

Zimbabwe: A letter from the MDC and a reply

20 November 2002

The following letter was sent by Eddie Cross, a leading Zimbabwean businessman and the secretary for Economic Affairs for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the main pro-Western opposition party to President Robert Mugabe's ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Cross's letter was sent in response to a previous exchange with a reader of the World Socialist Web Site on our attitude to Mugabe and Western intervention in Zimbabwe (See "An exchange on Zimbabwe".) The letter is followed by a reply by Ann Talbot.

Dear Ann,

I so enjoyed your response to the letter from Zimbabwe. I found it intellectually refreshing and concise. I did not enjoy your remarks about the MDC [Movement for Democratic Change]—found them a bit off line!!

The MDC does have an economic stabilisation and recovery programme (the Bridge), which you no doubt have seen on the web site. I assume from your comments that you think that this represents the totality of MDC thinking on the issue of economic policy and since we allude in that document to the IMF and the World Bank that we are pro those institutions and their prescriptions for the third world countries.

I want you to consider just for a moment what kind of a world the MDC would find itself in when it gained power—we would inherit an economy which was basically bankrupt—our national debt right now is estimated at US\$3.5 billion external, US\$1.2 billion arrears to the multilaterals and other banks, Z\$350 billion to local financial institutions, Z\$100 billion parastatal debt, Z\$100 billion debt in the Congo (owed to us but unlikely to be paid); that is a total debt of US\$4.7 billion plus Z\$550 billion. At the present exchange rate (official) of 55 to 1 this is US\$10 billion. Our combined debt is therefore a ridiculous US\$14.7 billion—compared to foreign earnings of US\$1.3 per annum and total GDP of US\$5.7 billion per annum.

What to do? Repudiate the debt? Reschedule and seek debt relief? Clearly we as a small central African state cannot dictate to the rest of the world, we are a pawn in the game. We would have to seek assistance in the short term—we would require all the above measures—we will repudiate some debt—corrupt obligations, we will have to ask for a rescheduling and we will seek debt relief. But in the end we will have to live with the situation where we are a heavily indebted country with very little to show for it. At independence 22 years ago our national debt was Z\$720 million.

To do any of these things we have to belong to the IMF and the World Bank. They would be the main players on behalf of the Paris Club and would play a crucial role in helping us deal with creditor states.

When we were able to get out from under this cloud we would then

be able to stand alone and do our own thing. Clearly, we would like to do many things differently. We are a labour-based movement—our roots are in the labour unions here and we would clearly like to follow strategies and policies which yield maximum benefit to the people we represent. But we have to operate in the real world, not some socialist nirvana that simply does not work. We also have to do the things that our supporters want—like any other democratic organisation. When would we be able to do things our own way? It will take us years to recover from Robert Mugabe.

If you have an alternative path which we might consider to get us out of this hole we are in—please let me know, I am all ears.

Eddie Cross,

Secretary for Economic Affairs, MDC

Dear Mr. Cross,

Let us make it clear at the outset that we have no interest in any collaboration between the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) of Zimbabwe, of which you are a leading member, and have no wish to offer you advice on economic policy.

We are in fundamental political opposition to the despotic regime of Robert Mugabe and have insisted that our hostility to the West's imperialist interests in Africa, especially the role of the IMF and the bankers, does not imply any support for a government that they are currently denouncing as a "rogue state". But we have also consistently expressed our opposition to the MDC, which functions as an advocate of free market policies and is backed by powerful political interests in Britain and the West.

Your own letter makes clear that the MDC offers nothing in its programme and policies that would alleviate the appalling situation faced by the working people and poor masses of Zimbabwe. You insist that if the MDC came to power, "we will have to live with the situation where we are a heavily indebted country with very little to show for it." Despite your half-hearted protestations to the contrary, you uphold the authority of the IMF and World Bank, whom you suggest will intercede with Zimbabwe's creditors.

You are seeking to foster dangerous illusions amongst those sections of the working class who support the MDC as an alternative to Mugabe's ZANU-PF. Wherever the IMF and World Bank have imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa, the result has been economic collapse. In the case of Rwanda, this led directly to communal violence and genocide as sections of the ruling elite attempted to seize what was left of the country's resources. The present famine in Southern Africa can in large measure be attributed to the policies of the international financial institutions, which have left African governments incapable of responding to the periodic droughts that are known to afflict this region.

The IMF and World Bank represent the interests of Western

governments and big business. They view Africa as a source of valuable raw materials and have no desire to share the profits they make from these resources with the mass of the continent's population. Even the minimal social gains that Africans made after independence have come under attack. Commodity prices have been relentlessly driven down, jobs destroyed, aid cut, subsidies to small farmers abolished, and welfare policies attacked.

