal for yet another anti-Mugabe quote.

Mugabe wins

Despite Ian Smith and the privately owned media, President Mugabe won the March 2002 election comfortably, securing 1,685,212 votes, as against the 1,258,401 secured by his challenger, Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In percentage terms, while Mugabe's share of the vote amounted to 56%, that of his opponent was far behind at 42%.

An enraged capitalist media became even more violent in their attacks on ZANU and its leader. "Without a shred of evidence, the *Financial Times* in its leading article of 14 March attributed the result to 'gross intimidation and blatant ballot rigging'.

"Calling it a 'travesty and a tragedy', the *Financial Times* went on to issue warnings of the dire consequences for the people of Zimbabwe if they did not get rid of Mr Mugabe through strikes, taking to the streets and 'through open rebellion'.



Harare, March 2002: ZANU-PF supporters express their delight at Mugabe's victory in the election for President.

Threats to investment



The election results were fair, says the head of Nigeria's observer team.

"Not being content with threatening the people of Zimbabwe, and expressing its rage at the endorsement by the Nigerian and South African observers of the Zimbabwean presidential elections as 'legitimate', the *Financial Times* warned the governments and leaders of these two countries that unless they joined in the imperialist attempts to isolate and destabilise the Zimbabwean regime, their attempts to attract foreign and domestic investment under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) would be in jeopardy."³

A month after the election, the privately owned Zimbabwe *Daily News* rushed into print with a story alleging that Mugabe's supporters had beheaded a woman in a rural district the previous year. Challenged, the paper had to subsequently admit the beheading story was false and apologise to Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party.

“Make the country ungovernable”

The British Government and media have led the foreign attacks on the land reform program. Ambassador Mubako commented: “President Mugabe has repeatedly said that there is no going back on the land reforms. Zimbabweans know that Mugabe is a man of his words. The British know this as well.

“So, they have decided to escalate their campaign of vilification against the people and the economy of Zimbabwe. The object is to make the people disaffected against their government, and to make the country ungovernable. “

Sanctions damage the economy

At the same time, the economic sanctions the main imperialist powers have imposed (in practice if not always officially) have seriously damaged the country's economy.

Simultaneously these same powers have connived with Zimbabwe's (white) commercial farmers, relics of British colonial rule, in causing a serious food shortage at a time of severe drought. They have then loudly trumpeted the very real threat of starvation, laying the blame for it not at their own door where it belongs, but solely at the feet of the Mugabe government, as the “inevitable” outcome of ZANU-PF's land reform and other economic programs.

Isolate and undermine

In short, Robert Mugabe — personifying the ZANU-PF government — is the latest recipient of the “demonising” tactic that imperialism, and the US in particular, now uses routinely to isolate and undermine unco-operative governments that refuse to do the bidding of Washington, London or Berlin.

Any government that defies the US, Britain or the EU on foreign policy or the World Bank on economic policy has to know that it is now likely to be subjected to just this kind of orchestrated global propaganda barrage, intended to render normal diplomatic and political life almost impossible while preparing international public opinion to accept covert and overt actions by the imperialist powers to bring about “regime change” in that country.

Additionally, the leaders of independently-minded countries must be made to understand that they will personally be punished for their defiance of imperialism's leaders. Yugoslavia's Slobodan Milosevic is currently imprisoned in the Hague while

“on trial” for daring to stand up against this US-dominated New World Order.

And in February, 2002, on a visit to Ghana, British PM Tony Blair warned “African dictators” that Britain would lead a drive to “bring them to justice”. He promised help to African states to set up a Court of Human Rights and money and training to bring “tyrants” before the courts.⁴

One did not need to have more than a passing acquaintance with British anti-Mugabe rhetoric of the last two years or so to recognise at whom this was aimed.



The ruins of Great Zimbabwe, once a stone city of 10,000 people.

Historical background

The sound and fury of imperialism’s campaign against the government of Zimbabwe and President Mugabe in particular, is obscuring the long history of Zimbabwe as well as the present struggle for land on the part of the people of that country. It is part of the long struggle of all African countries against European colonialism.

Ancient gold mines

The regions of south-central Africa now known as Zambia and Zimbabwe include what was once one of the great gold fields of the ancient world. The remains of mines, sunk to a vertical depth of sometimes 50 metres in gold-bearing rock, are found in an area 800 kilometres long by 650 kilometres wide.

Gold from here is believed to have supplied King Solomon and the Graeco-Roman world.

Certainly, the presence of this gold was a great attraction to Arab traders along the East Coast of Africa from the middle of the first millennium AD and to European colonisers from the middle of the second millennium.

It is estimated that, of the staggering total of 129,000 claims registered in 1910 by European gold-prospecting concerns, eleven-twelfths were pegged out on the site of mines of varying antiquity.

Bantu migration

In the middle of the first millennium AD, the Shona-speaking Bantu tribes began their great southward migration. They soon populated what is now Zimbabwe — the

Kalanga to the southwest, the Karanga to the east around Nyanda (formerly Fort Victoria), the Zezuru to the northeast, and the Rozwi and Tonga to the north.

Most of the ancient rock gold-mines had been abandoned long before the Bantu Shona people migrated to the area, but some were still able to be operated by the newcomers. They also obtained gold by river-sand washing and elementary quartz-crushing.

Trading with the East

By the eighth century, the Shona people were mining, smelting and working iron, gold, copper and tin and trading with these products down river to the Arab trade centres on the coast. This trade resulted in a great expansion of their culture.



The ruins of the fortified hilltop city of Great Zimbabwe.

Great Zimbabwe

The hilltop fort of Great Zimbabwe developed from a trading centre on the Limpopo river into a great stone city of 10,000 people.

The Shona civilisation's important trading connections with Asia continued to develop until the beginning of the 16th century when the push by European merchants and rulers to find new sources of wealth and trade led them to the East Coast of

Africa. In 1500-1520 the Portuguese captured the East Coast ports from the Arabs. The race to acquire the resources and colonise the lands of south-central Africa had begun.

European greed for gold

The Portuguese presence brought about the end of the prosperous trade with the east resulting in economic decline. In 1629, the Portuguese persuaded the paramount Bantu chief to sign a treaty granting the region's "gold mines" to the King of Portugal.

But, in reaction to the greed of the Europeans for their gold, the Shona miners filled in such mines as remained. They kept only their iron and copperworks functioning.

More migration

In 1823 a Bantu tribe speaking Ndebele (or Amandebele, corrupted by the English to Matabele), an offshoot of the Nguni people of Natal (now part of the Republic of South Africa), migrated northward after their leader, Mzilikazi, an Nguni military commander

under the orders of Shaka, king of the Zulu, fell foul of his master. Mzilikazi had resisted the flow of Boer settlers into Natal, but was eventually driven across the Limpopo by the firepower of the Boers.

The Ndebele-speaking people settled in about 1837-1840 around Bulawayo in what is now southwestern Zimbabwe, a region that was given the name of Matabeleland by Europeans. The Ndebele territory is entirely surrounded by Shona tribes.



Cecil Rhodes saw himself and British capitalism bestriding Africa like a colossus, making the continent “British from Cairo to the Cape”.

Imperialist rivalry

In 1887, Portugal sought to annex the whole of central Africa from Mozambique on the East Coast to Angola on the West Coast. Germany and France agreed, but Britain, with dreams of East Africa “British from Cairo to the Cape”, repudiated the Portuguese claim.

Enter Cecil Rhodes

In February the following year, the British resident in Bulawayo, at the instigation of the English adventurer-entrepreneur Cecil Rhodes, who had made a fortune in gold and diamond mining in South Africa, made an agreement with Lobenguela, the Ndebele ruler, under which Lobenguela bound himself not to enter into correspondence with any foreign power without the consent of the British High Commissioner.

At the end of October that year, Rhodes’ agents Rochford Maguire and Charles Rudd, by misrepresenting their real aims to Lobenguela, secured what Lobenguela understood to be an agreement allowing Rhodes’ company to mine for gold, but which Rhodes’ and his lawyers understood to be exclusive rights to all the Ndebele’s mineral resources. For this bounty Rhodes agents had undertaken to make Lobenguela a monthly payment of £100 and a supply of rifles and ammunition.

Enter the British South Africa Company

This concession was then transferred to an Association that Rhodes had formed in order to raise capital with which to exploit the concession. In 1889, the Association became the British South Africa Company (BSA), a mercantile company based in London.

The objects of the BSA were: (1) to extend northward the railway and telegraph systems; (2) to encourage emigration and colonisation; (3) to promote trade and commerce; and (4) to develop and work mineral and other concessions under the management of one powerful organisation.

The Ndebele territory was – at least nominally – an independent state, which the British called Matabeleland and which was supposedly ruled by Lobenguela from his capital Bulawayo.

Nevertheless, in addition to their minerals concession, the BSA was generously “granted” by the British Government control over trade, immigration, communications and the police in the district.

Land seizure begins

In late 1889, Rhodes organised a contingent of 200 settlers, protected by a force of 500 or more specially recruited police, to seize land on the Mashonaland plateau. They arrived in September 1890 and established a fortified camp which they called Salisbury.

The BSA thus took possession of what an agent of the French government called “the pick of central Africa on both sides of the Zambezi”.

The Africans fight back

Realising that he had been cheated by Rudd and Maguire, Lobenguela refused to give the BSA his “formal and free” approval necessary to make the British concessions legal. The Shona and Ndebele resisted the loss of their lands, but were defeated in the Matabele War in 1893.

In 1895 Rhodes’ “police”, under the pretext of arresting some Ndebele who had stolen cattle from the Shona, attacked Lobenguela’s capital Bulawayo.

Lobenguela was driven into the bush. The subsequent “native insurrection” of 1896, in which 10,000 Ndebele warriors besieged the British occupying Bulawayo, was also defeated and the Ndebele and Shona territories fell completely under BSA domination, becoming the provinces of Matabeleland and Mashonaland in a country the BSA named Southern Rhodesia.

A series of land-grabbing legislation followed, including the Native Reserves Order in Council of 1898, which dispersed the indigenous people on to low-potential arable land, the communal areas of today.

Exploiting Zimbabwe's gold

Most of the “settlers” were not there to farm but, as Rhodes happily put it, “to find their reefs” [of gold]. By 1905, with a gold export of £1,500,000, Southern Rhodesia “took its place among the gold producing countries of the [British] empire”.⁵

By 1909, gold exports were worth £2, 623,708, making it the fourth largest gold producer in the British Empire.

Despite this, when the BSA's term of rule formally expired in 1913, the Company asserted that it was in debt, claiming that expenditure on administration had greatly exceeded revenue collected. The BSA was under pressure to grant the white settlers (and only the white settlers) self government. As the 1946 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* so neatly put it: “The directors of the company were ready to surrender their powers, but they had to consider the interests of the shareholders.”

More land seizures

In 1914, white settlers, still only three percent of the population, controlled 75 percent of the economically productive land, while the black Africans were confined in 23 percent of the land.

The directors wanted to take over all remaining “unalienated” land (ie land still in the possession of the African population), together with its mineral and railway rights. The matter went to the Privy Council, and the BSA's directors were given the right to dispose of the unalienated land “until their administrative losses had been recovered”.⁶

The BSA also received a ten year extension of their rule over Rhodesia. By 1923, when their rule finally expired, the white population had grown to only 33,260. There were over 500,000 Africans in the country.

From company to Crown

In September 1923, Southern Rhodesia was formally annexed to the British crown as a self-governing colony. The BSA was given £3,750,000 in settlement of its remaining claims, but also retained its mineral rights and its interests in the railways.

More Europeans

One of the first concerns of the new colonial government was to augment European settlement, and by 1928 the white population had grown to 50,000.

In 1930, the colonial government, elected on a property franchise (electors had to possess £100 of property) that effectively excluded the black population, drew up the notorious Land Apportionment Act to formally dispossess the indigenous Africans of their land. The law was a blatant attempt to legitimise the theft of black Africans' land and force them on to the labour market.

In 1934, the Industrial Conciliation Act banned Africans from skilled employment, forcing them to work for subsistence wages on white farms, in mining or industry.

By 1960, although settlers of European origin still accounted for hardly five per cent of the population, they owned more than 70 per cent of the arable land.

Joshua Nkomo and ZAPU

In 1945, Joshua Nkomo, who had been born in Matabeleland in 1917, returned home after completing his education in Natal and Johannesburg. He worked for the Rhodesian Railways and by 1951 had become a leader in the trade union of the black Rhodesian railway workers.

In 1957, Nkomo was elected President of the African National Congress (ANC), the leading African nationalist organisation in Rhodesia. The ANC intensified the struggle for independence in Rhodesia.

When the ANC was banned early in 1959, Nkomo went to England to escape imprisonment. He returned in 1960 and founded the National Democratic Party (NDP); in 1961, when the NDP was banned in turn, he founded the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU).

Robert Mugabe and ZANU

Born in Southern Rhodesia in 1924, Robert Mugabe, the son of a village carpenter, returned home to Rhodesia in 1960. He had been a student at the University College of Fort Hare in South Africa, and had spent part of the 1950s in Ghana.

In 1963, in Tanzania, he helped the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole to form the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) as a breakaway from ZAPU.

Ian Smith and the Rhodesian Front

In Southern Rhodesia, elections in 1962 – boycotted by African nationalists – were won by Ian Smith's extreme right-wing Rhodesian Front party (RF), which ran on a platform of immediate independence under white control. The British Government urged Smith's white minority government to transfer power "gradually" to the indigenous African majority. Smith flatly refused.

African leaders imprisoned



Demonstration in the early '70s demanding the release of all detained and restricted persons including Nkomo.

In 1964 Mugabe was arrested for “subversive speech” and spent the next 10 years in prison. During that period he acquired law degrees by correspondence courses. While still in prison, in 1974 he replaced Sithole as ZANU’s leader.

Nkomo was also arrested by the white-minority government in 1964. He was held in detention until 1974. After his release he traveled widely in Africa and Europe to promote ZAPU’s goal of black majority rule in Rhodesia.

Racists declare independence

Meanwhile, the racist colonial government of Ian Smith had declared a “state of emergency” and on November 11, 1965, had unilaterally declared independence, the better to consolidate the white settlers’ hold on land and wealth in Southern Rhodesia. The Rhodesian Front government’s policies became more openly modeled on those of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Less than one per cent of Africans were able to vote. Instead of democratic measures, chiefs were given increased powers. Discriminatory legislation was increased.



Troops of Ian Smith’s racist regime searching for signs of guerillas.

Britain declines to act

Despite international pressure, Britain refused to take any decisive action against the illegal regime. An embargo was declared by the United Nations, although the blockade was systematically violated by the Western powers, with the aid of the apartheid regime in neighboring South Africa, Portugal (via Mozambique), and transnational oil companies. White commercial agriculture was heavily subsidised and competed with the African peasants, who felt the main burden of the sanctions.

By 1967, after the Tribal Trust Lands Act replaced the Native Reserves Act, 4.5 million blacks (seven tenths of the population) had been forcibly removed from their home areas and crowded on to infertile land. “The task of the unequal redistribution of land and white economic control was complete.”⁷

Land and the liberation war

From 1960, Britain manoeuvred to retain economic control over its colony after the independence it saw was inevitable. Liberation struggles were sweeping southern and central Africa.

“The unequal distribution of land in Zimbabwe was one of the major factors that inspired the rural-based liberation war against white rule and has been a source of continual popular agitation ever since, as the government struggled to find a consensual way to transfer land.

“My grandfather, Mhepo Mavakire, used to farm land in Zimbabwe which is now owned by a commercial farmer. It was forcibly taken from the family after the Second World War and handed to a white man, because he had fought for king and country.

“Many of my relatives died during the Zimbabwean liberation war, trying to reclaim this land. I joined ZANU, which played the central role in the war, in the late ‘60s and there was never any doubt in my mind that it was both a duty and an honour to fight for that land.”⁸

War in Portugal's colonies

The struggle in Rhodesia was closely tied to the independence struggle in neighboring Mozambique.

