

Where to Zimbabwe?

Looking beyond Mugabe

In the previous *Labour Bulletin* Lloyd Sachikonye reflected on challenges that the Zimbabwean labour movement faces. Here he assesses different scenarios that have been mooted for Zimbabwe's recovery, South Africa's political role in this, and posits some ideas for the country's economic recovery.

When the Southern Africa Development Community summit was convened in Lusaka in August 2007, the loudest applause was reserved for Robert Mugabe, the "liberation hero". It was difficult, as it has been in the past, to explain away this emotional response. The applause drowned out the sombre message that Zimbabwe has become 'a sinking Titanic'. An economic rescue package for the crisis-ridden country was pushed to the margins. The summit communiqué concluded that Zimbabwe's political and economic

crisis had been exaggerated.

Meanwhile, the country's official hyperinflation reached 7 600%, but this is widely believed to be an underestimate. The actual rate is in the region of 15 000%. A government price control campaign Operation Reduce Prices in June 2007 has made hyperinflation worse and the parallel black market, on the back of serious shortages of basic commodities.

Food shortages are experienced by 1.4 million people but this will soon increase to about 4 million. Endemic fuel shortage together with intermittent cuts of electricity and water undermine the economy with some enterprises now operating at 30% capacity. Job lay-offs have become widespread as factories downsize or close due to raw material shortages while shops and supermarkets have little stock. Who is indulging in a *denial syndrome* on Zimbabwe? It certainly is not a quarter of the population that has migrated and the several million that are short of food.

SOME SCENARIOS FOR RECOVERY

This article assesses Zimbabwe's prospects for recovery and reconstruction when change eventually comes to that country.

The past seven years have witnessed a flurry of scenario building. The scenarios range from a hand-picked successor to Mugabe, the ascendancy of a reformist faction in Zanu PF, a government of national unity that would include the opposition MDC (Movement for Democratic Change), regime change leading to an MDC government, to a coup and collapse into chaos and

anarchy. Whatever scenario or combination of scenarios ultimately unfolds, Zimbabwe will require a tremendous amount of strategic planning and resources to initiate and sustain a recovery.

One position is that a change in *regime leadership* might be just enough for the wider international community including the West to renew serious engagement with Zimbabwe. However, it is also acknowledged that if patronage networks, corruption and authoritarianism persist, there would be little point in insisting on constitutional reform as elections would continue to be rigged. In any case, with about six months remaining before the 2008 elections, the electoral system, government monopoly of the press and draconian laws against freedoms of assembly and expression, the possibility of free and fair elections is remote.

Meanwhile, the negotiations between the Zanu PF government and the MDC continue to hang in the balance. With little time left before the elections, the ruling party is unlikely to forfeit any advantages that it commands.

Another position is that the challenge for the opposition movement is to break through this rigged system and make political headway in spite of the repressive structures and practices of the Zimbabwe state. Historical precedents demonstrate that repressive *authoritarian structures* can be eroded. Even the formidable *apartheid system* became vulnerable to popular protest and



resistance. But it required massive and strategic *political mobilisation* on an unparalleled scale.

While the MDC has been adept at mobilisation in urban centres and amongst workers, it has not been successful and creative in reaching out to *rural areas and constituency* where the majority of over 60% of voters are based. The MDC could also reach out more to the middle classes. The best performance of the party was in the 2000 election when it won the majority of seats in three out of eight rural provinces. Since then, the combination of state patronage and repression has translated into reduced rural support for the MDC. The major challenge for the opposition party is to build a broad *national democratic alliance* that reaches out beyond the cities, towns and the working class.

The formidable task would be to build a strategic alliance of workers, middle classes, small farmers, youth and students as well as progressive sections of civil society. However, this would require *sustained mobilisation* that might include unconventional approaches beyond public rallies that are often banned and use of media which is heavily restricted. Above all, it would require extending political mobilisation beyond the *electoral cycle*.

It would be a limited vision for the opposition movement to confine its transformation to an electoral machine with no vision

beyond the capture of power. It was partly due to this *short-termism* and opportunism that divisions emerged in the MDC in 2005, divisions which continue to haunt it. Like charity, democracy should begin at home; internal party democracy should be nurtured and protected. The opposition movement therefore needs to revive its commitment to democratic values, constitutionalism and social equity. The process of building a democratic society in Zimbabwe will be a painstaking one over the *long haul*. Otherwise a mere change of government and leadership would represent a circulation of elites rather than *structural and democratic transformation*.

