

THE Zimbabwe story which appeared on the African News page of *The Guardian* of February 28, 2006, arrested my attention. Eventually it became the inspiration for this article. Titled Zimbabwe's opposition leader seeks unity against Mugabe regime, the story was a report of a press conference addressed by Arthur Mutambara who had just been elected factional leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the leading opposition political movement in Zimbabwe – at least before its recent crisis. I am making three distillations from what Mutambara was reported to have told the press in Bulawayo, southeast Zimbabwe.

Regretting the crisis in the opposition camp, Mutambara said: "We don't believe in fighting other democratic forces of this country. We believe in unity, working with everybody to dislodge and destroy the ZANU-PF regime that has created chaos in this country". *The Guardian* also reported that Mutambara, a former Zimbabwean student activist who had just returned from a 15-year sojourn in America and Europe, studying and working, sent "a strong message to Europe and the United States" to the effect that his faction was "completely anti-imperialist." He went on: "We want to warn our friends in Europe and America. In the event of the violation of human rights by American and European imperialism, we will take a position of complete condemnation against American imperialism and European unilateralism".

Mutambara's third statement was very significant: "We believe in land revolution, we agree that the land issue was the basis of our revolution in the country. Our land strategies and programmes are not driven by white farmer interest. They are driven by the interest of all Zimbabweans, white and black. We desire to give land to those that need it – the poor people and the workers". One may now see why I was arrested by what the factional opposition leader was reported to have said: commitment to the unity of political forces interested in the "destruction" of the "Mugabe regime" which had brought chaos to the

country; opposition to imperialism together with what he called "unilateralism"; and commitment to the radical resolution of the land question.

Put together and taken on their face value, Mutambara's three platforms constitute a critique of the Zimbabwe regime, or Robert Mugabe, from the left. Ideologically and politically, and from the information we get from here, MDC's opposition has, since its formation in 1999, been at best liberal in economy, politics and relations with imperialism and at worst, confused. I have never stopped wondering whether the MDC leadership is ever embarrassed by the content and form of support given to it by imperialists, racists, apologists of colonialism, modern-day slave-owners and global fascist dictators and their ideologies and media institutions. When a coalition of bad people or a coalition dominated by bad people, gives you support you ought to look at yourself again.

I should, perhaps, say again that Mutambara's statements are taken at their face value. I am convinced however, that even if the man was just playing politics and did not truly believe in what he said, there must be hundreds if not thousands of MDC supporters and non-party activists whose views he truly articulated. A political platform that rests on these three pillars and their logical implications, can become a credible and popular platform around which a powerful movement can be built: a credible movement capable of engaging Robert Mugabe from the left and displacing his regime. I may even go on to say that unless such a movement emerges very soon, Robert Mugabe will be succeeded either by a crudely racist fascist or a willing servant of imperialism. The central proposition of this article is that the ZANU-PF government ought to be radically confronted and supplanted: but not by the MDC, but by a movement to the left of ZANU-PF.

After decades of nationalist

Zimbabwe: A balance sheet

By Edwin Madunagu

struggle, the last 15 years being armed, Zimbabwe got independence as a Republic within the Commonwealth of Nations on April 18, 1980. Robert Mugabe, leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and its armed wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) became Executive Prime Minister. Canan Banana became ceremonial President. Ten nationalist political parties, including Mugabe's ZANU-PF, Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU-PF and Abel Muzerewa's UANC, contested the 80 parliamentary seats reserved for blacks. ZANU-PF won 57 seats, ZAPU-PF 20 and UANC three. Others got nothing. Twenty seats were reserved for the whites, who made up only two per cent of the population of about nine million, but controlled more than 70 per cent of the land.

The voting pattern showed ethnic cleavages, but nationalists across Africa and progressives around the world hoped that this problem, which was not peculiar to Zimbabwe would be resolved or progressively reduced with time. It was an unfulfilled expectation. In his first radio address to the nation as Prime Minister, Mugabe called for national reconciliation within the Black majority and their political parties and with the white minority. He spoke of "beating swords into plough-shares". In another broadcast he declared: "If yesterday I fought with you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interest". The hope of reconciliation was not realised. For, soon after Mugabe's speech an ethnic civil war erupted and the former liberation armies started decimating their ranks.

Today, almost 26 years after Robert Mugabe assumed office, first as head of government, and later as Head of State as well, the country is not only as divided as ever, but the government of Mugabe's ZANU is maintained in power decisively by the

coercive apparatus of the state. The opposition in Zimbabwe is popular and mass based. The situation in Zimbabwe today is exactly like that in Eastern Europe in the second half of 1989 when all the communist party governments were overthrown by mass action. As Joe Slovo, the leader of the South African Communist Party said at the time, the forces that overthrew these governments were popular, and the governments they overthrew were unpopular. I do not say that the opposition forces in Zimbabwe are revolutionary – in fact they are counter-revolutionary. But they are popular in the sense that they are supported by workers, students, women, professionals and de-classed masses.

Why has Zimbabwe come to this point? Why has it been impossible for the government and the ruling party to mobilise the masses and establish a social and political hegemony in the sense of Antonio Gramsci whom ZANU intellectual defenders always invoked at the beginning? Why has the opposition drawn and mobilised the masses away from ZANU, which is now seen and indeed appears, as oppressor of the masses? The answer is that President Mugabe and his ZANU party and government have progressively ceased to be revolutionary-except in the abstract. Since the late 1980s they have responded to every challenge of governance with arrogant rhetoric, witch-hunting, and then armed repression.

It is possible to isolate some landmarks in ZANU's decline: It was clear from the time it assumed power in April 1980 that ZANU wanted to create a one-party state. The protagonists embarked on the project through a twin-policy of neutralisation and absorption of other nationalist parties. It was a wrong policy as wrong as the objective. Ironically, as ZANU was holding talks with ZAPU for a merger, an ethnic civil war in which they were placed on opposite sides was going on. Eventually an agreement was reached between the leadership of ZANU and ZAPU, and the latter dissolved into history.

Some party and government positions – later to be taken back – were given to the defeated opponents.

Mugabe's second mistake was the adoption of the executive presidential system in December 1987. As the history of Latin America shows, this system was one of the several parallel routes to dictatorship. It was a sustainer of dictatorship wherever it came into being. As the country became increasingly divided along ethnic, racial and political lines, Robert Mugabe became the Executive President of the country, head of the de-facto single party and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

Robert Mugabe's third mistake was the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the late 1980s. We remember the devastating result and impacts of this IMF programme on the masses across the Third World. SAP was the forerunner of the present neo-liberal capitalist globalisation. Just as in Nigeria and other countries where SAP was introduced, the programme was opposed by Zimbabwean masses: workers, students, women and several strata of the middle-classes. Mugabe and his government tried to "explain". When the people did not show any understanding, and instead went on strikes and protests, Mugabe resorted to force. Mugabe's open renunciation of Marxism in 1989, just to please the IMF and World Bank was pathetic. So also is his homophobia defined as "irrational fear of aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals".

Another terrible mistake was on the land question. As the whole world knows, the land question was the main question in the national liberation revolution. Mugabe wasted almost two decades before embarking seriously on land redistribution. And when he eventually embarked on it, he made it look like a vindictive and punitive programme, rather than a programme of historical restitution and social justice. The 2005 forced eviction of hundreds of thousands of poor people from the ghettos of Harare was sufficient to bring down a government – whatever its claims.