In Mozambique, in 1971, the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente da Libertação de Moçambique; Frelimo), launched a new phase of the guerrilla war it had been waging since 1964 against targets in the northern part of the country. Under the leadership of Samora Machel, by 1974 Frelimo controlled much of northern and central Mozambique.

In Rhodesia, meanwhile, attempts by the British to resolve the conflict there by largely cosmetic measures, such as a referendum on a new constitution in 1972, failed.



Refugees from the Smith regime in Rhodesia who sought refuge in Mozambique rebuilding their homes after a raid by the white Rhodesian military in 1977.

Portuguese army revolts

Portugal's initial response to the outbreak of revolt in its African colonies of Angola and Mozambique had been all-out war, but by April 1974 the sheer cost of the wars together with rising political discontent in Portugal led to a popular army coup, the overthrow of the fascist government, and Portuguese withdrawal from Africa.

Portuguese withdrawal led to Mozambique's independence under a Frelimo government in June 1975, but the country's proximity to hostile regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia caused immediate problems. Like Zambia, Mozambique paid heavily for obeying UN sanctions against Rhodesia and for supporting the liberation movements.

Guerrilla war in Zimbabwe

Frelimo's victories in Mozambique in the early '70s and, more important, the changes in the power structure in the region after the independence of the former Portuguese colonies, led to a new independence strategy beginning to make headway in Rhodesia.



ZANU guerillas in training.

With Nkomo and Mugabe both



Mute evidence of war – the independence struggle, Zimbabwe, 1978.

out of prison, ZAPU and ZANU launched guerrilla warfare. Zambia, Mozambique, Angola, Botswana and Tanzania now formed the group of Front Line States to fight racism. They supported the ANC's struggle in South Africa and the liberation war in Zimbabwe.

That war was fought primarily by the armed peasantry, amongst whom ZANU had the greater influence. As the armed

struggle in Zimbabwe grew increasingly intense, the Smith regime bombarded Zambia and Mozambique. In 1976 ZAPU and ZANU united to form the Patriotic Front under the joint leadership of ZAPU's Joshua Nkomo and ZANU's Robert Mugabe.

Sham multiracial elections

By 1978 it had become clear that the Rhodesian government would not win the war, and Smith, under pressure from Western countries and South Africa, agreed in 1978 to hold essentially sham multiracial elections the following year. He signed an "internal agreement" with some African leaders opposed to the Patriotic Front which legalised their own political parties.

The 1979 elections excluded ZAPU and ZANU and were consequently basically fraudulent. Bishop Abel Muzorewa became Premier and



Independence supporters in London demonstrate against Ian Smith's regime in 1979.

changed the name of the country to Zimbabwe Rhodesia but the racist Constitution reserved the majority of parliamentary seats for the white settlers, so the racist minority had the power to control the socio-economic and political system. The war continued unabated.

Negotiations to end the war – Independence!

However, guerrilla pressure was mounting, and finally Smith had to agree to European and African governments' demands that he negotiate.

Fresh negotiations in London in 1979 led to the Lancaster House Agreement that ended the war and led to new British-supervised parliamentary elections in February 1980.⁹ Mugabe and ZANU won a landslide victory over the other black parties, and he became Prime Minister.

White privileges

Under the Lancaster House Agreement, whose terms would be a millstone around the country's neck for the next two decades, whites in Zimbabwe maintained their economic and political privileges, although they lost their veto over possible constitutional changes.

The *political* privileges enjoyed by whites were subsequently eliminated, although there were extensive privileges in other areas. For example, around 5000 commercial farmers (most of them white) still owned 15.5 million hectares or 45 percent of the country's most productive land. 8,500 small-scale, mainly black farming families had five percent in the drier regions, while 700,000 black families (some 4.5 million people) lived in the remaining communally-owned fifty percent, known as "tribal lands", in low rainfall areas with very poor soil fertility.

Limitations of the Lancaster House Agreement

Mugabe threatened to walk out of the independence negotiations at the Lancaster House Conference in London in 1980, over the land issue. The Conference only resumed when Britain's Tory government had given an undertaking, backed by the United States, to fund a land reform and resettlement program in Zimbabwe, based on the purchase of commercial white farms from those farmers willing to sell (usually white farmers emigrating). US\$2 billion were to be provided to "compensate" these white farmers for the "loss" of the land they or others like them had originally stolen from the black farmers.

"Willing seller – willing buyer"

These commitments were made conditional on the inclusion in Zimbabwe's new constitution of a "willing seller - willing buyer" clause, mandatory for ten years.

The aspirations of African farmers, who had hoped for a true agrarian reform after independence, clashed with the limitations imposed by the Lancaster House agreement.

The “willing seller - willing buyer” clause impeded the expropriation of white land-holdings. To make matters worse, the British and US governments avoided giving Zimbabwe most of the resources promised for the purchase and distribution of land.

Tony Blair’s subsequent Labour government in Britain decided to abrogate the pledge altogether and unilaterally announced that they had stopped funding the land reform and resettlement program in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe at independence

Meanwhile, because of war, the country’s cattle herd had shrunk to a third of its previous size; many roads had been rendered useless, and some schools had remained closed for seven years. The medical and sanitary systems were also in serious disrepair, and various diseases, such as malaria, were increasingly in evidence among the population.

In an effort to build maximum cohesiveness and unity behind the new government, Mugabe as Prime Minister offered generous cabinet participation to the ZAPU leadership, and also called on white segregationist politicians to form part of the government team.



Bob Marley at Zimbabwe’s independence celebrations.

“The wrongs of the past must be forgiven and forgotten”, he declared. “It could never be a correct justification that because the whites oppressed us when they had power, the blacks must oppress them today because we have power.”

Planned development

These steps were aimed at preventing old rivalries from interfering with national reconstruction, especially the ambitious National Development Plan.

Under the latter, farm production broke all records and consumption reached higher

levels than expected. However, the apartheid regime in South Africa maintained a damaging blockade on Zimbabwe's agricultural exports.

Major difficulties

At the same time, "this hand of reconciliation was rejected by the whites who went so far as to collaborate with the South African regime's failed attempts at assassinating Mugabe".¹⁰

The apartheid regime's agents also took a hand in fanning and encouraging political dissent between ZANU and ZAPU, especially in Matabeleland. To this end it created an organisation cleverly named Super-ZAPU, "an active paramilitary unit to foment unrest in the new Zimbabwe"¹¹.

The release of a large number of unemployed, armed young men into the countryside had bequeathed a violent legacy, and by 1982 the initial ZANU-ZAPU government coalition broke down in the face of the increasing ethnic violence in Matabeleland (in which Super-ZAPU was involved), for which ZANU held ZAPU responsible. Mugabe dismissed Nkomo from the Cabinet.

Towards the end of June 1985, Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union obtained a comfortable victory in parliamentary elections throughout the country, except in Matabeleland where a majority of whites voted for the Rhodesian Front, created by Ian Smith.

This led Mugabe to remind them that the privileges granted to former colonists under the Lancaster House agreement should not be considered unalterable.

ZANU and ZAPU merge

After a complete breach between Nkomo and Mugabe for several years, they agreed in 1987 to merge their respective parties, as ZANU-PF, in order to try to achieve ethnic unity in their country. In 1990 Nkomo became a Vice President under Mugabe, who remained Zimbabwe's chief executive.

Progress by 1990

The first ten years of Zimbabwean independence (1980-1990) witnessed some major advances and improvement in the social conditions of the majority of the working and poor people.

For instance there was massive expansion of social services, in particular in the spheres of health and education. For example, according to research done by the Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies (SARIPS) based in Harare, health recurrent expenditure rose from Z\$8.19 in 1979/80 to Z\$18.17 in 1990/91 in real per capita terms.

Real per capita recurrent expenditure on primary education grew from Z\$10.61 to Z\$28.70 during the same period. Primary education during this period was made free and compulsory, thus becoming accessible to millions of children from poor and rural families.

During this period the infant mortality rate declined from 88 to 61 per 1000 births, and immunisation coverage increased from 25% to more than 85% of children. Levels of literacy also improved dramatically during this period.

Social programs wrecked

However, the initial Mugabe and ZANU-PF programs of public spending on services and welfare and subsidies for staple commodities were ultimately wrecked by the intransigence of wealthy white farmers and business interests.

In fact, any attempt at redistribution of land or black participation in business met with sustained campaigns to destabilise the economy and remove ZANU-PF from government.

Overthrow of socialism in the USSR

The overthrow of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in 1989 was a serious blow to the governments of a number of recently liberated former colonies, Zimbabwe among them.

The USSR and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe had been a source of support in trade, health, education, and defence, but also – and not least – politically and diplomatically.

Land Reform Act

It was in these conditions that, in 1990, on the expiry of the “willing seller - willing buyer” provision in the Constitution, Zimbabwe’s parliament passed the Land Reform Act, authorising the Government to expropriate land held by Europeans, at a price fixed by the State, and to redistribute it among the poor.

The new law proved popular among the majority of the workers and peasants, who deemed it an act of racial and economic justice, but it evoked fierce resistance from the wealthy whites.

The white farmers waged a vigorous and disruptive campaign against the land reform law, attacking it as a violation of their civil and human rights established under the Constitution.

According to Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo, the Mugabe government would have persevered with the land reform in 1990 despite the objections of the

In 1990, the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) of white landowners controlled 90 per cent of all agricultural production, paid a third of the country's salaries and exported 40 per cent of the country's goods. They still owned eighty per cent of the land they had owned prior to independence, and successfully blocked many initiatives for rural redistribution.

white farmers and their backers, "but other African leaders intervened fearing it would damage the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa".

Economic sabotage

By 1992, the white farmers and business interests (and their foreign backers) had succeeded in bringing the economy to its knees. The year before, with no land reform, the economy under the control of foreign companies and the white commercial farmers, and the bulk of the population living in poverty, the ZANU-PF government had been in no position to withstand the pressure from imperialist "donor" states, who control aid and trade. It had been forced to agree to International Monetary Fund-World Bank "structural adjustment" demands in return for desperately needed loans.

IMF structural adjustment

According to IMF-World Bank officials, structural adjustment under their direction would make the country more attractive to foreign investors, more financially viable and more economically successful. Foreign loans would be more readily forthcoming to kick-start the economy.

The IMF and World Bank insisted on a drastic five-year structural adjustment program. "This program principally entailed a severe cutback on social spending, privatisation of state enterprises, liberalisation of the economy, a radical reduction of government deficit from 10 to 5% of the Gross Domestic Product, removal of food and other subsidies in particular for the poor, reduction of the civil service by 25% through retrenchments and freezing of posts, devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar, and orienting the economy towards exports at the expense of domestic demand.

"Like virtually all neo-liberal economic restructuring in the developing world, a promise was made that certain benefits would flow from such restructuring. These promises included the usual ones: an increase in foreign direct investment by at least 20% of the GDP per year, generation of more foreign exchange, job creation and an economic growth of 5% per year.

"None of these materialised."¹² Instead, there was "inflationary pressure due to increased import prices, businesses closing due to an inability to compete on the international market, the export of capital funds and increased prices on all staple foods.

“In five years the IMF destroyed 40 percent of industrial output. Zimbabwe was even forced to sell its maize reserves for IMF-ordered profits.”¹³

Meanwhile, the white commercial farmers were diversifying out of food crops, increasing the proportion of their land being used for tobacco and horticulture cultivation for export.

Under IMF prescriptions, the economic and social situation in Zimbabwe declined rapidly in the 1990s, almost eroding all the gains made during the first ten years of independence.

Colonial legacy

Zimbabwe’s economic problems were the legacy of its colonial past and neo-colonial economic relations still existing in the country. The World Bank, however, as a reliable instrument of imperialism, made no moves to “restructure” that colonial legacy.

Instead it strengthened neo-colonialism, in the form of foreign ownership, indebtedness, and a fiscal policy in thrall to foreign creditors.

Drought

1991-92 saw the onset of drought, but the fiscal targets forced on the Zimbabwean government by the World Bank meant there was almost nothing the government could do to even modestly respond to the drought.

The poor black smallholder farmers crowded into the marginal semi-arid regions of Zimbabwe are the most vulnerable to drought, and when driven from their land add to the impoverished unemployed in the cities.

Far from helping them, the World Bank’s structural adjustment program made their plight worse.

“After 1990/91 secondary school enrollment started to decline, with a decline by 7.5% in 1992. Real health expenditure fell to below the 1983 levels, education spending dramatically fell to 32% below its 1990/91 peak, and malnutrition rates amongst children increased by 13% in 1992 over 1991.

“Inflation rose from 23% in 1991 to 46% by December 1998, with the interest rate nearly 50%. Manufacturing output fell from 129.9 in 1992 to 116.9 in 1996, and real wages fell by 10% in 1992 over 1991, with more than 17,000 workers in the



Vice-President J Msika.

manufacturing sector being retrenched between 1991 and 1996. Real wages actually fell by 33% between 1990 and 1997.¹⁴

Retrenchments

“Between 1991 and 1995 the private and public sectors retrenched 25,510 and 20,000 workers respectively. During the same period about 300,000 school-leavers joined the labour market each year. Even more serious was the rise of food prices between 1981 and 1999.

“The net effect was rising poverty, to the extent that according to the 1998 Zimbabwe Human Development Report, it was estimated that 61% of Zimbabwean households were poor, and of these 45% were ‘very poor’.

“Of course it can be argued that the Zimbabwean budget deficit was too high at 10% and was not sustainable. But to ask of the government to cut it by half within 5 years – a religious and fundamentalist requirement by the IMF and World Bank irrespective of the nature and scale of social inequalities – was bound to lead to serious socio-economic decline.”¹⁵

The people suffer

Assured by the experts of the World Bank that the pain would be only temporary and that economic benefits would soon start to make themselves felt, the government was intolerant of criticism from the trade unions that the program was hurting workers.



Opposition forces were able to provoke food riots.

But as the benefits failed to materialise and impoverishment grew, it drove a wedge between the mass of the people (the urban poor in the towns in particular) on the one hand and ZANU-PF and the government on the other, a situation the reactionaries encouraged in every way.

Food riots

The Commercial Farmers’ Union manipulated food production to create shortages while prices rose. Opposition forces

were able to provoke food riots and strikes by the trade union movement in the mid-to-late 1990s.

Having their own agenda, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1995 were actually holding up Zimbabwe as an example of “successful” structural adjustment for other countries to follow!

Umsebenzi's analysis

At the time (2000), the actions of the ZANU-PF government in Zimbabwe received critical coverage in Umsebenzi, the newspaper of the South African Communist Party.

“The uncritical implementation [in Zimbabwe] of the structural adjustment was as a result of the consolidation of the power of a small and aspirant indigenous capitalist and bureaucratic bourgeoisie, which had become dependent on the post-colonial state, and had hoped to benefit from the privatisation of state assets under this program.

“The effects of the structural adjustment program under the hegemony of this class is perhaps the single most important explanation for the erosion of the power and influence of ZANU-PF amongst the people.”¹⁶

Calling the ZANU-PF government's implementation of the World Bank/IMF's Structural Adjustment Program “uncritical” is also inaccurate, certainly as the program wore on.

Government resistance to IMF “reforms”



Mugabe expressed his anger at the severity of the measures his government was having to take to meet the requirements of the IMF and the World Bank.

The government resisted implementing various aspects of the program. In the beginning of 1995 “donors were becoming impatient at the slow rate at which the country was implementing the financial reforms required by the IMF and the World Bank”.¹⁷

Popular disapproval of new excise taxes his government had been obliged to impose “led President Robert Mugabe to express his anger at the severity of the measures his government was having to take to meet the requirements of the IMF and the World Bank”.¹⁸

Revolt

By 1997, the government was in virtual revolt against the World Bank/IMF strictures. “President Robert Mugabe’s consistent refusal in 1997 to respond to external pressures to change policies that he professed to be in the interests of the black population of his country made potential foreign donors cautious and caused would-be foreign investors to hesitate.