SOUTH AFRICA'S ROLE

This is the wider context in which South Africa's *quiet diplomacy* may be assessed. As a powerful regional player, so much has been expected from South Africa to play a *leadership* and *mediatory* role. However, the 'quiet diplomacy' approach has accomplished little to date.

Admittedly, the options available to South Africa over Zimbabwe are limited. Megaphone diplomacy may not necessarily work better. It did not work in applying pressure on the repressive Abacha regime in Nigeria in the 1990s.

Sanctions could hasten the economic and political meltdown already under way. But South Africa would thereby cede opportunities

to players such as China besides its corporations such as Eskom sustaining losses through previous lending. Sanctions would also send conflicting signals to its SADC (Southern African Development Community) and AU (African Union) partners while banishing the possibility of a mediatory role. In any case, those loudest in calling for sterner measures against the Mugabe government do not incur such responsibility and cost as South Africa who provides refuge to an estimated three million Zimbabweans.

In our view, the large challenge for the Mbeki government is one of leadership in mobilising opinion and a consensus within SADC over the issue of change in Zimbabwe. Such a consensus, which would be a powerful signal, does not yet exist and this gives succour to the "liberation hero" in Harare! Yet South Africa, as an immediate neighbour, would be destined to play a major role in reconstruction in Zimbabwe when change arrives.

IDEAS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

There will be immense challenges for an economy that has shrunk considerably and for a society that has been traumatised during the past seven years. There has been recourse to governance by 'operations' including the infamous *Operation Restore Order/Murambatsvina* in 2005 that resulted in internal displacement.



Empty shelves in a Zimbabwean supermarket

There is useful and insightful work including policy research that is being conducted to rejuvenate the economy and society by such think-tanks as the Zimbabwe Institute based in South Africa, IDASA (Institute for Democracy in South Africa) based in Pretoria, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London and the Centre for Global Development (CGD) in Washington amongst others. They broadly agree that it would be a Herculean task to engineer a recovery. The key priorities would centre around the following aspects:

- Any recovery strategy would have to be *home-grown* rather than *donor-led*
- The donors' role should be to provide the necessary funding to assist the national recovery plan. Here the role of the United Nations and SADC would be important especially through multi-stakeholder forums.
- Useful lessons for the recovery strategy could be drawn from reconstruction experiences in post-conflict states and *fragile states*.
- A major challenge to address in designing a recovery plan would be the lack of reliable data on economic and social indicators (including health, education and migration statistics) for the last seven years. A scaling up of research in this area would be necessary to inform a reconstruction plan.
- A great deal of investment and planning capacity would be vital

in the resuscitation of sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, mining and the utilities. In this regard, the institutional policy making and implementation capacity of the state would need considerable strengthening after years of 'policy drift' and ad hoc 'crisis management'.

- A rational programme of land and agrarian reform would help redress the historical injustice of colonial expropriation, address the associated issues of equity and fairness, correct the effects of current patronage and mismanagement, stimulate agricultural production, and promote food security and rural development.
- The Zimbabwean diaspora should be drawn upon to play an active role in the recovery and reconstruction process. The existing networks of professionals across the world and in Zimbabwe should be supported to design sectoral frameworks for recovery and action in areas such as health and education.
- Finally, there would need to be a *de-militarisation* of political and economic structures and processes. Reform in the security sector would be paramount to eradicate practices of arbitrary arrest, partisan policing, torture and political violence.

From being the second most industrialised economy on the continent as well as the regional breadbasket, it is common

knowledge that Zimbabwe's economy is now a pale shadow of its former self. South Africa and SADC would have an important opportunity in the recovery process, an opportunity that they should seize. It is however the harder part, harder than proffering platitudes and thunderous applause as at the August SADC summit.

At certain critical junctures, Africa appears to shy away from collectively seizing opportunities to redeem itself. Crisis situations such as Rwanda and Somalia in the 1990s, and Darfur currently amongst others tend to be 'ignored' as they unfold. There is often inertia and a vacuum in leadership by better-endowed and positioned states to avert or address the unfolding crisis until it is too late. The role of South Africa and SADC is no exception with respect to Zimbabwe. If the present drift continues, history may not judge them kindly.

Fortunately, the same cannot be said of civil society in this region. It has acted as a conscience on the Zimbabwe question and its solidarity is deeply appreciated by most Zimbabweans. The solidarity initiatives by labour movements, churches, human rights organisations, women's groups and the media have kept the issue of authoritarianism alive in the public domain. This should continue to be the case. In the final analysis, while change and recovery should be *primarily* initiated by Zimbabweans themselves, there is plenty of scope for solidarity, assistance and partnership by the regional and international community. LB

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