

Robert Mugabe resigns as president of Zimbabwe

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Robert Mugabe resigned as president on Tuesday, six days after Zimbabwe's military first moved against him. His resignation was announced in the midst of a debate in parliament on impeachment initiated by his factional rivals in the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

Mugabe, 93, who has led the country for 37 years, refused to go after last Wednesday's move by the army targeting the G40 faction of his wife, Grace Mugabe, and supporting the former deputy prime minister, Emmerson Mnangagwa. He failed to resign in a televised address Sunday while flanked by top military figures, having been removed as party leader earlier that day. Instead, he suggested that he would lead a party congress next month.

Despite the staging of rallies and scenes of euphoria in Harare at news of Mugabe's resignation, his removal is the result of a palace coup with political and economic aims dictated by bourgeois forces no less corrupt than Mugabe.

Mugabe finally submitted his resignation in a letter to parliament that was read out by the speaker, Jacob Mudenda, to the assembled MPs. The cheering in the chamber was an indication of how far removed the political overturn was from what the army and sections of the media had proclaimed to be a genuinely popular uprising. Even the charges under which Mugabe was to be impeached—that his advanced age allowed his wife to “usurp power”—reflected the intention to limit any fallout.

Mnangagwa, who is to be Mugabe's replacement, has no principled differences with the man for whom he acted as enforcer for decades. He moved against his former boss only when Mugabe deposed him a fortnight ago, after sidelining other members of the “old guard” close to the military in favour of a younger bourgeois layer around “Gucci Grace.”

The military portray Mugabe's actions as undermining the heroes of the independence movement. But in the

decades since the 1980s, the military leveraged its power to become a major economic force that grew wealthy at the expense of the working population. The generals were angry at Mugabe only for his promotion of a younger venal layer at their expense.

Mnangagwa has been alleged to be Zimbabwe's richest man in cables released by WikiLeaks and written by a US ambassador in 2001. The sources of his wealth include ill-gotten gains obtained while secretary for finance in ZANU-PF as well as illegal mineral exploitation in the Congo. His first destination in seeking support for a move against Mugabe was Beijing, Zimbabwe's biggest investor, where Mnangagwa fled after being deposed. Mnangagwa has appealed to China, the US and Britain by advancing himself as “engagement”-friendly and an opponent of Mugabe's recent turn to policies of “indigenisation” that penalised foreign investors in mining and other key industries.

The man immediately in charge of the palace coup, commander of the Zimbabwe national army, General Constantine Chiwenga, is also fabulously wealthy, with an extensive real estate portfolio, control of some 100 companies, a fleet of luxury cars and a mountain of jewellery.

The extent to which the military is managing events was epitomised by the statement issued Monday by Chiwenga. Flanked by Air Force of Zimbabwe Commander Perrance Shiri, Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri, Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services Commissioner-General Paradzai Zimondi and acting Central Intelligence Organisation head Aaron Nhepera, Chiwenga warned against any action by anyone that would “threaten peace, life and property.”

Zimbabweans, he declared, had to “remain calm and patient, fully observing and respecting the laws of the country,” while “your defence forces...remain seized with the operation codenamed ‘Operation Restore Legacy.’”

Chiwenga urged students protesting at the University of Zimbabwe “to be calm and to proceed with their educational programmes as scheduled.”

Lining up behind the impeachment move is Morgan Tsvangirai, head of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The former leader of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) now speaks of his desire to see all the hungry fed as a reason for temporarily siding with the Mnangagwa faction. But he and the trade union bureaucracy are aligned with bourgeois forces in Zimbabwe and major imperialist powers, including Britain and the United States.

Set up in 1999, the MDC stood against ZANU-PF as the defender of International Monetary Fund-imposed structural adjustment programmes and white farming interests when Mugabe was forced to make a show of opposition to both to preserve his popular base. In an interview with the *South African Mail and Guardian* in 1997, Tsvangirai denied that the IMF caused Zimbabwe’s social crisis, insisting that it was because “We are not living within our means.” He continued: “At the stage we had reached, some form of structural adjustment was needed... We had to relax and open up and allow business to operate without these constraints.”

The MDC has been a consistent advocate of this agenda and backed Western moves to depose Mugabe that involved crippling sanctions that destroyed the livelihoods of millions.

London and Washington have over time combined backing for the MDC with seeking relations with factions within ZANU-PF, including that led by Mnangagwa. The ailing Tsvangirai still enjoys international backing, with the US and Britain insisting that the military must give way to civilian rule in arrangements that include the MDC and other opposition tendencies. The MDC is considered to be an important political lever against China’s influence within ZANU-PF.

Another party concerned that Mugabe’s departure from office be carefully managed is the African National Congress government in South Africa. President Jacob Zuma heads a regime that has just as decisively betrayed its promises to the working class and poor farmers in return for a share in their exploitation through governmental positions and business connections forged by means of the policies of “Black economic empowerment.” He arrives in Harare today from a meeting in Angola of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to discuss how the power transition will continue.

Yesterday, Reuters reported a cable it received weeks prior to the palace coup from South Africa’s Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). The cable reports that sixteen African leaders in the SADC led by Zuma were encouraging Mugabe to step down in the knowledge that the army was ready to remove him. Dated October 23, the CIO source warns that Mugabe would face “fierce resistance from the military” if Mnangagwa was removed and that “the military is not going to easily accept the appointment of Grace.”

The report adds that Reuters “reported in September that Mnangagwa was plotting to succeed Mugabe, with army backing, at the helm of a broad coalition. The plot posited an interim unity government with international blessing to allow for Zimbabwe’s re-engagement with the world after decades of isolation from global lenders and donors.”

Mnangagwa yesterday, in his first public appearance since the coup, offered his vision for a “new Zimbabwe” that was in line with this aim, describing “a national, not party political, project” that was “not a job for Zanu-PF alone...”

The imperialists are calculating that opportunities will indeed be opened up to them. Prime Minister Theresa May said that the UK, “as Zimbabwe’s oldest friend,” will do all it can to help “rebuild” the Zimbabwean economy.

Whatever rebuilding is planned involving Britain and other imperialist powers will be at the expense of the working class and rural poor. The essential issue posed before the working class of Zimbabwe is to assert its interests independently of all factions of the bourgeoisie. That class and not just Mugabe has proved incapable of freeing the masses from imperialist domination and creating the conditions for genuine and lasting social and economic progress.



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