Increased tariff protection

“Typical of the president’s stance was his announcement in February [1998] of a new tariff structure that gave increased protection to local industry. This was in clear conflict with the World Bank policy on trade liberalisation.

“Then, in March, a bill was published legalising affirmative action to permit discrimination that would benefit ‘persons disadvantaged by previous discrimination’.”¹⁹ Despite the deliberate absence of racial terms, this was clearly a reference to the historical discrimination by whites against blacks in Zimbabwe.

Control over investment

Later the same month the government signaled its intention to ignore World Bank requirements for unfettered access to investment in the country by transnational corporations, including their freedom to take over privatised public utilities. “Mugabe stated that recent reforms had left the country ‘ripe for investment’ and that the government would continue to play an important role in the choice of foreign partners and would ensure that the privatisation program was used to encourage black entrepreneurs so as to redress the legacy of minority rule.”²⁰

“Shifting class allegiances”

The writer of the *Umsebenzi* article quoted earlier also claimed that “shifting class allegiances in ZANU-PF” were at work, “unfortunately similar to those that have characterised many former liberation movements on our continent.

“After ascendancy to political power, the class alliances within the liberation movement

shift from the pre-independence alliance between the working class, the peasantry and progressive sections of the petty bourgeoisie to a new alliance between these (formerly) progressive elements of the petty bourgeoisie and sections of local and international capital.

“This is usually brought about by the marginalisation of the working class and the peasantry in the post-independence reconstruction programs. Without participation of the masses, the petty bourgeoisie, now in control of state institutions and within the context of the domination of imperialism, seeks to advance its interests in accumulation into an alliance with sections of local and international capital.

“The end result of these developments has always been the continuation of the economic structure of the colonial era, albeit under new circumstances, thus sacrificing the interests of working class, the peasantry and the poor.”²¹

The *Umsebenzi* writer lamented that after independence “thousands of rank and file combatants were demobilised and returned to their remote peasant farms. From there they could hardly influence the ongoing evolution of post-independence affairs.”²²

And yet it is precisely these war veterans from their “remote peasant farms” who drove the process of seizing white commercial farms to enforce land reform.

“A process of land acquisition and resettlement of indigenous landless people cuts across the networks that link the farmers, the producers of agricultural inputs, the banks and insurance houses, all dominated by the white minority. And this network also spreads in the international capital arena.” – George Shire, *The Guardian*, (UK).

ZANU a broad movement

In fact, the analysis in *Umsebenzi* failed to distinguish between national liberation movements and Marxist-Leninist parties. ZANU may be led by Communists, but is nevertheless a broad movement that must satisfy the aspirations of peasants, small business people, bigger business people and big peasants, as well as workers.

In the context of Zimbabwe, it is carrying through not the socialist revolution but the national democratic revolution. The various disparate elements that make up ZANU have widely differing expectations of what they want to achieve in this transformation, of how far is far enough.

Just as the white landowners and business owners accused the government of favouritism and worse for allegedly putting the interests of the rural poor before those of the business community, so also “many poor Zimbabweans believe that the interests of this white network have been allowed to overshadow the morally legitimate cry of the impoverished and landless majority in post-colonial Zimbabwe.”²³

Land reform and South Africa

Umsebenzi carried several articles when the war veterans' seizures of white commercial farms was making headlines in the bourgeois media everywhere, criticising the process. "This is not the way to carry out land reform" was the burden of the SACP message at that time.

The SACP-ANC-COSATU alliance has a developed position on land reform in South Africa, which was outlined in an SACP article in July 2001.²⁴ The article said, *inter alia*: "In 1994, the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) of the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance put the land question at the centre of socio-economic transformation.



A (white) anti-Mugabe protester in South Africa.

Land restitution, security of tenure and land redistribution

"The key pillars of this RDP framework on land transformation were land restitution [to families evicted under apartheid], security of tenure and land redistribution.

"The RDP framework also linked land transformation to the provision of finance; basic infrastructure such as water, electricity, public roads and training to the targeted beneficiaries of land transformation.

"Since then, the ANC government has passed several pieces of progressive legislation seeking to implement the RDP framework."²⁵

These however failed to make much progress because of "the capitalist character of our society" and its inhibiting effect on "accelerated land reform in terms of the RDP framework".²⁶

Apartheid land ownership patterns

"The main cause of land hunger in our country remains apartheid land ownership patterns where more than 80% of our land is still owned and controlled by the white minority, in particular big private agricultural capital....

"Any progressive land reform program which intends to reverse apartheid land ownership patterns and lead to progressive land transformation must effectively deal with big white private agricultural capital and urban land control by the capitalist class."²⁷

This long-term strategy makes land reform dependent on fundamental changes in society. In fact, the article says: “the land question cannot be resolved outside of broader economic transformation”.

“Opportunistic short-cuts”

It concludes: “No opportunistic short-cuts will deliver land transformation in favour of poor and working people.”²⁸ With *Umsebenzi* at the time arguing that ZANU was driven by petty bourgeois elements rather than “poor and working people”, it is easy to see how ZANU’s land reform program could have been viewed as “opportunistic” too.

If people in South Africa were to emulate their Zimbabwean counterparts, then South Africa could expect an economic backlash just as Zimbabwe had experienced, a backlash that could well make any attempt to rebuild post-apartheid South Africa well nigh impossible.

Landless movement

The ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance, however, was also faced by a swelling movement within South Africa on the part of landless rural poor, calling for urgent land reform in the country. These people hailed the actions of the Zimbabwe war veterans in forcing the issue by occupying large white farms.

The ANC’s would-be rival, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) was making political capital out of the movement for land, and there was an obvious likelihood of Zimbabwe’s land reform giving impetus to this movement in South Africa.

PAC-led land occupation

In fact, in mid-2001 the PAC led an invasion and occupation by about 2,000 landless people of vacant government land in Bredell, near Johannesburg. The SACP called it “opportunistic” and the ANC government evicted the squatters, but clearly something positive would have to be done to accelerate land reform.

In the latter part of 2002, South African President Mbeki announced that his government would speed up restoring land to the thousands of families evicted under apartheid.

Neighboring Namibia also has a land reform program, but like Zimbabwe used to be, Namibia is saddled with a “willing seller, willing buyer” policy. In an effort to make more white farmers “willing sellers”, the Namibian government announced on 15 November, 2002, that it would initiate “a compulsory survey of white-owned farmland as part of a plan to impose a land tax on white farmers.

Namibia imposes land tax on white farmers

“The data will be used to work out how much land tax the farmers will have to pay

when the levy takes effect in April 2003. Other factors to be taken into account include the productivity of the land and farms' livestock carrying capacity."²⁹

The survey and the land tax are "part of wider reforms aimed at speeding up the transfer of land in Namibia from whites to indigenous people."³⁰

One of imperialism's worst nightmares – land reform across post colonial Africa – is beginning to come true. It's an historically-inevitable process, but Zimbabwe gave it impetus and will just as inevitably cop the blame from imperialism.

The national democratic revolution

In the '60s and '70s, when the Soviet Union was the superpower that gave tremendous aid to national liberation movements throughout the world, there were many in those movements who thought that they would be able to go straight from liberation to the socialist revolution, skipping the national-democratic stage altogether.

By the '90s, however, with the victory of counter-revolution in the USSR and economic or covert (and sometimes overt) military counter-attack by the imperialist countries across the breadth of the former colonial countries, it was increasingly realised that the foundations for social transformation would have to be laid first.

In ZANU-PF, with its mixture of poor farmers, workers and petty-bourgeois elements (and even a component of the incipient national bourgeoisie) in its ranks, there was throughout the '90s an ongoing struggle to find a path that would meet the needs of these various sectors of the people.

Land reform – at market prices

The IMF and World Bank had insisted that any land acquired for the land reform program had to be purchased at full market prices. The Zimbabwe government simply did not have the money for this.

"The British government came up with £44 million (a claim challenged) and then withdrew its support, conveniently alleging that Mugabe was giving the land to his 'cronies and political allies'."³¹

Restructuring finally rejected

ZANU-PF finally rejected the IMF-World Bank's program of restructuring, but not before tremendous harm had been done to the government's social programs and the public sector of the economy in particular.

The structures left over from colonialism had not been touched by the IMF "structural adjustment program": the gross inequality of land ownership in Zimbabwe remained more or less as it had been ever since the European takeover of the country.

Compulsory acquisition

So in November, 1997, Mugabe's government took the only option left: to compulsorily acquire land for redistribution (with compensation for improvements). The land to be acquired in this way – comprising 1503 mainly white-owned commercial farms – was categorised into derelict or under-used land, land owned by absentee landlords (including members of the British House of Lords), land owned by farmers with more than one property, and land contiguous with communal areas.

The government was obviously trying to find a formula that would create the least hostility with the white commercial farmers and their business backers, while still carrying through the necessary land reform.

Mugabe told the Parliament: “It is not the intention of the government to drive white commercial farmers off the land. No farmer will be without land in Zimbabwe.

Even those farmers whose properties are designated by reason of their proximity to communal areas will still be invited to select from properties elsewhere.”

Even the World Bank had acknowledged that the large commercial (read white) farms utilised less than half the 11.26 million hectares they owned.

Land reform “essential”

At a conference on land reform held in 1998 in Harare, 48 countries and international organisations from the “donor” community unanimously endorsed the need for land reform as being “essential for poverty reduction, economic growth and political stability”.³²

Robin C Hood, in an *Open Letter* to British Tory political figure Chris Patten in the Harare *Herald*, pointed out that Western “donor” countries do very well out of their well-publicised generosity to Third World countries.

“We have personal experience of the way in which European aid has been used as a weapon in your undeclared war against us, how you have withheld that aid for your own political ends and the amount of that supposed aid that finishes up back in your countries through our payments for your so-called experts, importing your goods and our mounting debt.

“There are even those among us, and their voice is gaining strength as a result of your actions, that advocate that this region should be more self-reliant and less dependent on Western aid that distorts our progress in favour of yours.”³³



The people take back the land.

Injustice of the international economic order

In his speech to the Schiller Institute, Zimbabwean Ambassador to the US Dr Simbi Mubako commented that “The injustice of the international political order rests on the injustice of the international economic order, represented by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

“Zimbabwe is a long-standing member of both organisations, and had come to rely on them for its vital development projects. We thought that we had rights in these institutions, provided that we followed the rules and paid our dues. However, we have since discovered, to our costs, that we were deluding ourselves. We are only insignificant pawns, that can be cast away at the whim of the great powers.”

Dr Mubako said that the lesson to be learnt from Zimbabwe’s experience was that “even if you are a member of the IMF and the World Bank, you should not build your economy on the IMF prescriptions.

“Young and poor nations should rely on their own meager resources. Then you will not be blackmailed politically. This is a surer way to steady economic development, even if it is slower economic development.”

Global warming and land reform

In a six-part series in the Harare *Herald* in August and September, 2002, Gregory Elich wrote that: “A study examining the effect of global warming on agricultural production in Zimbabwe lends urgency to the land reform process.

“The study noted that Zimbabwe has experienced three droughts since 1982 (and now a fourth in 2002, after the study was performed), and that Southern Africa is one of the regions that appear most vulnerable to climate change.”

Elich reported that the study had found that already maize in Zimbabwe was “increasingly coming under stress due to high temperatures and low rainfall conditions.

“ ‘As the climate changes, more and more of the land in the arid communal areas are marginal’, the study adds, ‘and will become more vulnerable with climate change’.

“Consequently”, he writes, “without land reform six million poor black farmers crowded into the [‘marginal’] communal areas are likely to be driven from their homes as their land becomes increasingly incapable of producing crops.”

“Disaster of grand proportions”

These poor black farm owners (not the white commercial farms) account for *the majority of maize grown in Zimbabwe*. “The lack of land reform, or even a delay in

the implementation of land reform, could spell economic and human disaster of grand proportions”, observes Elich.

In this regard, he notes that “the fertile land occupied by the large commercial farms [the areas designated for resettlement of poor black farmers] can withstand climate change much more readily than the communal areas”.

The future of land reform

Looking to the future, he adds: “It is expected that land reform will eventually result in a net increase in agricultural production.”

However, it will not be a simple task. “The Government of Zimbabwe proposes spending a total of US\$3 billion in support of the land reform process, much of which will be earmarked for building up the infrastructure in resettled areas, including roads, schools and clinics.

“The initial phase of the plan focuses on immediate support to allow resettled farmers to start farming.”

Elich sounds a warning: “Because land reform is a long-term process, it will take years for resettled farmers to achieve full potential yields.

“Any delay in implementing land reform would run the risk of production in the resettled areas lagging dangerously behind the rate of loss of production in the communal areas as rising global temperature eliminates farmland in arid communal regions.”

Effect of sanctions

And there’s the rub. “A major impediment is that the Government finds itself in a dire financial situation due to international sanctions. This is affecting its ability to implement the support structure necessary for the success of land reform.” [That effect is one of the aims of the sanctions regime, of course.]

“Despite these constraints, the government has spent \$155 million in initial support for resettled farmers.”

Black farmers act

In July 2002, the Government brokered a deal between the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (representing indigenous black farmers) and the manufacturers to ensure that the

“The intent of land reform in Zimbabwe is not only to redress the injustices of colonial theft, but also to reduce widespread poverty and raise the standard of living, not only for the resettled farmers, but for society as a whole”. –Gregory Elich, *The Herald*, Harare.

farmers will not run short of inputs such as fertiliser and seeds.

The previous season, farmers were hit by a serious shortage of inputs, as economic sabotage (and profiteering) by white commercial farmers and business interests saw many inputs only available on the black market, where they sold at prices far beyond the reach of many of the resettled poor black farmers.

This saw many of them resorting to measures that disrupted the farming exercise. Now, as the ZFU regional director for Matabeleland North and South, Tendai Munjoma, points out, the new arrangement means farmers “are now able to access the inputs directly from the producers without going through middlemen”.³⁴

Mr Munjoma adds: “For us, this is a favourable and agreeable deal for the farmers, who have been short-changed for a long time.”

Stimulating agricultural production

The Harare *Herald* commented that “the ZFU’s latest arrangement together with the Government’s initiative to release Z\$8.5 billion for the purchase of crop inputs, is set to stimulate the country’s agricultural production, create jobs and also boost the economy”.

The Zimbabwe Farmers’ Union, which has a good standing relationship with some Japanese companies, is also facilitating the acquisition of tractors by farmers.

“The tractors are for every farmer, both old and newly resettled, with proven agricultural aptitude.

“We are encouraging the farmers to take up the initiative and buy the tractors, which are heavily subsidised”, said Mr Munjoma.³⁵

Gregory Elich reports that the Zimbabwe Government has in place plans to establish 36 irrigation schemes in dry communal and resettlement areas.³⁶ The irrigation project will rely on water in existing dams and allow irrigation in areas formerly lacking access to water.

Irrigation, claims Elich, would result in increased yields in dry areas, and allow nearly year round farming. “It would also help to limit or delay the loss of farmland due to rising global temperatures.”

Unfortunately, progress on implementing the irrigation schemes is held up by the lack of funding. “An official from the Department of Irrigation commented that some irrigation projects ‘have been around for more than five or six years, the feasibility studies are done. But due to budgetary constraints we have been unable to implement those projects’.

“Once again, it is seen that international sanctions serve to hurt efforts to improve agricultural output.”³⁷

Neo-colonial ruling class

Zimbabwe has some of the best agricultural land in Africa. But it has been primarily in the possession of white commercial planters who used it to produce export crops, the income from which went primarily to the same white minority.

Land reform in Zimbabwe strikes directly at the power base of this neo-colonial ruling class. If effective land redistribution were to take place there it could spread to other African countries where the land is still in the hands of the European settlers who seized it during the colonial period.

It would raise the spectre of fundamental changes in these countries in favour of the poor and dispossessed, something that international capitalism does not readily tolerate.

