

Letters and a reply on Zimbabwe

24 September 2008

The following letters were received in response to the September 19 article, "Power-sharing deal signed in Zimbabwe." They are followed by a reply by the article's author, Ann Talbot.

Thanks for the informative piece but I remain mystified by your line. Mugabe must be doing something right for otherwise there would not be the, highly unusual in its intensity, propaganda onslaught in Britain. Were he to succeed in giving the land to many and stopping US corporations taking over the country (by insisting concerns should be 50 percent locally owned) other countries might follow his example. There would be the 'domino effect' so feared by the American master race. Zimbabwe's dying population is caused by the economic sanctions imposed by our political leaders. They are therefore literally murderers for it is the object of the sanctions to stress the Zimbabweans into displacing Mugabe—c.f. the Oil for Food programme in Iraq. We ought to support Mugabe; he is one of the few chinks of light.

Regards,

LT

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More than 90 years ago Leon Trotsky observed that in underdeveloped countries the capitalist class is incapable of carrying through the tasks of democracy, and will, against the struggle of the masses, ally itself with the forces of reaction. This principle has been thoroughly proved by the experience of ZANU-PF since 1980. The failure of the MDC to mobilise the Zimbabwean working class against the repressive nationalist state and the MDC's reliance on imperialist powers further bears this out.

EG

South Africa

Dear LT,

The imperialist countries are indeed ultimately responsible for the social conditions that exist today in Zimbabwe. A century and more of colonial domination makes them responsible. Sanctions have taken a heavy

toll in depriving the country of access to foreign currency with which to pay for oil. But President Robert Mugabe cannot escape blame. He was happy to work with the world financial institutions, corporations and governments for almost two decades after he came to power. He made no attempt at land reform, although this had always been a major plank of his policy during the war against the Smith regime. Even when he refused to continue implementing an International Monetary Fund Structural Adjustment Programme, because it threatened to undermine his power of patronage, companies like Anglo American and Barclays Bank continued to operate in Zimbabwe.

Mugabe's proposed law to make 51 percent of all businesses locally owned would not have benefited the majority of Zimbabweans. It would have made the political elite on whom Mugabe depends to maintain his power even wealthier. The same generals who have looted Congo, the same ministers and leading officials of the regime who have received land would have been handed a slice of some of Zimbabwe's mineral wealth.

Nor is Mugabe alone in putting forward such proposals. The Movement for Democratic Change has its own plan for Zimbabwean participation in what they expect to be a new mineral boom. They have not yet announced what they intend to do, but have insisted that it will be "investor friendly." There is a model for such plans over the border in South Africa where leading members of the ANC have been given shares and seats on the boards of major companies under the programme of Black Economic Empowerment. The result has been the creation of a thin layer of wealthy black businessmen who determine the policies of the government, which is thoroughly alienated from the mass of the population who are condemned to poverty and insecurity.

You speak of Mugabe's economic measures creating a domino effect as though you imagine there is something inherently progressive in state intervention in the economy. If that were the case then the *World Socialist Web Site* would be praising US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson to the skies because he has organised the most

massive state intervention in the economy ever seen. *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman commented ironically in a recent article, “Comrade Paulson seizes the economy’s commanding heights.” The question is what class interests does state intervention serve? In the case of the takeover of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and AIG, or of Northern Rock in Britain, it serves the interests of Wall Street and the City of London. The purpose of the intervention is to bail out bankrupt corporations, super-rich CEOs and speculators. This massive handout will be paid for by the working class in the form of taxes and welfare cuts. There is nothing progressive about the actions of the US and UK governments and there is nothing progressive about Mugabe’s state intervention.

Socialists should not align themselves with every wretched dictator who has outlived his usefulness to the imperialist powers that put him in office. Mugabe was feted by successive British governments. They have only just removed the knighthood they gave him. Defending the population of a semi-colonial country against imperialist aggression does not mean making an unprincipled political amalgam with hostile class forces. To do so would be an act of betrayal. What the events in Zimbabwe demonstrate—both the political trajectory that Mugabe has followed and the emergence of the MDC as a party of government—is that a socialist movement that reflects the interests of the working class and is independent of both ZANU-PF and the MDC is necessary.

The agreement that was signed last week in Harare was a demonstration of the fact that Mugabe has failed to free Zimbabwe from the grip of colonialism. I agree wholeheartedly with the letter from EG, who argues that the capitalist class is incapable of carrying out democratic tasks such as the national liberation of colonial peoples. These tasks now fall to the working class as part of their own socialist revolution.

Ann Talbot



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