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Zimbabwe's latest stolen election

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Zimbabwe's July 31 elections mark the end of the road for the MDCs. After four inglorious years in government side-by-side with ZANU-PF, the reduction of MDC, this formerly mass-based party of workers and rights activists into a divided, compromised and impotent shadow of its old self stands confirmed by its inability to mobilise any significant challenge to the obvious manipulation of the poll. Saddled from the onset with a pro-capitalist programme and a leadership co-opted by imperialism – having discarded ZANU-PF as a liability and danger to capitalist interests he safeguarded since coming to power – the MDC now stands so compromised that ZANU-PF could in this election comfortably stick to mere vote-rigging and bribery while desisting from murder and torture.

Both ZANU-PF and the MDCs have shown they cannot take Zimbabwe out of the dead-end of independence on a capitalist basis. It is high time for working class people to unite to build a new, genuinely revolutionary mass political force prepared to fight on a programme for democratic reforms and socialism – the only way forward for Zim along with Africa and the world.

Another stolen election

According to news reports, the post-election talk on the streets of Harare is that while the 2008 elections were 'stolen from Ts'vangirai', this time the poll was 'stolen from the people'. The '61% majority' for the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front's (ZANU-PF), giving the 89-year-old Mugabe another five years as president cannot be taken seriously given the grave flaws that were apparent long before the vote and underlined by the many reports of transgressions during its course.

The election date was decreed by special presidential power by Mugabe in mid-June, before the Electoral Act could be amended in line with the new constitution and in violation of many of its provisions – e.g. not allowing the 30 days required for voter registration to run their course or the 30 days stipulated between nomination of candidates and elections. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission released the voters' roll literally on the eve of the elections, allowing no time for accountability. Election day saw as many as one million deceased 'voters' on the roll while up to one million (living) voters were denied registration or turned away from polling stations, according to the Zimbabwe Election Support Network which had 7000 observers on the ground. Other worrying reports

included rural headmen ordering and apparently checking the votes of their subjects, bribery by ZANU-PF officials, 'lost and found' ballot papers, etc.

The MDC allows ZANU-PF return from the dead

While the elections were clearly a sham in form, an even more serious problem is that even if they would have been formally 'free and fair', in substance there was no choice representing the interests of the majority of workers and poor. After being so overwhelmingly discredited at the time of the 2008 elections that no amount of intimidation, beatings, killings and vote-rigging could contain the defiant MDC-vote, ZANU-PF has fed through the life-line it was handed by MDC and the SA mediators in the form of the Government of National Unity (GNU) allowing a zombie-like from the dead.

The MDC that was born out of the magnificent mass struggles by Zimbabwe's organised workers, students and civics which took off in the mid-1990s in protest against the neo-liberal ESAP (Economic Structural Adjustment Programme) imposed by Mugabe under instruction by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which devastated the economy, and for constitutional reform betrayed its working class base.

Although it was working class-based mass forces – the Zimbabwe Council of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and a range of rights-organisations – that formed the MDC, its leadership ensured that it was formed as a pro-capitalist party from the onset in 1999. When Mugabe crossed the class line, as far as capital was concerned, by turning to the land grabs to rebuild his support base, the MDC was selected as the darling of both Zimbabwean and Western big business and quickly declared its programme as one of taking the privatisation and 'liberalisation' of the economy further along the lines of the very ESAP it had emerged to fight.

On this basis, the MDC became conscious agents of Western imperialism and failed to give its mass base primarily among workers and urban youth any clear direction. To contain their working class base in appeasement of imperialism, they increasingly toned down the methods of mass actions in favour of talks, 'prayer meetings' and zig-zagged on issues of programme and tactics, e.g. on the question of participation in flawed elections, which led to a split of the MDC into two factions, MDC-T and MDC-Ncube.

Despite all of this, the idea of some sort of 'change' gained massive support also in the rural areas when the economic downfall accelerated into complete meltdown in the late 2000s and the two MDCs together won 57% of the 2008 vote despite the usual manipulation of the process and ZANU-PF's campaign of brutal terror against their supporters.