The “Zimbabwe infection”

This too lies behind the virulent campaign against Zimbabwe’s government. As the British *Telegraph* reported at the beginning of 2002: “... the South African Rand has dropped to record lows, as international markets fear that the regional superpower [South Africa] will contract the Zimbabwean ‘infection’.”

Since then, as we have seen, thousands of landless Africans have occupied vacant government land near Johannesburg and the South African government has had to announce plans to implement a land reform program of its own. Namibia has also acted to accelerate land reform.

This fear of the land being returned to those who had worked and owned it for centuries prior to European invasion lies at the heart of the hysterical campaign against Mugabe.



Attempts were made by imperialism to foment a coup.

Fomenting a coup

In the early to mid '90s, when ZANU-PF's social programs were being sabotaged by the IMF-World Bank structural adjustment measures, Western intelligence agencies tried their best to foment a coup from within the Zimbabwean armed forces.

They failed, due to the vigilance of Zimbabwe's patriots, but at the time the white business community's media and political organs were agog with eager speculation and anticipation.

Mineral-rich Zimbabwe

For imperialism, Zimbabwe is a choice area to control. It is mineral-rich and exports tobacco, gold, ferroalloys and cotton. All that is missing is a compliant government that will co-operate with Western banks and the transnational corporations in the exploitation of the country's resources.

New methods of control

The old methods of ensuring imperialist control – gunboats, colonial armies and mass hangings of rebellious Africans – are now passé.

Today, the favoured method is to promote and materially assist selected local politicians who, in return for significant assistance, may be relied upon to implement policies favoured by those aforementioned banks and corporations.

The assistance provided ranges all the way from money and trained “advisors” to clandestine radio stations and even arms.

Savimbi in Angola, Mobutu in the Congo, and Blaise Compaore in Burkina Faso are but three examples.

Continuing destabilisation

In Zimbabwe, the white landlords and business interests continued their economic sabotage. As real wages declined sharply and thousands of jobs were lost, they heaped the blame on the government and set about developing a “Zimbabwean opposition”.

In this they were aided by a shadowy international body called the Zimbabwe Democracy Trust (ZDT) and two organisations funded by the British and US governments: the Westminster Foundation and the National Endowment for Democracy.

Zimbabwe Democracy Trust

The ZDT is a powerful organisation of imperialists, including three former British Foreign Secretaries and Chester Crocker, a former US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia and Africa, “a notorious lover of the former South African apartheid regime”³⁸.

The avowed aim of the ZDT is to promote private ownership and secure opportunities for private investment in Zimbabwe unfettered by government regulation.

The Westminster Foundation gets 95% of its funding from the British government. Represented in it are the leading figures from the three major bourgeois parties at Westminster – Labour, Tories and Liberal-Democrats. This thoroughly imperialist outfit claims to be devoted to the “development of democratic institutions”, but with fine Orwellian logic this means in practice “the sabotage of any independent development across the world”.³⁹

The similar National Endowment for Democracy is a Congressionally-funded US front organisation for meddling in other countries’ political affairs. It is now headed by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Allbright, whose hostility to independently minded countries was well demonstrated over Yugoslavia and Iraq.

EU plans Mugabe government’s removal

“By the efforts of these two agencies [ZDT and the Westminster Foundation], working through the British government and senior British political figures, the EU was persuaded in 1998 to institute a study on Zimbabwe. This study, presented to the EU’s Africa Working Group, blatantly demanded the removal of Robert Mugabe.

“As to the method of his removal, the study recommended the systematic building up of the NGOs and the Zimbabwe Trade Union Congress as alternative poles of attraction and centres of power, supported by strikes, demonstrations, urban unrest, food riots and carefully engineered dissension within the ranks of the government, the ruling party and the country’s armed forces.



Mugabe addresses the UN, even as the EU and the US plot his overthrow.

“The EU study was candid enough to state that Zimbabwe had earned the EU’s ire because of her program of land distribution and her decision to send her armed forces to the Democratic Republic of Congo to aid the Kabila regime against foreign aggression.

“The EU’s report was quickly followed by a meeting held under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. This gathering, under the rhetorical title *Zimbabwe - Time for Mugabe to go?*, did not leave much

to the imagination. It too advocated ways for removing Robert Mugabe, similar to those propounded by the EU study. Like the latter, it too singled out land reform and Zimbabwe’s involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo as areas of serious concern to the imperialist powers.

So does Washington

“Barely two months after the London meeting, the State Department in Washington convened a seminar entitled *Zimbabwe at the crossroads*, at which Zimbabwe’s involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo was singled out as the main problem and various means were suggested for ‘strengthening civil society’ to render Zimbabwe ungovernable.

“As to the means to achieve this end, reliance was to be placed on NGO’s, ethnic divisions between the Shona and Ndebele were to be fomented and exacerbated, every attempt was to be made to sow dissension within the ranks of the ruling ZANU-PF, and all opposition parties were to be assisted and encouraged to merge and help in creating unrest in the country.”⁴⁰

It should come as no surprise to anyone, then, that in 1999 a “united” opposition party was formed headed by the leader of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

Creation of the MDC

The party was the “Movement for Democratic Change” (MDC), its leader Morgan Tsvangirai, the head of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) from 1988 to 2000.

Growing hardship amongst the urban masses in the 1990s had enabled the Tsvangirai leadership of the ZCTU to pursue a bolder, more “militant” course (“good governance plus neo-liberal economics”⁴¹) that could be more openly anti-government without losing support.

For all that it has a black “leader”, the MDC is primarily the creation of the (white) Commercial Farmers’ Union and the British and US agencies already referred to.

Ironically, and tellingly, the White farmers had generally voted for the former party of apartheid, Ian Smith’s Rhodesian Front. Until 1999, that is, when they struck on the more sophisticated weapon of the MDC.

“The MDC is a social democrat movement with a certain strength in the cities and substantially financed and directed by white Zimbabwean money and foreign forces opposed to Mugabe and the equitable land redistribution program.”⁴²

Even anti-Mugabe Zimbabwe media activist Raj Patel admits “the MDC is a candidly neoliberal party, one that has promised to privatise services within a year of gaining power” and says “they have used their own militia against ideological dissenters within their ranks”.⁴³



The MDC, a “candidly neo-liberal” party.

“Together with the white farmers and big corporations, the Westminster Foundation [and the National Endowment for Democracy] fund and provide political support for the MDC because of the latter’s commitment to the free market, restoration of Zimbabwe’s land to the tiny group of white farmers, and withdrawal of Zimbabwean troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo.”⁴⁴

MDC and the MMD

The MDC is clearly modeled on the very similar body which toppled the government of Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, the former *Northern* Rhodesia. Kaunda, the national liberation struggle leader who led Zambia for 27 years, lost power a decade ago when a former union leader, Frederick Chiluba, took advantage of the country’s economic difficulties and

resultant discontent, to lead the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) to victory in the elections.

Writing about the most recent Zambian elections held at the end of 2001, Jonathan Steele said: “It was a disgraceful election which European Union observers and local monitors severely censured. The media were controlled. Criticising the president risked criminal charges. The police regularly moved in to prevent opposition candidates campaigning and the vote-count was marked by irregularities.”⁴⁵

Hethenasked if there had been “statements of indignation from [British Foreign Secretary] Jack Straw? Not a murmur. Furious coverage in Fleet Street? A few column inches on inside pages. Talk of ‘smart’ sanctions to punish the men who stole the election? You must be joking.”

Zambia under the MMD

And yet imperialist leaders who wax very vocal about supposed violations of democracy and “good governance” in Zimbabwe maintain a discrete silence over Zambia.

Why? Because, observed Steele, the “neo-liberal enforcers in the big international financial institutions” found the Chiluba government “acceptably pliant”.⁴⁶

After gaining power, the MMD dropped its pro-worker rhetoric, launched welfare and job cuts and went along with World Bank demands to privatise the copper mines which used to be the country's main source of budget revenue and foreign exchange.

He adds that the record of the Chiluba government and the MMD "should be a warning to those who expect great things from the MDC in Zimbabwe".⁴⁷

Support for MDC

That many workers in Zimbabwe as well as discontented middle-class elements have been drawn to support the MDC is linked to the country's high level of unemployment and rampant inflation. These, of course, are a legacy of the country's colonial past aggravated by the IMF's structural adjustment program, the effects of the West's economic sanctions and the white farmers' and businesses' economic sabotage strategy.

**Jonathan Steele
in *The Guardian* of
18 January, 2002,
notes that under the
MMD government,
"Zambia has seen a
catastrophic decline
in living standards
with life expectancy
down to 43. It has the
distinction of being
the only country
where the mortality
rate for the under-
fives has gone up.**

Use of migrant farm workers

With true colonial plantation mentality, the white planters (or "commercial farmers" as they preferred to be known) declined to use the local Zimbabweans as farm workers, preferring to use immigrant workers from Malawi and Mozambique.

This was partly a response by the white farmers to the Zimbabweans' involvement in the independence movement, and partly, by keeping them isolated and dependent, a way of preventing their employees from becoming militant and radical.

The immigrant workers were dependent on the white farmers for their livelihood, their housing, even the primary schools their children attended were organised by the white farmers. They were isolated from the Zimbabwean people and that's the way the white farmers liked it.

When the Commercial Farmers' Union joined in setting up the MDC, many farm workers in particular were signed up in the new party by their landlord employers.

Land acquisition

The 1997 legislation on the compulsory acquisition of designated commercial farms for resettlement did produce some positive results: by July 1998, the government

had recovered 3.8 million hectares while paying compensation for land value and improvements. But the rate of acquisition was far too slow, and expensive.

“It had produced other results, too, in the shape of a vicious and concerted backlash from the UK and powerful white national organisations like the Zimbabwe Commercial Farmers’ Union, the Zimbabwe Tobacco Association, and the former’s international allies, in an essentially political context.”⁴⁸

MDC opposes land reform

In late 1999, the government held a referendum for constitutional changes to enable the confiscation of the large colonial-era landholdings of the white planters.

ZANU had anticipated an easy passage for this essential reform and badly underestimated the magnitude and sophistication of imperialism’s campaign among urban Zimbabwean people to defeat it.

In the face of a weak campaign by an overconfident ZANU, the newly formed MDC drew on its masters’ full economic and international media muscle to mobilise a “no” vote. All the demagogic stops were pulled out. To the delight of imperialism and the white farmers, the referendum was lost.

Despite the number of influential bodies that had recognised the *necessity* for land reform in Zimbabwe, the MDC continued to collude with the white minority landowners and business owners on the one hand and foreign governments, especially the British, on the other, to prevent it.

“The western-backed Movement for Democratic Change opposition, by contrast, is very reluctant to be drawn on how it would resolve the land question. The white-dominated Commercial Farmers Union and members of the defunct Rhodesia Front, strongly represented in the MDC, could not care less who governs Zimbabwe as long as they can keep the land and continue to live in the style to which they have become accustomed.”⁴⁹

The fact that MDC membership has been strongly promoted by employers is also a telling factor in its growth: most urban workers in Zimbabwe with jobs are employed by foreign companies while over 60,000 farm workers were employed by the white landowners.

700,000 get land

While a jubilant MDC were predictably calling for Mugabe and the ZANU government to resign, Mugabe used his Presidential powers to decree a confiscatory Land Acquisition Act.

Although the Zimbabwe government was at pains not to exacerbate relations with Britain, that country's Labour government moved with alacrity to protect Britain's colonial interests.

Even as the British government fulminated against Mugabe and ZANU-PF over the alleged impropriety of confiscating the white farmers' landholdings, the Mugabe government claimed to be powerless to prevent first the blockading and then later the occupation of some 1200 white commercial farms by landless veterans of the liberation war.



Workers line up to work a newly-occupied former white farms.

The British government (and media) was joined by other imperialist governments (and *their* supporting media) in protesting this affront to ruling class rights, although they represented their actions as being on behalf of defenceless white women and children, alleged victims of black racist hooligans.

Once again, Murdoch's *Financial Times* was in the lead, fulminating against the War Veterans Association, which led the struggle for land seizures in Zimbabwe, accusing it of "theft, extortion, blackmail, fraud and vandalism".

The real concern of Britain was British business interests in Zimbabwe, including commercial agribusiness. The war veterans also "invaded" businesses, black and Asian as well as white⁵⁰, demanding that they too be opened up to popular participation.

Fast-tracking land reform

Chinese journalist Gao Shixing wrote that Zimbabwe had undertaken "a fundamental exercise to acquire land on its own without assistance from donors or any outsiders.

"It was solely the farmers, war veterans and the government that carried out the exercise which had nothing to do with the outsiders who wanted to dictate what Zimbabwe should do."⁵¹

George Shire, veteran of the Zimbabwe liberation war and now an academic working for Britain's Open University, wrote just before the March Presidential election: "Land reform is now a socioeconomic and political imperative in Zimbabwe. The land distribution program of Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF government is aimed at redressing gross inequalities to meet the needs of the landless, the smallholders who want to venture

into small-scale commercial farming and indigenous citizens who have the resources to go into large-scale commercial agriculture. These are modest, but worthwhile, objectives.”⁵²

Today some 210,000 families have been resettled on good land under the Model A1 scheme while 54,000 new commercial black farmers have received land under the Model A2 scheme, bringing the total to 264,000 households – about **1,500,000** people.

An additional 3,178 farms with a capacity of 160,340 households have been subdivided by the government for resettlement. The government says the land reform process is now effectively complete.

Despite the magnitude of this operation, the capitalist media continues to boldly peddle the line that the confiscated land has only gone to “the Mugabe elite”.

In fact, true to the ZANU government’s policy of inclusion, many prominent supporters of the MDC are among those who have received land.

At the same time, imperialist propaganda is pushing another (and contradictory) propaganda line about this land redistribution, one that comes straight out of the armoury of the white racists (although it is also peddled by some claiming to be on the left).

According to this line, the redistribution represents not “land to the people” but “the dislocation of almost a million people from their traditional homelands”!



A white farmer is escorted off his farm by the poor and landless who will farm it in his place.

The “traditional homelands” being referred to are those barren parts of the country where colonialists and racists like Ian Smith forced the Africans to live after they evicted them from the good farming land that the whites wanted for themselves. Letting the black farmers move back onto their *genuine* traditional lands where they *can* make a living from farming is hardly unwelcome “dislocation”.

Compensation

Fed up with two decades of British evasion of their responsibilities under the Lancaster House Agreement to fund the acquisition of colonial era farms for redistribution to indigenous farmers, Mugabe moved to refer all claims for compensation



Typical emotive newsphoto of another white farmer leaving his farm. Note the emphasis on the baby's highchair; the international capitalist media did not feel it warranted to photograph the black Zimbabwean children who would not die now that their families have moved on to viable farmland.

to Britain, which had, after all, collected the revenue from the land in question when it was grabbed by the BSAC in 1890.

In September 2001, Nigeria and the Commonwealth brokered a deal to end the seizures of white farms by veterans of the war for independence. Zimbabwe agreed to halt the forceful takeover of white farms in return for a British government commitment provide assistance to fund an orderly land reform, but once again Britain reneged.

The British government did however offer repatriation to “dispossessed” white farmers.

In May of 2002, the landmark Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act No 16 or 2002 was passed by Zimbabwe’s Parliament. The Act amended the country’s Constitution to make it legal for the government to compulsorily acquire land or resettle landless black people without paying compensation to affected white settler farmers or landlords.

As recently as November 16, 2002, South Africa’s Foreign Minister, Nkosazana Zuma, made another call for Britain, as Zimbabwe’s former colonial ruler, to compensate Zimbabwe’s dispossessed white farmers.

Dr Timothy Stamps

Mugabe’s cabinet contains one white member, Dr Timothy Stamps. A former British citizen, he came to the country as a public health officer when it was still colonial Rhodesia in the early 1960s.

Dr Stamps opposed the Ian Smith white dictatorship and supported the ZANU-PF government. Since 1990 he has been Minister of Health.