All this has been done under the guise of combating corruption. "Democracy, accountability and transparency" has become a mantra. But what right have Western governments and corporations to demand "democracy, accountability and transparency" from Africa following the recent revelations about Enron, Worldcom, et al?

You say that the IMF and World Bank would help Zimbabwe get debt relief, but what attacks would you have to impose in order to get it? As you well know you would have to privatise every state asset in Zimbabwe. Your Economic Stabilisation and Recovery Programme states that within its first 100 days an MDC government would begin the process of privatising all parastatals, which you would aim to have completed within two years. In every country where these measures have been applied they have meant mass unemployment, escalating poverty, the destruction of whole industries and infrastructural collapse.

You only have to cast your eyes across the border to neighbouring Zambia to see the results of the privatisation of the copper industry. Once a booming industry, copper mining was hit by the collapse of commodity prices and the IMF was able to force through privatisations, resulting in a sharp escalation in unemployment. IMF policies have reduced a fertile country, richly endowed with mineral resources, to the most abject poverty.

Look further afield to Argentina and Russia and you will see more damning evidence of the effect of IMF structural adjustment programmes. In Russia, where people were told they could expect better living conditions under capitalism, the population is now declining as the death rate overtakes the birth rate.

You say that the MDC is a "labour-based movement." Your web site carries articles supporting workers' strikes, and leading members of the MDC, such as Morgan Tsvangirai, have a background as union bureaucrats. But does all that make the MDC a workers organisation? No, it does not.

The class character of an organisation or movement is determined not by the protestations of its leaders or even the social origins of its members, but by its programme and principles. The MDC's programme and principles are those of a party that accepts the capitalist system and reflects the interests of a privileged elite who wish to preserve their position within it. In so far as you refer to the needs of workers, poor farmers and other oppressed layers, it is with the self-interested desire of winning their votes by deluding them into thinking that an MDC government will redress their grievances.

On every continent the majority of the population are experiencing the disastrous consequences of precisely the kind of free market policies that your programme outlines, while a tiny layer of obscenely privileged people enrich themselves at the expense of the rest. Our policy is to unite this exploited majority on a programme of social equality. The interests of Zimbabwean workers and small farmers lie in uniting with similarly oppressed classes internationally, not in accepting even greater poverty so that they can pay off the Zimbabwean national debt.

In making debt repayments its main priority the MDC reveals that its class outlook is that of the African elite. It speaks for the wealthy

farmers and businessmen, together with a section of the black middle class who aspire to greater things, of which Tsvangirai is a prime example. Its aim is to restore relations with the former colonial powers that have broken down under Mugabe. Without such people it would never have been possible for the European imperialist powers to rule Africa or to continue to maintain their economic domination after independence.

We are presently experiencing a new period of colonial expansion as the USA attempts to establish its control over the earth's strategic resources and its rivals try to follow its example in their own spheres of influence. Britain has once again forcibly established itself as a colonial power in Sierra Leone. France has moved into Ivory Coast and the USA is financing the Nigerian army.

Throughout Africa the western powers have imposed "regime change", albeit more quietly than they are seeking to do in Iraq. The nationalist leaders of a previous generation have been shunted into retirement and new men have been brought forward with programmes which, like that of the MDC, call for privatisation, free enterprise and the imposition of IMF policies.

Two decades ago after the bitter war of independence the suggestion that a party openly supporting pro-Western economic policies like the MDC should rule Zimbabwe would have been ridiculed. Britain and the US reluctantly allowed Mugabe and ZANU-PF to take power when it became clear that there was no other way to deal with the opposition of millions of black Africans to the hated white-supremacist Smith regime. It is a damning indictment of Mugabe's nationalist politics and political record that so many Zimbabwean people have built up illusions in the MDC over the past two years or at least have swallowed your claim that there is no alternative.

The *World Socialist Web Site* fights for a political alternative to the bourgeois nationalists and those advancing a pro-imperialist programme. One can only surmise that your letter is a nervous response to the growth in our readership and political authority in Zimbabwe, at a time when illusions in the MDC are being undermined by your own political record. To date you have been able to dismiss socialism as a false utopia, more properly associated with the brutality and stupidity of Stalinism and ZANU-PF. But given the dire consequences of capitalism in Africa and elsewhere, support for a genuine socialist perspective is growing and will make your efforts to build support for the MDC more difficult by the day.

Yours sincerely,
Ann Talbot, for the WSWWS



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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