Rightly boycotting the 'run-off' that was imposed by an effective military junta, the Joint Operations Command, appointed by Mugabe, the MDCs however failed to formulate and mobilise for any real alternative. Out of fear for the inherent logic of a working class-led mass protest movement, which could have finished off Mugabe at that point, the MDC leaders instead went from momentum to impasse, falling right into the SA-engineered 'negotiated settlement'-

trap by entering into the GNU with ZANU-PF the following year. The MDCs' assumption of responsibility without power in the GNU rescued the utterly discredited ZANU-PF, meant they shared responsibility for the continuing suffering of the masses and rampant corruption in government, in which MDC leaders joined their former ZANU-PF tormentors.

A 2012 opinion poll conducted by the US-based organisation Freedom House showed a decline in MDC support from 38% in 2010 to 20% in 2012, while ZANU-PF support grew from 17% to 31% (*New York Times*, 2013/04/13). The 2013 election, however unreliable the results, indicates that the MDCs have eventually compromised themselves fatally.

Cleverly playing on the loss of credibility of MDCs 'in power', ZANU-PF has regained some space partly through pseudo-radical measures such as the 'indigenisation' of the mining industry, which is an attempt at a more effective version of SA's BEE policies and certainly not a step towards socialism or genuine 'economic freedom' for the masses – but mostly through the vacuum left by the MDCs rendering themselves irrelevant. This is an indictment on the MDC leaders.

The roots of the impasse

Mugabe's regime which inherited an impotent neo-colonial capitalist state from the Rhodesian regime of Ian Smith, incapable of satisfying the expectations of the masses, was repressive against the brutally disappointed masses of the Zimbabwean working classes from the onset. This regime rode to power 33 years ago on a pseudo-'socialist' bubble, carried by the heroic struggle by the tens of thousands of young ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters. Despite the Chinese-Stalinist inspired 'socialist' rhetoric, his intention was never to overthrow capitalism.

A victorious guerrilla struggle was enough to destabilise the Rhodesian regime of Ian Smith, but not to unseat the Rhodesian capitalist ruling class, firmly backed by SA capital and Western imperialism – this would have required a mass workers' struggle. The absence of independent working class organising meant the Rhodesian ruling class and British imperialism remained entrenched enough to impose the continuation of capitalism in independent Zimbabwe.

Mugabe's government immediately on assuming power came into conflict with the black workers, peasants and youth. Inqaba Ya Basebenzi, the predecessor of Izwi Labasebenzi, pointed out in July 1986 how it had crushed workers' strikes, e.g. of the railway workers and bus drivers in 1982, brought in draconian new (anti)labour laws, evicted urban poor from their shacks and rural poor from off white-owned land. In addition, the regime's divide-and-rule went to the atrocious extent of killing 20 000 in Matabeleland in the 1980s.

The ESAP reversal, from 1990, of the limited social reforms and gains which had been possible in the 1980s devastated the economy, wreaking the kind of misery on the Zimbabwean masses which SA township and rural residents and workers can easily identify with. For this Mugabe was praised by the Western imperialists who today oppose him because they're worried that the tides of working class revolt his policies has provoked will sweep capitalism away along with his increasingly discredited regime, which since 2000 had to rely on rigging elections just to stay in power.

The 2013 elections have shown the cold-blooded reality that without a socialist programme to overthrow capitalism working and poor people and the youth are stuck under the grinding juggernaut of neo-colonial capitalism. The root of the chain of impasses is the failed colonial revolution, which had the misfortune of being led by the middle class and therefore could not bring about relief or terminate the socio-economic ills imposed upon colonial people by both local and foreign capital under the aegis of world imperialism.

In Zimbabwe, like in all the former colonial countries, burning issues like poverty, inequality, unemployment, poor education, disastrous healthcare, homelessness and the national question will continue to be a devastating nightmare, whether ZANU-PF or the MDCs or both are at the helm. The fact that the countless sacrifices in the course of the struggle for liberation, in its various phases, have so far led down a dead-end is a tragedy that must be faced by workers, poor communities, peasants, youth and students in Zimbabwe by building their own class-independent organisations, including a new mass party on a socialist programme.