Dr Stamps accuses Britain

During the parliamentary elections in June 2000, Dr Stamps charged Britain with responsibility for the problems, tensions and animosities in Zimbabwe.

He declared that Britain “has consistently reneged on commitments to help finance land reform in its former colony and has played the leading role in manipulating and financing internal discontent in an effort to discredit and humiliate Mr Mugabe’s government”.

British interest in blocking land reform

Dr Stamps charged that foreign companies were behind the growth of support for the MDC. “British companies like Lonmin (formerly Lonrho) and Tory MPs who own land here have donated large sums of money to what they call human rights organisations”, he said.

Sam Sibanda in *Zimbabwe and World Hypocrisy* agrees: “Britain’s residual presence in the economic life of the Southern African country through the vast farmland, its industrial conglomerates and its ever-present non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has also enabled it to politically manipulate the situation in Zimbabwe.

“Subsequent generations of original British colonists literally ‘own’ and ‘run’ the economic life of Zimbabwe to the deprivation of the majority black population who are now trying to redress this tragic but, again, natural fact. Through these few but capably well-endowed white land owners whose only allegiance is to Britain, the British, for all intents and purposes, are able to manipulate international perceptions of Zimbabwe’s land resettlement exercise.

“Among the absentee landowners”, writes Gregory Elich in the Harare Herald, “are members of the British House of Lords and other prominent British citizens, a fact not entirely unrelated to British efforts to derail land reform.

“Put simply, Britain is the country to lose the most by any economic redress in Zimbabwe and so will gain nothing by cooperating with the Zimbabwean government on the ongoing land restructuring.”

And from the SACP’s paper *Umsebenzi*: “The colonial legacy continues to express itself politically through sections of the white Zimbabwean population opposed to redistribution of land and seeking to roll back whatever modest gains have been made since independence. This bloc of essentially counter-revolutionary ‘Rhodesian’ elements are backed by imperialism, mainly the UK and elements connected to sections of South Africa’s white opposition.

“The colonial legacy is also expressed in the arrogant refusal of the UK over the years – the former colonial power – to honour one of the main agreements in the Lancaster House settlement: payment for the redistribution of land.

“Instead all indications show that the British government has chosen to support any expression of opposition in Zimbabwe, including the MDC, to the point of introducing a new condition for release of funds for land distribution, that ZANU-PF must work with the MDC, whatever that means.”

Foreign backing for the MDC

“Within Zimbabwe itself, Britain and its allies are trying to destabilise the elected Government of President Mugabe, in any way they can think of, in order to install a puppet government that will dance to their tune. They have now admitted, that through organisations like the Westminster Foundation, the Amani Trust, and others, they – together with the white farmers, and white interests in South Africa – bankrolled the main opposition party in Zimbabwe, for a long time now.

“You have, today, an opposition party, led by people who were formerly impoverished trades union leaders, which has now, arguably, more resources than the party in government. The leaders [of the MDC] have become instant millionaires. They have managed to establish short-wave radio stations in Britain and the Netherlands, that nightly beam propaganda to Zimbabwe, in favour of the opposition and against the government.”⁵³



Morgan Tsvangirai’s MDC is backed by white businesses and foreign governments.

One of those stations is SW Radio Africa, a powerful short wave radio, broadcasting pro-MDC and anti-ZANU material from clandestine studios in the London borough of Borehamwood. SW Radio Africa was set up just over three months before the March 2002 Presidential elections, ostensibly by a group of “Zimbabwean exiles”. They claimed the money to run the station came from “human rights and media freedom groups” but declined to name them.

The British newspaper *The Guardian* revealed in January, 2002, however, that the station was in fact secretly funded by the United States. “SW Radio Africa, which broadcasts three hours a night on short wave, receives millions of dollars from a department of the US International Development Agency, the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)”, the paper wrote.

“Diplomatic sources say OTI pays for the studios, equipment and airtime on the transmitters of what SWRA calls a ‘global communications provider’ but declines to name.”⁵⁴

Zimbabwe’s Information Minister, Jonathan Moyo, says the BBC is the mysterious “global communications provider”, but the BBC claims to “have no connection with it”.

Tsvangirai admits foreign financial backing

In a clandestinely filmed interview, screened in Australia on February 2002 on the SBS *Dateline* program, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai was caught on camera admitting

that his organisation was financed by European governments and corporations, the money being channelled through a British firm of political consultants, BSMG.

Sam Zibanda considers the MDC “perhaps the most viable weapon against the Zimbabwean government the British have”. He says the MDC has “no qualms about attempting to unseat President Mugabe by any means necessary. The MDC and its President, Morgan Tsvangirai, have been openly courting British and any foreign assistance to unseat the government.

“The MDC’s very agenda is to oust the incumbent government, albeit without a feasible policy of action to resolve the land crisis except to echo the British’s empty call for the ‘rule of law’ and the ‘compensation’ by government of the minority white farmers who have enjoyed the fruits of the [stolen] land they have ‘owned’ for more than a century.”⁵⁵

MDC violence

Writing in January, during the run-up to the March 2002 Presidential election, liberation war veteran turned academic in Britain George Shire recorded: “In the last couple of weeks alone three people have been killed by MDC supporters, who also went on a rampage in Harare, petrol-bombing shops belonging to Zanu-PF supporters.

“Senior MDC figures have been implicated in the murder of a Zanu-PF official, Gibson Masarira, who was hacked to death in front of his family. And in Kwekwe, suspected MDC supporters burnt three Zanu-PF officials’ houses. None of these events has been reported in the British [or Australian] media.

Former Rhodesian police and Selous Scouts in the MDC

“Such MDC violence echoes the activities of the Rhodesian police and notorious Selous Scouts in the late ‘70s – which is perhaps hardly surprising since several are now leading lights in the MDC.

“It was the Selous Scouts who killed refugees, men, women and children, at Nyadzonja, Chimoio, Tembue, Mkushi, Luangwa, and Solwezi, where they still lie buried in mass graves. David Coltart, an MDC MP for Bulawayo South, was a prominent member of the Rhodesian police and he and his bodyguard Simon Spooner – recently

MDC’s lack of policies:

“The MDC has no corresponding program [to that of ZANU] for mass public health or education, or the economic empowerment of indigenous people.”

“The MDC remains silent when asked about what it will do with the more than 130,000 families who have been allocated land through the fast-track process if it wins the presidency.” – George Shire, *The Guardian (UK)*, 24 January, 2002.

charged with the murder of Cain Nkala, leader of the war veterans in Matabeleland – were attached to the Selous Scouts.

“The deputy national security adviser for the MDC, who rose to the rank of sergeant in the Rhodesian police, was likewise a handler of Selous Scouts operatives while based in Bulawayo. Mike Orret, another MDC MP, was also a senior police officer.”⁵⁶

MDC’s foreign-staffed “support centres”

The MDC’s foreign backing has not been merely financial. A leader of the white Commercial Farmers’ Union, Ian King, boasted of the “support centres” set up for the MDC around the country during the 2001 elections, staffed by white Zimbabweans and foreigners supplied by the ZDT and others.

Justifying their actions by claiming that recent elections in Zimbabwe have been marred by violence and intimidation and hence were not a true reflection of the will of the electorate, the EU, Commonwealth and the United States have flagrantly attempted to interfere in the country’s election process, via the mass media, massive political funding of the MDC, and blatant economic blackmail of urban and rural workers by their employers.

Election monitors

The interference also included sending hundreds of election “monitors” from Britain and the European Union, who arrogantly behaved as if they had a “right” to be present and asserted openly that the ZANU government was not to be trusted.

Speaking at the time, Ambassador Mubako said: “The British fear that their three-year-old Zimbabwean baby [the MDC] might fail to win the election; hence, they have decided to interfere directly in the elections themselves.

“They demanded that the European Union monitor Zimbabwe’s



European and Australian election monitors arrived already prejudiced in favour of Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC.

elections. This arrogant demand was made under threat of economic sanctions, and in complete disregard of Zimbabwe's laws and its sovereignty. They saw in this an opportunity for them to be able to rig the elections, in favour of their favourite party.⁵⁷

European diktat

“The Zimbabwe government had no choice, but to reject this diktat out of hand. Next – I have said they funded pirate radio stations in Britain and the Netherlands, with a daily propaganda campaign for the opposition, that vilify the elected government – the European Union is trying to impose a Swedish election observer, who was not invited by the Zimbabwe government. He just took the plane from New York, the United Nations, and flew into Zimbabwe, and said, ‘Here, I’ve come to observe your elections, on behalf of the European Union’.”⁵⁸

This interference was understandably resented.⁵⁹ However, when in February, 2002, Zimbabwe bundled Pierre Schori, the Swedish gentleman mentioned above, off back to Europe along with a coterie of other European “election observers” sent in to the country to “monitor” the March elections (replacing them with African observers), the EU became livid and imposed sanctions on President Mugabe and 19 other ZANU and government leaders.

British Communists asked “Just who are these guardians of ‘democracy’ who so loudly criticise Zimbabwe’s President Mugabe? ...” and answered: “The European Union has a parliament that has nothing at all to do with democracy since it has no law-making powers and is actually run by non-elected commissions dominated by transnational companies.”⁶⁰

ZANU mobilised the people

Ten thousand people marched on the British mission in Harare to protest the EU sanctions. ZANU proceeded to mobilise the people to defend the gains they had made since independence. In the ensuing elections, despite threats, rampant interference, massive outside propaganda and a very unfavourable economic situation, and to the fury of the British government in particular, as well as the EU and the US, the ZANU-PF government was returned by a clear majority in the biggest turnout since independence.

The MDC however did gain a significant presence in the new parliament, prompting Britain’s Foreign Secretary Robin Cook to bizarrely threaten that, “if Mugabe chose to ignore the election results”, Britain would launch an international campaign to pressure him to “implement the will of the people”.

Cook was untroubled by the fact that Britain had already been waging its international campaign against Zimbabwe for years. Nor was he at all perturbed by the fact that it was precisely Mugabe’s resolve to “implement the will of the people” that had made the

imperialist powers and the transnational corporations so het up in the first place!

Campaign of vilification

In fact, the imperialists set about organising what they confidently hoped would be Mugabe and ZANU's defeat in the Presidential elections in March 2002. In preparation, they launched a particularly clamorous campaign of vilification and disinformation.

In this they had the wholehearted support of all Zimbabwe's major privately owned newspapers. The Harare *Herald* is publicly owned and reflects the government line. But the private newspapers are part of the white business establishment and present a pro-imperialist, anti-ZANU line under cover of a constant shrill clamour about "freedom of the press".



Privately owned papers like the *Financial Gazette* outdo each other in anti-Mugabe Rhetoric.

"The foremost ally in British propaganda to the world remains the so-called 'independent press' of Zimbabwe's publications. Financed and directed by the British through 'well-meaning' donors and NGOs, the *Daily News*, *Financial Gazette*, *Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard* have been outdoing each other in trying to attain the status of the most anti-Mugabe rhetoric in order to appeal to their potential British sponsors" — Sam Sibanda.⁶¹

"Just before the presidential election, David Frost, the [British] television presenter, in an interview with the Foreign Office Minister Baroness Amos, glibly talked of 100,000 people killed by Mugabe supporters during the previous two years. The reality, however, is that during that period there were 160 deaths, most of which cannot be attributed to Mugabe's supporters. Having uttered a foul lie, his dirty work done, Mr Frost moved on, leaving his audience with the impression that Mr Mugabe is a sadistic mass murderer."⁶²

Manufacturing a food crisis

To aid their cause they also sought to produce a food crisis. The white landowners, facing repossession, refused to produce, hoping to precipitate unrest and heap the blame on the government. Having the largest farms, they normally produce most of the marketable grain.

By the beginning of 2002, aid agencies were already reporting that Zimbabwe faced a shortfall in cereal production of some 600,000 tons, most of it in maize, the country's staple food.

The white farmers, the MDC and Western propaganda were quick to blame "disruption of farming operations" resulting from the Government's decision to press on with its land reform plan which the Opposition claims "has severely hurt crop production".

This form of economic sabotage is not a new tactic: it was used as far back as the late 1920s by the large peasants of the USSR to try to stop the collectivisation land reform in the Ukraine. It resulted in famine there too, for which the Soviet government was – and still is – blamed by capitalism's propagandists. But it did not stop the land reform and the sharing out of the big peasants' holdings.

The economic sabotage in Zimbabwe has exacerbated a critical situation caused by the drought that is battering much of southern Africa. The climatic conditions are plain for all to see, so cannot be ignored. But only in Zimbabwe's case do the mass media almost invariably add land reform to drought as a main cause of the food shortage.

The anti-ZANU Johannesburg *Sunday Times* is typical. On September 8, 2002, it reported that "the World Food Program estimates that about six million Zimbabweans are threatened with hunger over the next six months. The food crisis has been blamed on a severe drought during the growing season, and Mugabe's land redistribution program."

And yet only three days earlier, on September 5, John Highfield, on ABC radio's *The World Today*, had reported: "As we look at drought and other problems, the World Food Program has warned that more than 12 million people are on the brink of starvation in Southern Africa in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Angola, and Mozambique, *largely because of drought*" [emphasis added].

Food shortage pre-dates land reform.

The 1997 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in dealing with the situation in Zimbabwe in 1995, when land reform was virtually non-existent, reported that: "Continuing drought led to food shortages and to a wheat crop that was barely a third of the 1994 harvest".

Clearly, blaming the land reform program for food shortages in Zimbabwe but not in any of the other countries affected by the drought is motivated by politics, not logic.

“There is no bread”

But the food crisis is no less real for all that: On September 7, 2002, Beatrice Tonhodzayi in her regular column *Mixed Bag* in the pro-government Harare *Herald*, noted that “bread (which we could always fall back on) seems to have become a rare commodity.



Queuing for bread as imperialism and its local agents try to make life unbearable for the people of Zimbabwe.

“Whenever you pass a bakery these days, it is to see a long snaking queue of people lining for bread. It is the same in town, in the ghetto, in fact, everywhere.

“There is no bread.”

Speaking to journalists after his return from the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development, President Mugabe rejected as “absolute nonsense” the idea that the land reform had contributed to the hunger crisis. “If anything,” he said, “it’s the only way you can empower people to produce, not just for subsistence, but to

enable them to enjoy life and to enable the country to continue to export maize.”

Ironically, the white planters and agribusiness companies’ sabotage has served to emphasise how imperative is the need for land reform in the country. The ZANU government accordingly pressed on with and even accelerated the appropriation and resettlement of large white-owned farms and the provision of measures to enable the resettled farmers to resume producing.

Nearly 3,000 white farmers were ordered to vacate their farms in early August, 2002, to make way for landless blacks.

Using humanitarian aid as a weapon

Despite the claims of imminent famine in Zimbabwe, Western aid agencies actually balked at supplying grain prior to the last elections, ostensibly “lest food aid be used by ZANU-PF to win votes” (*Financial Times*).

Such blatant interference in the country’s internal affairs – not to mention the deliberate withholding of humanitarian aid – is only possible because of the demonisation of the country’s government by the major capitalist governments and their mass media.

As if hunger – and the promise of plentiful food after the defeat of Mugabe – wasn't used by the MDC and its Western backers to secure votes for Morgan Tsvangirai!

De facto sanctions

The *Financial Times* article quoted above also admitted that the West had in fact already been applying “de facto sanctions” since at least the middle of 2001: “the IMF and World Bank have frozen loans, aid is limited to humanitarian needs, and foreign investment has dried up”, it gloated.

Dr Mubako, in his speech to the Schiller Institute, related that “They [British imperialism] imposed informal sanctions on the country, including attempts to prevent oil deliveries reaching Zimbabwe. We had gasoline queues, and closures of some factories, leaving thousands of people unemployed.

“They withheld spare parts for our machinery and aircraft bought in Britain, including parts for incubators and respirators for newborn babies.”

