

Power-sharing deal signed in Zimbabwe

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The governing ZANU-PF party of President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) signed a power-sharing deal on Monday.

Under the deal, Robert Mugabe will remain president and Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the MDC, will become prime minister. A new government of 31 ministers will be formed from ZANU-PF, the MDC and a breakaway faction of the MDC.

Mugabe will continue to chair the cabinet, but Tsvangirai will chair a new council of ministers. It is not clear what the relationship between the cabinet and the council will be or which of the two men will have the ultimate authority in government.

What emerges clearly, however, is that Mugabe will now share power with a party he has declared to be an imperialist puppet and Tsvangirai will form a government with a man he has been denouncing for the last eight years as a dictator.

The power-sharing agreement offers no prospect of genuine social peace. Even as the deal was being signed, Tsvangirai's supporters were being beaten by ZANU-PF thugs. As they celebrated in the townships that night, MDC members were rounded up and arrested by police in a continuation of the widespread intimidation that marked the June election and has continued ever since.

In an interview with the *Guardian* on Wednesday, Tsvangirai acknowledged that he would be sharing government with the people who have organised a campaign of violence and repression against the population of Zimbabwe.

"There's an inherent suspicion, there's inherent mistrust of Robert Mugabe," Tsvangirai told Chris McGreal. "It's understandable given his history, given his role. It's part of his legacy. But he also must understand that the future is not in the hands of Robert Mugabe."

He did not envisage Mugabe being held to account for his recent acts of brutality or the massacres of thousands of civilians in Matabeleland during the 1980s.

Tsvangirai is relying on the support of Britain and the United States just as he has done for the last eight years. He has benefited from a vast wave of anger against Mugabe, but he has never attempted to mobilise a mass movement of opposition against the self-seeking clique that Mugabe represents for fear that it would get out of control. That is why Mugabe has been able to hang on to power.

Mugabe has been forced to the negotiating table because of the complete collapse of the Zimbabwean economy, brought about deliberately by the imperialist powers. There are suggestions that the government has reached the point where it cannot continue to pay the armed forces on which Mugabe depends to maintain his rule.

Inflation is reckoned to be running at the unimaginable figure of 40 million percent. The central bank recently knocked 13 zeros off the currency because automatic cash machines could not handle the numbers involved in calculating transactions.

Doctors are currently on strike demanding their pay in foreign currency. Their demand may prove to be the first of many, as the Zimbabwean dollar is worthless. Most transactions are being carried out illegally in foreign currency or petrol coupons. The government was forced to admit

the collapse of the currency last week when it announced that some retailers would be permitted to accept foreign currency.

Mugabe has accepted the power-sharing deal because it was the only way in which he could restore his links with the international financial institutions and gain access to foreign currency. He made a long speech denouncing British imperialism at the signing ceremony. But the reality is that the deal will kick-start what the *Times* called a new Scramble for Africa and hand "a new breed of modern-day City imperialists the opportunities of a lifetime."

When he came to power in 1980, Mugabe was careful to protect the interests of foreign investors. He developed good relations with the white commercial farmers and worked closely with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Only when the policies of the IMF began to threaten his ability to maintain power through patronage did he cease to comply with its directives. But even as he dispossessed some white farmers and distributed their land to his cronies, Mugabe left the major capitalist interests untouched. Foreign mining companies and banks have continued to do business in Zimbabwe over the last eight years.

As the deal was signed, Impala Platinum announced a major investment in its two Zimbabwean mines. Anglo Platinum, a subsidiary of Anglo American, announced earlier this year that it was planning a US\$400 million investment in a new mine in Zimbabwe. African Rainbow Minerals (ARM), which began prospecting in Zimbabwe some months ago, said the settlement was a "very positive" development.

It is the need to restore relations with global capital by ending patronage that drives the MDC into coalition government. Eddie Cross, policy coordinator of the MDC, promised that the deal would have a dramatic impact on the mining sector.

"We plan to revise the policy for mining so as to make it more investor friendly," Cross said. "It is a high priority for us to get all mining projects...being planned under way."

Cross made it clear that the MDC, which will hold all the economic portfolios in the new government, would immediately scrap the provision that all foreign companies should be 51 percent owned by Zimbabweans.

"We will still seek Zimbabwean participation in major parts of the economy, but it is going to be investor friendly."

The announcement that a deal had been reached was welcomed by Dominique Strauss-Kahn of the IMF. "We stand ready," he said, "to discuss with the new authorities their policies to stabilise the economy, improve social conditions, and reduce poverty. I encourage the government to take steps to show clear commitment to a new policy direction and to seek the support of the international community."

IMF structural adjustment programmes have produced social devastation across Africa as subsidies have been cut, government spending slashed, grain reserves sold off, services and utilities privatised, and the limited social welfare measures introduced after independence gutted. The new policy direction that Strauss-Kahn has in mind for Zimbabwe will be a rigorous programme of deflationary measures that will destroy what little is left of education and healthcare. Not least will be the demand that ordinary Zimbabweans pay the debt that is owed to the IMF.