Sanctions are intended to sow discord, unrest and dislocation among the population. Ultimately, if necessary, they will make the country ungovernable. At present (November 2002), they continue to take their toll in Zimbabwe, and the country's economy continues to suffer.

Closures and layoffs

According to Ken Jerrard, Bulawayo regional president of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, the foreign currency shortage has prevented most firms from importing essential capital goods and raw materials necessary to maintain production.

Over 100 companies in Bulawayo province have had to close down, while others have avoided closing only by drastic layoffs of staff. Either way, the result is mass unemployment.

Imperialism is using every economic lever to try to force the ZANU government to return to the IMF-World Bank prescriptions which it had earlier rejected. Gregory Elich reports in the Harare *Herald* that in fact imperialism has had some success in this regard: “In order to raise foreign currency to meet its budget commitments, the Government has been forced to engage in limited and targeted privatisation, a painful but unavoidable compromise under the circumstances.”

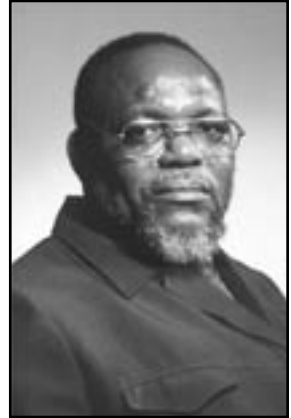
President Mugabe indicated in his December 2001 *State of the Nation* address, that “US\$150 million of privatisation proceeds will go towards repayment of the external debt”. In the same address, he indicated that a sizeable chunk of the country's limited foreign reserves would be paid to South Africa for electricity, including “supply arrears and service debt, equivalent to US\$259.9 million, as well as paying for current power imports.”

Interrupting fuel supplies

Imperialist governments and corporations are tightening the screws on vital fuel supplies as well.

Approximately 70 percent of Zimbabwe’s fuel is shipped from Libya. It comes to the port of Beira in Mozambique, where it is transferred to pipelines. Gregory Elich reports that “a ship carrying fuel intended for Zimbabwe was unable to offload its cargo at the port of Beira. British Petroleum, which owns the fuel storage facilities at the port, refused to accept the fuel because Zimbabwe owed the firm \$3 million.” The lack of foreign currency caused by the sanctions had prevented Zimbabwe from meeting its payments to British Petroleum.

Sylvestre Maunganidze, head of political affairs at the Zimbabwe Embassy in Georgia, says, “We realised that unless we maximised production we would not be able to survive the onslaught of the West.”⁶³



**Vice-President
SV Muzenda**

Looking beyond imperialism

To obtain finance to pay for vital supplies such as fuel and medicines, the Zimbabwe government has had to turn to sources of funding outside the tightly controlled imperialist banking system. (Remember the furore that erupted in such a concerted way around the heads of the Whitlam government in Australia when it sought to go outside the recognised imperialist channels and obtain loan funds from the Middle East with which to “buy back the farm”?)

The Zimbabwe government has made “trade deals with Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand and Vietnam, and [obtained] import finance from the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, the Libyan Arab Foreign Bank, Afreximbank, the African Preferential Trade Area Bank and the People’s Republic of China”.⁶⁴

MDC calls for more sanctions

In January 2002, even as the people were suffering under the sanctions imposed by the West, and the government was doing its best to maintain services and keep prices in check, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai was calling for more sanctions. He berated South Africa’s leaders to the BBC after the Southern African Development Community’s summit in Malawi declined to take action against Zimbabwe.

Tsvangirai demanded of South Africa that it tell Zimbabwe “we are going to cut fuel, we are going to cut transport links. Those kind of measures, even if they are

implemented at a low level, send the right signals.”

Calling for them certainly sends significant signals about Morgan Tsvangirai!

South Africa opposes continued sanctions

Unfortunately for the MDC leader’s hopes, South Africa’s Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Aziz Pahad, was not interested. “Calls for sanctions are misplaced”, he said.

“Effectively sanctions have been applied in Zimbabwe. All foreign aid has been terminated. There is effectively no new development aid. Investment has been frozen and exports from Zimbabwe have been stopped, I think. Sanctions are not the way to go.”

The message was reiterated in November, 2002. At a news conference in Pretoria in early November, with her Zimbabwean counterpart, Stan Mudenge, by her side, South Africa’s Foreign Minister, Nkosazana Zuma, said of the sanctions already imposed on Zimbabwe, “We don’t think that’s a situation which should continue for a long time.”

Price controls sabotaged

The government’s attempts via price controls to assist ordinary Zimbabweans to withstand the effects of the sanctions and the local capitalists’ price-gouging have also been sabotaged by manufacturers and distributors in Zimbabwe.

To rein in the rampant price rises, the government introduced price controls over a wide range of commonly used items, setting a maximum price for each of the commonly used quantities by which these goods were sold.

The manufacturers and distributors – mainly white or foreign owned – colluded to package essential products, such as salt and cooking oil, in very large sizes only, which were not specifically covered by the price-control laws.

Instead of buying a 750 ml bottle of cooking oil, consumers must now take a 25litre container, which most cannot afford. If they group together to buy the large size, they find that its price is proportionately much higher than the gazetted price for that product.

This price gouging and thwarting of price controls is being carried out by the same people who self-righteously back the MDC. They are, of course, quick to blame the Mugabe government for the people’s financial difficulties as well as for product shortages.

More economic sabotage

There was an artificially created shortage of salt earlier in the year, with the big manufacturers and suppliers of oil and salt, National Foods and Blue Ribbon Foods,

claiming they had no supplies available. But in June, huge quantities of salt were found hidden at several National Foods depots across the country.

Although there are still plenty of white farmers working their farms in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Tobacco Association is encouraging its member-growers to move to neighboring Mozambique, and some hundreds have done so, lured by the appeal of resuming their role as lords and masters of large estates worked by plentiful low-paid African labour.

Although they must “start again at the bottom”, most have money and the Mozambique government has been wooing them with packages of leased land and tax-free incentives. The Mozambique government hopes the expatriate white farmers’ arrival will kick-start an export-oriented agriculture that is at present almost non-existent.

The British carrot

Britain’s *Financial Times* had earlier held out a carrot to the ZANU government: if it were to reconsider its “misguided policies”, if it were to “adopt appropriate economic reforms”, economic donors would reappear, the authoritative paper claimed, apparently even ready – according to the paper – to “help fund land reform”!

This last item would be truly unique if it were true. In reality, however, the “economic donors” in question were merely offering to *lend* the government of Zimbabwe the money with which to pay “compensation” to the white land owners, saddling the people of Zimbabwe with a huge public debt for buying back the land that was stolen from them in the first place.

Submit, or else

The *Financial Times* report of the West’s financial sanctions and the “way out” that was – and presumably still is – supposedly available to Mugabe and ZANU actually clearly reveals what is the essence of the imperialist position: unless Zimbabwe

- voluntarily turns its economy over for imperialism to exploit,
- stops “meddling” in international affairs against the interests of imperialist countries (especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo, whose vast mineral wealth is coveted by the US and Europe alike), and
- submits to Western *diktat*,

What is happening in Zimbabwe is a variant of the “create shortages” tactic that imperialism used against the Allende Government in Chile (cooking oil was put into artificially short supply there too).

Britain, the US and other imperialist powers will wage uncompromising economic and political warfare against it.

The message from imperialism to the people of Zimbabwe is not new for the people of Africa, but it has been unusually explicit: if necessary, say the imperialist powers, we will starve you into submission, for it is our right to rule you and your place to submit.

British campaign against Zimbabwe

Throughout the second half of 2001 and continuing in 2002, Britain orchestrated an international political campaign to isolate Zimbabwe, to supplement Britain's internal interference and economic measures.

“The British have not abandoned their old ideas of imperial domination over their old colonies. They now want to dominate by economic manipulation, and by installing puppet regimes, all in the name of democracy, human rights, and good governance. If they cannot do it alone, they summon the Americans and fellow Europeans, to subdue the disobedient developing country.



ZANU-PF supporters protest Britain's interference in the Zimbabwe elections, March 2002. The placard reads: "For how long are we going to be under the servitude of whites? You have tried our patience for too long".

“At the Berlin Conference of 1895, European powers signed a treaty, to partition and colonise Africa. They did so. We are now witnessing a process whereby Britain, a former colonial power, is turning the European Union into an instrument of neo-colonialism.”⁶⁵

US joins in

As for the US, its government took a dim view of land reform, passing a bill to impose sanctions while pretending that it was to aid the promotion of democracy and economic recovery in the country. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker issued

a thinly veiled threat: “It is time to tell President Mugabe that he needs to re-examine these policies in terms of land seizures and go back to the road of democratic norms that Zimbabwe should be on.”

Sam Sibanda commented in August 2001: “Having personally appointed itself the policeman of the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has made it its prime objective to direct and order non-European countries to conform to its norms and expectations. Countries such as Zimbabwe that are attempting to determine their [own] destinies are committing a cardinal sin by US standards.

“Black-run Zimbabwe is trying to address a historical imbalance that will deprive the white man of his land and so the US Senate passes the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Bill that seeks to impose sanctions against it.

“Only such an explanation can be valid for a country that has not been forthcoming on such issues as the wholesale genocide in Rwanda and Burundi, the endless persecution of the black majority in Southern Sudan, the callous gunning down of Palestinians by a brutal American-sponsored Israeli government and the civil war in Angola waged by its longtime ally Jonas Savimbi and his UNITA. No other justification can be found for making Zimbabwe’s attempt at self-determination US business.”⁶⁶

“Irrespective of their political differences, the US Democratic and Republican parties have an eternally common ground when it comes to the persecution of racially different governments of the rest of the world. Somehow or other, they have successfully masked that side of their nature under such apparently noble causes as ‘human rights’ and ‘the rule of law’, but only to further their agendas when in power.”

– Sam Sibanda, *Zimbabwe and World Hypocrisy*

And Ambassador Mubako said: “As you know, the right wing in the United States jumped at the opportunity to punish an African country, whom they saw as being a ‘cheeky’ one. They introduced the so-called Zimbabwe Democracy Bill, which was passed by Congress last year. In so doing, they ignored the protests and advice from Zimbabwe itself, from all states of the whole of the SADC region, and from all the African states. All the African states were united against any form of sanctions.”⁶⁷

“None of the successive US governments have been able to apologise to Africa and their own African-American population for slavery and colonialism, yet they still assist Israel to get compensation for more recent events. It is

no wonder that the US government cannot be taken seriously when it pretends to stand for human rights and the rule of law given its preferential treatment of other countries.

A racist bill

“Consequently, the *Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Bill* appears, in effect, to be a racist Bill since it targets African people whose crime is to attempt to address the issue of their fundamental rights, the method by which they go about it notwithstanding. Hard as it might be to fathom, the US together with the British will fault every manner by which Zimbabwe may attempt to resettle its majority blacks on white-owned farmland.”⁶⁸

Ambassador Mubako also took the US to task for its attempts to divide Africans: “In particular, they [the US] keep trying to divide Africans, to get some Africans to break off from opposition to the line they [the US] are taking. They keep on blaming President Mbeki, for example, of South Africa, for refusing to be used against a friendly African government, which has impeccable pan-Africanist credentials.

“Last week [February 2002], President Mbeki voiced his exasperation with the West, for treating African states like little children, who were either ignorant, or did not know what was good for them. He said that in Zimbabwe, the West’s interest is clearly not about democracy, but about their wish to control the country.”⁶⁹

More monitors

The EU and the Commonwealth again demanded that they be allowed to send monitors to ensure that the March 2002 Presidential election would be “free and fair”.

“With breathtaking hypocrisy, monitors are routinely used by powerful imperialist states as tools for interfering in the internal affairs of weak states and for de-legitimising candidates not to the liking of imperialism and vice versa.

Kare Vollan and the OECD

“The chief of the EU Group of Observers, Norwegian Kare Vollan, denounced the Zimbabwe poll, first because of alleged pre-poll violence. The same Mr Vollan was an observer on behalf of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OECD) at the Ukrainian parliamentary elections in 1998.

“He declared that those elections ‘were managed with professionalism’ and he did not call into question these results despite, in his own words, ‘violence, intimidation and harassment during the run-up to the elections’. The reason? The Ukraine was the darling of the OECD – Vollan’s employer.”⁷⁰

The Commonwealth Observers Group similarly used the term “professionalism” in relation to Zimbabwe’s March 2002 Presidential election. The Group reported on 14 March 2002 that the polling and counting had been peaceful, with the secrecy of the ballot assured, stating that it had been “impressed by the professionalism and conscientiousness of the majority of the polling staff”.

This is “a very different picture from that conjured up by the imperialist media and press agencies, with their lurid stories of ballot rigging, ballot box stuffing, the dead rising from the grave, walking to the polling stations, voting for Mugabe and dutifully returning to their eternal slumber until the next election”.⁷¹

“Politically motivated violence”

At the same time, the Commonwealth Observers Group echoed Vollan in stating that there was “a high level of politically motivated violence and intimidation, which preceded the poll” and which therefore they themselves could not have witnessed.

“Any violence during the elections in Zimbabwe pales into insignificance with that which accompanies elections in South Africa and yet no one has ever said that either Nelson Mandela or Thabo Mbeki stole the election and, therefore, ought to have stepped aside.”⁷²

“Control of the media”

The second reason given by Vollan for denouncing the 2002 Zimbabwean Presidential election was the alleged control of the media by Zimbabwe’s government. “But such considerations caused no concern to the OECD during the Montenegrin



Queuing to vote in Harare, 2002.

parliamentary elections in 1998, when Milo Djukanovic received tens of millions of dollars from imperialist countries – huge sums considering the population of his province is half that of Birmingham.

“He utilised these vast sums for his 30,000-strong police force to ensure total control of the media. ... But since he was an opponent of the Yugoslav leader, Milosevic, his conduct was not only tolerated but actively encouraged.

Voting queues

“The third reason given by Vollan was that there were long queues at polling stations in Harare. There were similarly long queues at the Italian parliamentary elections last May [2001]. There the socialist government had reduced the number of polling stations by as much as a third, resulting in chaos such that the last Italian to cast his vote did so at 5 in the morning. No one then accused Francesco Rutelli’s friends of trying to prevent Italians from voting for [right-wing candidate] Berlusconi.”⁷³

Election “flawed”, says Bush

The Cuban Communist Party newspaper *Granma* was not impressed with US President Bush’s comments on the Zimbabwe Presidential election: “Speaking with some nerve, given his ascent to the White House, decided by a Supreme Court ruling in violation of the popular vote, Bush declared on March 12: ‘We do not recognise the outcome of the election, because we think it is flawed... We are dealing with our friends to figure out how to deal with this flawed election.’



George W Bush had the gall to say the election of Zimbabwe’s President was “flawed”.

“Mr Bush has no moral right to judge those elections”, said *Granma*.⁷⁴

Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State, condemning the Zimbabwean Presidential poll as “neither free nor fair”, said that the US was considering sanctions “against those responsible for undermining democracy in Zimbabwe”.

To which British left journal *Lalkar* responded: “This really takes the palm, considering that he has struck a close relationship with General Musharraf who hijacked Pakistan bourgeois democracy at gunpoint, that he spent a week in Israel/Palestine supervising the massacre at Jenin by the war criminal and butcher of Sabra and Chatila notoriety – Sharon, that he has little difficulty cosyng up to the medieval Gulf autocracies which hold no elections at all, and that he serves in the administration of George W Bush, who really did steal the US presidential election and whose election was neither free and certainly not fair.”⁷⁵

On August 20th, 2002, Walter Kansteiner, US Under-Secretary of State for African Affairs, stated that the US and countries bordering Zimbabwe are seeking ways of aiding the opposition MDC and winning a change of government.

“This is an open declaration of US intentions to overthrow the President of a sovereign nation for reasons that have nothing to do with democracy and everything to do with its interests in the African continent.”⁷⁶

Australia joins in

The Australian government joined its British counterpart in putting pressure on African and other Commonwealth nations to suspend Zimbabwe from their organisations.

Although, during the apartheid era in South Africa, Australian Prime Minister John Howard had been a vocal opponent of sanctions on that brutal racist government, he now gives full support to sanctions against the government of Zimbabwe.

“If we don’t get some response from what the Commonwealth troika decided earlier this year from Zimbabwe then countries like Australia have no alternative other than to look at some action on the sanctions front”, he told reporters.

“I don’t like sanctions. I was on record some years ago as not supporting sanctions in relation to South Africa because I was concerned about their impact on people right down the bottom of the economic ladder but unless there’s some response then the rest of the world has no alternative.”⁷⁷

Given his own government’s harsh domestic economic policies, the news that John Howard was actually concerned about “people right down the bottom of the economic ladder” must have come as a surprise to Australian workers, pensioners, Aborigines and the unemployed.

Making Mugabe an “issue”

The Australian government had previously supported other Western governments in vain attempts to make the presence of President Mugabe an “issue” at international gatherings like the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in

Queensland and the UN food summit in Rome.

These attempts were in vain because, as Ambassador Mubako puts it, “Africa supports Mugabe. Africa has decided that there is no case whatsoever for sanctions of any kind against Zimbabwe; rather, there is a case for economic assistance, if anyone is inclined to assist.”⁷⁸

In fact, Mugabe’s appearance at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September was acknowledged as a “triumph” that completely overshadowed Tony Blair’s contribution.

Howard's mission to Africa

Undaunted, Australia’s PM met with the Presidents of Nigeria and South Africa in yet another effort to get them to agree to the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe by Commonwealth countries.

In this Howard failed once again, having to ruefully admit that the two African leaders simply would not support him. Whereupon Natasha Stott-Despoia, the recently ousted leader of the Australian Democrats, called for Australia to impose its own sanctions on Zimbabwe.

The Australian Labor Party’s shadow foreign minister, Kevan Rudd had already taken a fiercely anti-Mugabe position at the time of CHOGM in Coolom in May, 2002.

ALP's call for sanctions

Rudd, who had been appointed as an “impartial observer” to the Commonwealth observer team for the March 2002 Presidential elections in Zimbabwe, saw no problem in condemning the Howard government for not imposing immediate sanctions against Zimbabwe and then flying to Harare to join the “impartial” observer team.

Before leaving, Rudd said Australia should act unilaterally against the Mugabe Government and not wait for other Commonwealth countries.

His arrogantly public display of bias angered Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, concerned to maintain Australia’s credibility as the then current Chair of the



John Howard tried to get President Obasanjo of Nigeria to agree to Commonwealth sanctions against Zimbabwe.

Commonwealth and a participant in the Commonwealth Observers' Group for the elections.

An “expedient hypocrite”

In a statement, Downer said imposing sanctions at that time would undermine Australia's contribution to observing the Presidential election. He said that Rudd's call “shows him to be an expedient hypocrite whose passion for international travel is more important than any policy principles.

“As I have said on a number of occasions, to impose sanctions now would undermine our contribution to the election observer process. We would have no choice but to abandon our role in the Commonwealth observer team”, said Downer.

Australia imposes sanctions

However, the election observers found no reason to invalidate the election result. So after another vain try at getting the other members of the Commonwealth troika (the present, previous and next countries to chair the Commonwealth – Australia, South Africa and Nigeria) to agree to the Commonwealth imposing sanctions, John Howard finally decided that Australia would after all impose its own unilateral sanctions.

Using the EU sanctions as a model, the Australian government has imposed travel restrictions on Zimbabwean government members, military leaders and selected (ie pro-government) political figures and frozen Zimbabwean assets in Australia.

Democracy and good governance

Despite the fact that observers from the Organisation of African Unity (South Africa and Nigeria included) as well as Russia and China declared the electoral process to have been transparent, credible, free and fair, the capitalist mass media continue to promote the line that the 2002 Presidential elections were rigged.

Subsequently, intense pressure was put on the Presidents of South Africa and Nigeria, including threats of withholding of much needed loans, to try to get them to join Britain, Australia and Canada in condemning Zimbabwe's election results and

Downer plays the “ethnic cleansing” card.

“Revealing either an abysmal ignorance of or complete indifference to the history of British colonial Africa, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has declared, “Mugabe is effectively conducting a policy of ethnic cleansing on the farms...”

Angie Todd, in the Communist Party of Cuba newspaper *Granma Ineternational* (August 25, 2002)

applying sanctions against the country, in the name of promoting “good governance”.

But the South African Communist Party has stated: “The resilience and commitment displayed by the people of Zimbabwe has been critical in understanding the elections as legitimate”.⁷⁹

And a reader of the Sydney *Guardian* wrote: “It also has to be asked why Morgan Tsvangirai’s call for a general strike fell flat on its face? Was it because of a lack of support – a fairly clear indication that the people’s will had been expressed at the ballot box.”⁸⁰

Ambassador Mubako says: “The campaign against my country has nothing to do with democracy, the rule of law, or elections, as they tend to allege. Zimbabwe has always practiced these things, and is committed to democracy and good government.

“In reality, the West itself does not care about these matters in Third World countries. If you look, their closest allies are the greatest offenders against democracy and human rights. I shall not name names, but you know the military regimes, and the one-party states, and theocracies, and so on, with whom they are in bed.”⁸¹

In fact, says Sam Sibanda, imperialist governments’ concerns for good governance are just a sham. “Zimbabwe finds itself juxtaposed to the so-called world leaders of democracy and human rights. Any assertive measure Zimbabwe, or any developing country for that matter, makes to redress and correct those colonial imbalances that have ensured [the white world’s] continued influence will see this white world momentarily discard its



Although you would not know it from the reports in the mass media, there were in fact five candidates in the 2002 Presidential elections: besides Mugabe and Tsvangirai, there was Wilson Kumbula of ZANU who ended up with 1.0%, Shakespeare Maya of the National Alliance for Good Governance (NAGG) who won 0.4% and the independent candidate, Paul Siwela who also got 0.4%.

supposed dedication to democracy and human rights and show its hypocrisy for what it truly is, a facade to mask the underlying racism and intolerance for anything that may affect its continued benefits from former colonies and any other territories of influence.”⁸²

John Howard’s unsuccessful quest for sanctions

However, despite the best arm-twisting efforts of Australia’s PM John Howard, and despite the unprincipled economic pressure, Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo would not agree to expelling Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth or applying sanctions.



Howard had to admit that Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo would not agree to supporting his call for sanctions.

The most that imperialism could get out of them was a grudging twelve months’ suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth – no sanctions or other tangible actions were agreed to.

Although this “slap on the wrist” was touted by the capitalist media as some kind of moral victory, in fact the decision was a further defeat for imperialism. The British

government had clearly hoped that its – and the Australian government’s – manoeuvres would clear the way for extensive overt sanctions.

Unrest leading to a coup?

These in turn would lead to increased hardship and unrest in Zimbabwe, perhaps even paving the way for military intervention, or, if necessary, a coup.

A coup, however, seems unlikely to receive support in the armed services, at least at the highest level. In January, 2002, with Presidential elections due in March, Zimbabwe Defence Forces commander Vitalis Zvinvashe announced: “We wish to make it very clear to all Zimbabwean citizens that the security organisations will only stand in support of those political leaders that will pursue Zimbabwean values, traditions and beliefs for which thousands of lives were lost, in pursuit of Zimbabwe’s hard-won independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interests.

“To this end, let it be known that the highest office in the land is a straitjacket whose occupant is expected to observe the objectives of the liberation struggle. We will, therefore, not accept, let alone support or salute, anyone with a different agenda that threatens the very existence of our sovereignty, our country and our people.”

The MDC and its white colonialist backers were understandably dismayed, labelling the patriotic Zvinvashe and his fellow officers “a motley junta-in-waiting”.⁸³



The Zimbabwe army, determined to defend “the objectives of the liberation struggle”.

The fomenting and arming of a “separatist” insurgency, as has been done in some other African countries (including Nigeria and the Congo) in the past, is another possibility in such conditions.

Illicit arms

It is not without significance that the Zimbabwean army has over the last three years intercepted more than one large truckload of arms attempting to illicitly enter the country. The Zimbabwean authorities are satisfied that these large arms shipments were intended for recipients in Zimbabwe and were not in transit to guerilla

organisations in other African countries.

The danger with such shipments, should they get through, is that they must presumably be destined for some intended armed provocation, insurgency or “pro-democracy” uprising, thereby creating a civil war as in neighbouring DR Congo and Angola.

An ongoing insurgency, possibly with accompanying terrorist acts, would be the perfect pretext for imperialist powers to seek to introduce “peace keepers” into the country. Zimbabwe’s fate as an independent country would be sealed for years to come.

An unlikely choice for imperialism?

At first glance, it might seem strange that imperialism would choose as its instrument in Zimbabwe a former leader of the mineworkers’ union and head of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. After all, the corporations and governments at their service that make up what we call imperialism are not normally noted for their concern for the welfare of workers or for the rights of trade unionists.

In fact, certain imperialist governments have a long history of subverting trade unions and trade union leaderships and making them an integral part of the political arsenal of capitalism.

Imperialism and trade unions

In the years following WW2, it was imperialism that engineered the splitting of

the World Federation of Trade Unions and the creation of the reformist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. The ICFTU would play a significant role in the Cold War.

For decades, the former leadership of the US trade union movement, the AFL-CIO, functioned as the mouthpiece in the world labour movement for the US State Department. When not engaged in opposing “international communism” abroad, they were collaborating in the operation of anti-Communist witch hunts, red-baiting and blacklisting within the US union movement.

In the costly and lengthy campaign by imperialism to overthrow socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, so-called “free trade unions” played an important and influential role, most notoriously and successfully in Poland.



Walesa and Solidarnosc

Lech Walesa was also a trade union leader with his eye on becoming President. By various demagogic stratagems and the hefty support of the Vatican and imperialism, he achieved his aim and returned Poland to the grip of capitalism. The shipyard workers he had once “represented” so lustily saw their shipyards closed and their country’s economy destroyed in the interests of German capital.

Although Communists perceived Lech Walesa’s role as an imperialist agent from the beginning, his trade union credentials, like those of Morgan Tsvangirai, helped to blind others to his true aims. Many progressives in the West declared their support for him and Solidarnosc, because “Walesa is a worker” and “Solidarnosc is a workers’ union”.

Funding, advisors and a hidden agenda provided by the Vatican and the CIA: the first national congress of “independent trade union” Solidarnosc, in Gdansk in 1981.

Like Tsvangirai, Walesa also called for “democratic change” in Poland. He too was supported wholeheartedly by imperialism – which under other

circumstances is more than happy to subvert or overthrow democratic governments whenever it suits its interests to do so.

Using unions against the people

When the CIA set about the task of bringing down the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in Chile, one of their first acts was to pay the leaders of the truck drivers' union to organise a national strike, to create shortages and destabilise the government. The truck drivers were trade unionists, but their union was acting strictly in the interests of imperialism.

This apparent attack "by the workers" on a socialist or progressive government is a major propaganda achievement for imperialism, shaking other workers' confidence in the government, sowing confusion and helping to destabilise the regime.

Venezuela

More recently, when the US decided to oust Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, over oil, relations with Cuba and measures to alleviate poverty in the oil-rich country, the Chavez government was inevitably and by now predictably attacked in the capitalist media world-wide as "corrupt". Chavez' policies, it was announced, would "lead to violence" and "mob-rule".

Chavez' policy of trading oil to Cuba cheaply in return for free medical services for his country was decried as insane and "desperate", much like Mugabe and land reform.

Oil workers union used against Chavez

The initial step of the Venezuelan reactionaries (and the US agents advising them) to destabilise the country and bring down the Chavez government was once again to organise a strike, this time by the oil workers' union.

But Chavez had introduced cheap health care (with the help of Cuban medical teams) and was building up a system of real participatory democracy. "Chavez reformed the discredited and corrupt political system he inherited, did his best to redistribute land to the landless and poor farmers, awarded land titles to those who had built homes in the barrios, increased the minimum wage and enabled a million extra children to attend school."⁸⁴

The Bush administration was quick to endorse the presidency of Carmona Estanga (chief of the most significant business association in Venezuela), whom the military tried to install in Chavez's place, despite the fact that his first acts were to dissolve all democratic organisations and institutions in Venezuela (even the Ombudsman).

Military coup defeated

The union leaders behind the strike soon lost support and the strike collapsed. So a military coup was engineered instead. This too collapsed within days in the face of popular protest and resolute action by loyal officers of the military, but not before the global capitalist mass media had produced the same disinformation about Chavez as is produced today about Mugabe.

Despite his genuinely and obviously democratic program, Chavez was castigated in *The New York Times*, for example, as a “would be dictator” who “threatened Venezuelan democracy”.

Trade union credentials are not enough

In many countries of the world, trade unions are affiliated to particular political parties. There are Communist unions and Social Democrat unions. But there are also Christian Democrat unions, even neo-fascist unions.

Being a trade union leader by itself does not necessarily signify that a person is in any way progressive.

And yet there are those on the Left in Australia who wave Morgan Tsvangirai’s trade union credentials as a talisman that justifies and permits their repeating every anti-ZANU slander dreamed up in the rumour mills of imperialism.

COSATU

There is a major difference between Morgan Tsvangirai and, say, COSATU in neighboring South Africa. COSATU has always taken an anti-imperialist position, and has fought imperialism’s intrigues in southern Africa.

Tsvangirai does not oppose imperialism, instead he co-operates with imperialism. He even sought to apologise to the white landlords of Zimbabwe for the actions of the people who fought in the liberation struggle and now were demanding the return of the land that was always rightfully theirs.

Tsvangirai accepts the money of imperialism, accepts their personnel as “aides” in his campaigns, adopts their positions and supports their views, all the while preaching against corruption.

Disinformation campaign

Meanwhile the capitalist media persist in portraying Robert Mugabe as either insane and ridiculous or dictatorial and racist. While allegedly victimising white farmers because they are white, he is also supposedly lining his pockets and those of the entire ZANU leadership through massive corruption.

Corruption

The think tanks and agents of imperialism have become extremely prolific and sophisticated at producing rumours of corruption on the part of political leaders and parties that imperialist governments want to discredit. It is a tool that was developed into an art during the Second World War and then honed into an extremely powerful weapon during the Cold War.

Whether it is spreading unfounded stories of lavish hunting lodges owned by the leaders of the German Democratic Republic in the '80s, or groundless tales of massive corruption on the part of President Milosevic's wife in Yugoslavia, the methods are now very efficient and very effective.

That corruption undoubtedly exists in Zimbabwe is virtually a given in conditions of gross inequalities and poverty, where many people suffer shortages but those with money suffer less. Where petty corruption is rife, accusations of massive corruption are easy to make, hard to refute and all too easy to get people to believe.



Harare, centre of the most decadent, evil and corrupt government in Africa, if the capitalist media is to believed!

And, of course, reports, accusations, rumours, innuendo and gossip about corruption on the part of ZANU leaders and their “cronies” abound. So many in fact, that one wonders they have time for anything else!

When the white farms first began to be taken over for resettlement, the “corruption” propaganda line was that “Mugabe’s so-called land distribution is a farce with the best of the confiscated land going to his cronies and not to the peasants.” As time went on, the sheer number of people already resettled on to formerly white-owned farms showed up the lying propaganda behind such statements.

Corruption propaganda line changes to suit circumstances

It’s a line that probably originated with the white settlers element, but its assiduous spreading is the work of sophisticated rumour mongers. This is the kind of material that

is pumped into Zimbabwe nightly by SW Radio Africa and its ilk.

Significantly, this line has now largely been dropped, replaced by a simple and rather desperate labelling of the land reform process as “chaotic”, and, in an echo of the tactic that was used in Yugoslavia, the focus of the corruption propaganda has shifted to Grace Mugabe, the President’s wife.

Also giving the lie to the “cronies” charge is the fact that the bulk of the rural poor overwhelmingly continue to support Mugabe and ZANU-PF. If they were being cheated of the land they were promised they would soon renounce him.