While the public pronouncements in Harare stressed that this was a Zimbabwean deal worked out in conjunction with President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Strauss-Kahn's remarks underscore the fact that it has been devised to meet the demands of international capital.

United States ambassador to Zimbabwe James McGee professed complete ignorance of the details of the agreement. But, according to the London *Times*, he received hourly briefings as the negotiations proceeded, and the US "approved the new settlement almost line by line."

US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Jendayi Frazer is said to have approached the top generals who hold effective power and offered them financial incentives to accept the deal. They refused. But now that the deal is signed, with their tacit support, money is expected to flow their way. If it proves too embarrassing for them to accept it directly from the US, then it will be distributed via South Africa.

America, Britain, Japan, Germany, France, Sweden, Holland, Norway, Canada and Australia, who make up what is known as the Fishmongers' Group, will offer Zimbabwe an immediate financial package. The group was set up under a British initiative, but the US has led it during the negotiations. It has a list of demands including the return of land to the white commercial farmers, the removal from office of those accused of human rights abuses and the prosecution of those responsible for the Matabeleland massacres in the 1980s.

The present deal is not the one that this group of imperialist powers would ideally have wanted. They wanted a complete regime change that removed Mugabe from the scene. But the MDC proved unfit for the task, being unable to mount a genuine mass democratic movement because of its pro-imperialist programme.

Even so, the major powers intend to make the most of what they can get. The financial package on offer to Zimbabwe will give them the ability to impose their demands on the new government. UK Foreign Minister David Miliband insisted that the new government would have to make significant progress before Britain supported the lifting of sanctions.

After almost 30 years, this is where Mugabe's nationalist perspective has led Zimbabwe. In all but name the country has returned to a colonial status, with him once again imposing an economic and political agenda set by the major corporations and banks on the working masses.

For its part, the MDC continues to be the most pliant and directly accountable tool of the Western powers. It has even asked for several hundred British troops to be sent to Zimbabwe in a training capacity.

Tsvangirai and the MDC, though exploiting legitimate mass hostility to Mugabe's brutal regime, are the political representative of bourgeois layers in Zimbabwe—such as the white farmers and businessmen—in alliance with the trade union bureaucracy. They concluded that Mugabe's system of patronage and high-level corruption was an impediment to their economic interests and was hampering international investment in Zimbabwe's economy. The party was formed with the aim of championing a pro-Western economic and political orientation more consistently and efficiently than Mugabe and ZANU-PF. That is why the MDC consistently opposed the development of any mass opposition to the Mugabe regime and instead pleaded for Western support at every stage.

Tsvangirai's decision to sit in government alongside Mugabe is the end product of this political line. Some of the top MDC leaders will now find even easier access to personal riches and advancement at the direct expense of the vast majority of the Zimbabwean population, including those who voted, fought and died for them.

The deal has been brokered by Mbeki and has the backing of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). This serves to underline the political and economic role of the entire African bourgeoisie as guardians of imperialist domination and exploitation of the continent, its peoples and vital resources.

Despite their former socialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric, the nationalist movements and regimes they head all preside over the brutal

exploitation of the African workers and peasants by the native capitalists in alliance with the major corporations.

The illusions the African leaders cultivated that the growing presence of China in Africa would make a positive difference has also proved unfounded. China and Russia opposed the imposition of tougher UN sanctions on Zimbabwe, but their differences with the US are tactical. China's main concern has been the profitability of its own investments in Zimbabwe and the surrounding region. Chinese companies must operate in the same global market as Western companies and are driven by the same overriding goal to make a profit. Zimbabwe's relative isolation from the world market is as much a problem for Chinese companies as it is for the West.

Without easy access to oil, Chinese operations in Zimbabwe are hampered. Angola could provide all the oil that Zimbabwe needs, but the former national liberation leader and self-proclaimed Marxist President Dos Santos of Angola is eager to maintain close relations with the US so as to enrich the tiny clique that he and others like him represent. It is not just Mugabe that has been shown to politically bankrupt but all the African nationalist leaders.

The deal that has been signed in Harare is similar to the power-sharing arrangement that was introduced in Kenya under the auspices of Jendayi Frazer following the contested elections in that country.

"The fact that the same political prescription forced down Kenyans' throats has been replicated in Zimbabwe paints a grim picture for forthcoming elections in several African countries," Zimbabwean human rights activist Brian Kagoro commented.

Kagoro's remarks point to a concerted effort on the part of the US and its ally, Britain, to establish governments in Africa that will allow the major capitalist companies to engage in a new rape of a continent whose resources have become increasingly important to the world economy. The power-sharing government in Kenya, and now in Zimbabwe, has installed some new faces in the government who will be given their opportunity to enrich themselves at the expense of the majority of the population so long as they open up the economy to transnational investors.

The development of a mass movement in opposition to this renewed onslaught by imperialism is essential. Above all, it must be independent of the Western financial and corporate interests and of the nationalist parties that are the local representatives of these interests. Such a movement must be based on the principle of social equality and a programme of the social ownership of the land, industry and natural resources.



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