After a century of being robbed blind by the extraordinarily corrupt system of colonialism, a system based on “might makes right”, it might seem surprising that Zimbabweans have any ethical standards at all. But after fighting a bloody war against colonialism, their best people have a well developed awareness of what is just, fair and ethical.

Business corruption

Manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors, for whom the reconstruction of the country’s economy is merely an additional chance to line their own pockets, are dazzled by the possibility of foreign investment capital coming their way if the MDC becomes the government. They have no compunction about creating artificial shortages or sabotaging the ZANU government’s price control regulations.

The Minister of State responsible for the Informal Sector (small businesses such as school tuckshops), Mrs Sithembiso Nyoni, at a meeting of tuckshop owners in Mutare, denounced “corrupt wholesalers who are hoarding and exporting basic goods”.

The government intends to take them on, in what is obviously a long range plan. “We have people in the sector who are capable of making processing machines and once we grow enough food then we can process and distribute the basic commodities ourselves,” Mrs Nyoni said.

She told the tuckshop owners that talent was abundant in Zimbabwe but what was needed was to develop it for the benefit of the country.

Significantly, although the leaders of the MDC are involved in all manner of shady activities from negotiating assassinations to channelling illicit funds, there are seldom if ever any reports in the mass media of corruption on the part of the MDC. Apparently, the media want reports of corruption confined exclusively to members of ZANU. Now, why would that be?

The corruption that mainly blights the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans today is corruption on the part of business people – profiteering, hoarding, thwarting price controls – a form of corruption that rates no mention in the capitalist media, either in Zimbabwe or out.

“Weed out corruption”

“Manufacturers and wholesalers who are behind this corruption did not just come from nowhere, but they grew from humble beginnings like yours and got where they are through partnerships and unity,” she said.

“If we weed out corruption then we will all be rich but as long as there are people that are corrupt among us then they are the ones who will keep on getting richer while others get poorer,” she said.

The senior manager at the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe, Victor Chisi, also denounced

“unscrupulous businesspeople” who seek to evade price controls. He told a meeting of retail traders: “As honest and responsible business people you have a duty as watchdogs of society to report those involved in the scams and if it is a minister, it is your right to expose that individual because you should not encourage corruption.”

“Human rights abuses”

Blanket accusations of “human rights abuses” are also made against Mugabe and ZANU-PF. These are ostentatiously taken up by foreign governments that are noticeably unconcerned by real abuses of human rights in their own countries.

The British Foreign Office has made much public use of a highly critical “report” on the Mugabe government’s alleged abuses issued by the “Zimbabwean Human Rights Forum”. This “Forum”, however, is in fact another invention of the ZDT. The Foreign Office, of course, would have been well aware of that fact but did not see fit to mention it.

“But many Africans are also suspicious of Western talk about human rights in Zimbabwe when there is little talk about human rights in other African nations.

“In other African countries where human rights are ignored it’s business as usual’, said Claude Kabemba, Acting Director of the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa.

“That’s why many people have failed to embrace the Western position; they see it as hypocrisy.” –Rachel Swarns, *The New York Times*, 16 November 2002.

The Sunday Times spells it out

The reason for the bourgeois media's hostile attitude towards Zimbabwe was frankly stated by Rupert Murdoch's *Sunday Times* in August 2001.

After bluntly telling British Prime Minister Tony Blair to organise “a worldwide economic blockade [of Zimbabwe] and the country's diplomatic isolation” (which Blair has been dutifully trying to do), Murdoch's ruling class mouthpiece went on to give Blair the frank advice: “The opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, should be supported and military intervention should not be ruled out.”

Then came the clincher: “Until decisive action is taken, the whole region is a high-risk area for investors.” A warning no British government, Labour or Tory, can afford to ignore!

Trotskyists back MDC

But it is not only the Murdoch press that howls for Mugabe's removal. Trotskyist papers, including Australia's *Green Left Weekly*, have supported the MDC from its inception.

In fact, in Zimbabwe itself, the Trotskyist International Socialist Organisation (ISO), a Zimbabwean Trotskyist grouping with links to the British Socialist Workers Party, was and still is a founder member of the MDC, despite the MDC's total domination by capitalists, white farmers, former racist police, small business interests and above all imperialism.

The better to carry out imperialism's agenda in Zimbabwe, the MDC deliberately targets urban and rural workers. “Revolutionary” Trotskyist rhetoric (attacking ZANU “from the left”) is very useful here.



ZANU election poster for the Presidential election, March 2002. Mugabe campaigned around the slogan “Reject recolonisation by Britain”, which he said would be the inevitable outcome if Morgan Tsvangirai won. The Trotskyists, impatient for Red revolution in Zimbabwe, berate the ZANU leader for “compromising with the bosses at the expense of the workers”.

“ZANU in the service of the bosses”

The ISO, for example, typically (and illogically) rails against “the ZANU dictatorship and the propertied classes of bosses in whose service the ZANU-PF dictatorship ultimately operates”.

The national co-ordinator of the ISO was approvingly quoted in the British Trotskyist newspaper the *Weekly Worker* as saying: “Mugabe is compromising with the bosses at the expense of workers – not only the local capitalists, but with foreign investors. Sometimes he speaks left, but his policy is pro-capitalist”.⁸⁵

If ZANU really operated in the interests of “the propertied classes of bosses”, imperialists would be funding it, not trying to overthrow it. Similarly, if Mugabe’s policy was pro-capitalist, if his government was indeed compromising with international and domestic capital, imperialism would hardly continue to oppose his government at every opportunity.

“Would it not be truer to say that it is the Trotskyists whose ‘left’ phrases are intended merely to camouflage their truly reactionary and pro-imperialist position across the board? The long counter-revolutionary activity of Trotskyism, and the actions of the present-day Trotskyists, furnish sound proof of this proposition.”⁸⁶

The Zimbabwean ISO national co-ordinator went on to call on the workers to vote for Tsvangirai and then to stage a rebellion against him after the elections! “Imperialism is very happy to receive such help and disregard the empty rhetoric about rebellion afterwards, which is after all only meant to dupe the Simple Simons among the Trotskyist rank and file as well as to deceive the workers.”⁸⁷

Common ground

Once again, Trotskyism and imperialism find common ground. They even use the same terms: the *Sunday Times* refers to “ZANU’s thugs” and *GreenLeft Weekly* (Jan 23, 2002) calls the same people “ZANU’s thugs” and even adds “ZANU’s goons” for good measure. The people in question are the veterans of the war of liberation against British colonialism.

Another article in *GreenLeft Weekly* (Feb 6, 2002) actually came out in favour of imperialist sanctions being imposed on the country, glibly passing off the inevitable suffering sanctions would cause (and indeed have caused) for the poor of Zimbabwe as “detrimental side-effects” (shades of “collateral damage”).

Tsvangirai’s Canadian conspiracy

But for all their intrigue and interference, and their bold predictions of Mugabe’s resounding defeat, imperialism failed to get the result they wanted in the March 2002

elections in Zimbabwe. They immediately cried foul, alleging fraud and worse. But in the SBS *Dateline* program already referred to, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai admitted that he actually had no hope of winning the Presidential elections.

Which probably accounts for the fact that the meeting where he was secretly filmed was with a Canadian firm of political consultants, Dickens and Madsen, whom Tsvangirai was trying to bribe to arrange the *assassination* of Robert Mugabe.

Despite his carefully cultivated reputation as an opponent of corruption, Tsvangirai offered the Canadians almost a million dollars on completion of the murder of his rival, and juicy contracts with his new government once Mugabe had been “eliminated”.

The Canadians blow the whistle

The Canadians, however, following Tsvangirai’s initial approach, contacted the ZANU-PF government and embarrassingly arranged for the subsequent meeting to be filmed.

Commenting on Tsvangirai’s gloomy predictions about the, at that time forthcoming, March 2002 elections, SBS reporter Mark Davis commented: “It would seem that Mr Tsvangirai may have the overwhelming support of Whitehall, Canberra, Brussels and Washington, but not that of his own people.



Morgan Tsvangirai; the party he leads, the MDC, is an overt and outright instrument of imperialism.

“It appears that Mr Mugabe is to be killed, not because he is a threat to democracy, but because the democratic process threatens to reinstall him.” As, indeed, it did.

The international backers of Morgan Tsvangirai, however, are not the sort to be deterred just because their man has been caught out trying to book up an assassination. (Imagine the never-ending furore that would have erupted if Mugabe had been filmed trying to get Tsvangirai assassinated!)

Reporter Mark Davis found himself having to *defend* his report. And then it simply disappeared, buried, as though it had never happened. Now *that’s* power!

Africans support Mugabe

“Imperialism will not forgive Robert Mugabe for having become the ideological spokesman of sub-Saharan Africa and having won the grudging support of his fellow heads of state for his belief that reliance on imperialism has brought Africa nothing but poverty, corruption, chaos and brutality.”⁸⁸

It may peeve Tony Blair, John Howard, George Bush and Morgan Tsvangirai, but Robert Mugabe is considered a hero in Africa, where the land question is still a burning issue. If his government is successful in bringing about an effective redistribution of land, Zimbabwe’s example could rapidly spread to other African countries. Already, as we have seen, it has spread in one form or another to Namibia and South Africa.



Mugabe at the Earth Summit. He has become “the ideological spokesman of sub-Saharan Africa”.

The Zimbabwean “infection”

At the beginning of 2002, the British *Telegraph* reported in alarm that “the South African Rand has dropped to record lows, as international markets fear that the regional superpower will contract the Zimbabwean ‘infection’.”

“International markets” in this context means corporate investors and speculators.

Later in the year, the South African Chamber of Business tried again to get African governments to intervene in Zimbabwe (no prize for guessing on whose side). In early September, after issuing dire warnings that the “crisis in Zimbabwe” could spell disaster for the region, the Chamber said in a statement: “We believe the African Union, in conjunction with the Southern African Development Community, should urgently assess the Zimbabwean situation and come up with a pragmatic and sustainable plan to deal with the situation there.”

Ironically, *Xinhua* reports that the decision by President Mbeki to speed up land reform in South Africa is “seen by analysts as vital to removing one of that country’s biggest political risks and restoring foreign investor confidence in the economy”.

Zimbabwe - the central question for activists

The central question regarding the struggle going on in Zimbabwe at the present time is whether or not one is on the side of imperialism or on the side of those who are trying to stand up to the machinations of imperialism.

On one side in Zimbabwe are the white settlers, white business interests and their foreign backers, that is British, US and European imperialism.

On the other side are the victims of imperialism, the mass of the Zimbabwean people, seeking to regain what is rightfully theirs and to find a way out of the poverty and misery which remains a consequence of generations of colonialist and neo-colonialist domination and exploitation.

Hard as it may be to counter the flood of imperialist propaganda, we must distinguish – and must help other people to distinguish – between genuine pro-people policies such as those of the Zimbabwe African National Union – People’s Front (ZANU-PF), however shakily they may sometimes be implemented, and the policies of an outright instrument of imperialism like the MDC.

The leaders of the latter, under a cloak of “democratic” and “progressive” rhetoric, are willing to sell out their country and their people to further, expanded imperialist exploitation in return for a share of the spoils and the chance to achieve a position of power.

“A nation worth its name”

“We have not sought to quarrel with any nation” says President Mugabe. “We have no other ambition than to remain sovereign as we co-operate and respect the sovereignty of others.

“We cannot be a nation worth its name if we succumb to and acquiesce in the sheer erosion of our sovereignty.”

Dr Simbi Mubako, Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the US, says “Zimbabwe values its independence and sovereignty above all else. There is no going back on our land reform program, which is now almost complete. Our economy has been under siege for about three years now. But now, there are signs of recovery and stability.

“We have learned a bitter lesson. We have learned that, after all, there is life after the IMF.”⁸⁹

“We are not a perfect people but we know that there is a group of people outside of Zimbabwe who would only be waiting to pounce on our mistakes but the only response we have for them is to ask them to come back in two years and they would see a transformed Zimbabwe.

“We thought we had good partners abroad and did not know that we were killing ourselves with this dependency. Now we are weaning ourselves from dependency and we want to be independent both politically and economically.

“No longer will Zimbabwe be an appendage of the industrial capitalist system.”⁹⁰

Gregory Elich comments that “It is precisely this independence that has made Zimbabwe a target. The Western campaign against Zimbabwe will continue to escalate until it achieves its goal of reversing that independence, regardless of the cost to the people of Zimbabwe.

“Despite Western hostility and belligerence, Zimbabwe remains resolute in its pursuit of land reform and rejection of the neo-liberal economic model.”⁹¹

“Imperialism is continuing with its ongoing attempts at destabilising and overthrowing the regime in Zimbabwe. The proletariat and the proletarian parties in the imperialist countries must expose and oppose these attempts of their own governments and give fraternal support to the Zimbabwean government and its people in their hour of need.”⁹²

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⁵⁷ Dr Simbi Mubako, Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the United States, in a speech to the US national conference of the Schiller Institute.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ African observers for US elections? At the time when George W Bush and the Republican Right were engaged in very publicly stealing the US Presidency through gross electoral fraud in Florida, Agence France Presse quoted a top aide to Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe as suggesting that "maybe Africans and others should send observers to help Americans deal with their democracy", adding that "perhaps now we have reached a time when they can learn a lot from us".

⁶⁰ *New Worker*, week commencing 22 February, 2002.

⁶¹ *Zimbabwe and World Hypocrisy*.

⁶² *Lalkar*, May/June 2002.

⁶³ *The Herald*, Harare, 2002.

⁶⁴ Patrick Bond, *ZNet Commentary*, January 30, 2002.

⁶⁵ **Speech by Dr Simbi Mubako, the Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the United States, given to the national conference of the Schiller Institute (US), on February 16, 2002.**

⁶⁶ **Sam Sibanda, *Zimbabwe and World Hypocrisy*.**

⁶⁷ **Dr Simbi Mubako, *ibid*.**

⁶⁸ **Sam Sibanda, *Zimbabwe and World Hypocrisy*.**

⁶⁹ **Dr Simbi Mubako, Speech by given to the national conference of the Schiller Institute (US), on February 16, 2002.**

⁷⁰ ***Lalkar*, May/June 2002.**

⁷¹ ***ibid***

⁷² ***ibid***

⁷³ ***Lalkar*, May/June 2002.**

⁷⁴ **Angie Todd, *Granma International*, newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba.**

⁷⁵ ***Lalkar*, May/June 2002.**

⁷⁶ ***ibid***

⁷⁷ **John Howard, July 16, 2002.**

⁷⁸ **Speech by Dr. Simbi Mubako, the Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the United States, given to the national conference of the Schiller Institute (US), on February 16, 2002.**

⁷⁹ **Quoted by Kevin Watkins, Belmont WA, in *The Guardian* (Sydney).**

⁸⁰ **Kevin Watkins, Belmont WA, in *The Guardian*, Sydney.**

⁸¹ **Speech by Dr. Simbi Mubako, the Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the United States, given to the national conference of the Schiller Institute (US), on February 16, 2002.**

⁸² **Sam Sibanda, *Zimbabwe and World Hypocrisy*.**

⁸³ **Patrick Bond, *ZNet Commentary*, January 30, 2002.**

⁸⁴ ***Lalkar*, May/June 2002.**

⁸⁵ *Weekly Worker* no. 415, 17 January 2002.

⁸⁶ *Lalkar*, May/June 2002.

⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁸⁸ *Lalkar*, May/June 2002.

⁸⁹ Speech by Dr Simbi Mubako, the Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the United States, given to the national conference of the Schiller Institute (US), on 16 February 2002.

⁹⁰ Sylvestre Maunganidze, head of political affairs at the Zimbabwe Embassy in Georgia, quoted by Gregory Elich, *The Herald*, Harare, 2002.

⁹¹ *The Herald*, Harare, 2002.

⁹² *Lalkar*, May/June 2002.

