

Mobutu's final days in Zaire

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EARLY MAY saw the Mobutu regime in Zaire enter its death throes. The rebel forces of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo Zaire (ADFL) continued to close in on the capital Kinshasa.

In town after town, the conquering rebels have been met by jubilant crowds eager to hasten the end of President Mobutu's corrupt dictatorship.

Mobutu, Africa's longest surviving dictator, came to power in 1966 after the CIA had engineered the overthrow of the 'African Socialist' regime of Patrice Lumumba. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Mobutu remained a reliable ally of imperialism, especially favoured by the USA. During the 'new cold war' it played an invaluable role in destabilising the Angolan regime, operating as a base for the CIA's military operations in support of UNITA in Angola.

For over a quarter of a century the Mobutu dictatorship provided a stable regime for the super-exploitation of the Zairean masses as French, US, Belgian and South African multinationals looted the enormous mineral wealth of the country. In the process Mobutu and his cronies took billions of dollars in bribes and profits and stashed them away in private bank accounts throughout Europe. After the collapse of Stalinism Mobutu's increasingly corrupt and unstable dictatorship not only lost its former importance but became a positive embarrassment for US imperialism.

Collapse

The looting of the state treasury had taken on such gigantic proportions that the regime was becoming dysfunctional, even for the multinationals. By the 1990s the country's economic infrastructure, especially its road and rail transport, was on the verge of collapse. Civil servants were left unpaid, soldiers took to extortion to replace unpaid salaries.

Regionalism grew as the central state institutions began to weaken. Today in Zaire there are three separate currencies which cannot be used outside their own region.

In 1990, under US pressure, Mobutu cynically agreed to a transition to democracy which was no nearer to completion seven years later. Mobutu's prevarication opened up divisions between the imperialists themselves. France and Belgium became Mobutu's principal backers in the 1990s, their own capitalists being rewarded with the usual lucrative contracts. This backing was vital to the Mobutu regime's survival. Given the chaotic state of the country and the unpopularity of the dictatorship it is little wonder that Laurent Kabila's rebels have been welcomed in each town they have conquered in their 1,000 mile trek across Zaire.

The civil war started in October 1996, when exiled Rwandan Hutu militia in camps near Goma attacked local Zairean Tutsis with the backing of Mobutu's regime. Backed by the Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian armies, Kabila's hastily formed ADFL fought back in defence of the Tutsis and against the Zairean army.

The collapse of Mobutu's armed forces in the face of a well-armed and highly motivated rebel force, which grew in numbers with every victory, mobilised the opposition to Mobutu. General strikes rocked Kinshasa and forced Mobutu to try and incorporate opposition politicians. Etienne Tshisekedi was appointed prime minister but lasted less than a week in the job! His crime was to offer the ADFL six cabinet seats. His

sacking sparked another solid one-day protest general strike.

While socialists and democrats should fight for the downfall of the corrupt Mobutu regime we must give not one iota of political support to Laurent Kabila or his allies. Kabila leads the 'People's Revolutionary Party' (PRP) the major force in the rebel coalition. This organisation came out of the guerrillaist movements of the late 1960s, influenced by Maoism and Guevarism. Like other 'Marxist-Leninists' of the Robert Mugabe type, Kabila has moved rapidly to the right and now happily cuts deals with the imperialists.

When Mbuji-Mayi, the city at the centre of the diamond-rich region of East Kasai, was captured on 6 April, the ADFL wasted no time in signing a series of deals guaranteeing multinational corporations, like RTZ and De Beers, exploitation rights on hugely profitable terms. Kabila even found himself entangled in a corporate battle when the Anglo-American Corporation complained that American Mineral Fields Inc. had been awarded a \$540 million contract before the tendering process had even been completed!

Kabila is no friend of democracy. While the PRP have spent 13 years recruiting and training a guerrilla army they have, like many movements built on guerrillaism, remained cut off from the Zairean masses and their struggles. This explains why, while they are extremely popular for getting rid of Mobutu, they do not have wide political support amongst the population in the towns.

The PRP have responded by setting up 'party cells' in the 'liberated areas' where workers and peasants are encouraged to attend 10-day political education programmes. At the same time they have imposed a ban on the activity of all other political parties.

This ban was intended to last at least a year, while the ADFL ruled and built up a party of cadres. As Mwama Mawampanga, a party official, tried to explain:

'But that doesn't make it a dictatorship. During that time, [other parties] should go to the library and polish up their political programmes ? and then if they beat us in an election, we will concede.'

After 30 years of dictatorship and super-exploitation at the hands of the multinationals, the Zairean workers do not need another year before being allowed to assert their rights. The Zairean masses must immediately demand an end to all political bans and proscriptions and fight for the fullest democracy.

All the imperialist forces are still wary of seeing Zaire fall directly into Kabila's hands. He remains an unknown and perhaps dangerous quantity. US Special Envoy to Zaire, Bill Richardson declared: 'The United States believes there can be no military solution to the crisis, but rather a negotiated settlement leading to an inclusive transitional government and free and fair elections.'

Deal

The hammering out of a deal on board a South African naval ship is part of this plan. The US wants Mobutu quietly pensioned off, after all it has to reward even its wayward dictators.

More importantly the US wants a deal that ensures a peaceful transition endorsed by all the imperialists, including France, so that the region is not plunged into further rounds of guerrilla struggles covertly backed by this or that imperialist power. It also wants Kabila hemmed in by the 'democratic process' so that the imperialists can use their power and wealth to sponsor political parties of their choice and keep any new government under control.

The deal that has been struck leading to the ceasefire has not been finalised as we go to press. Rest assured it is a deal that the masses of Zaire can have no confidence in. Mobutu and his friends will retire to enjoy their riches. 'Free elections' will take place under the guns of the imperialists presently encamped in the Congo. The masses have yet to have their say.

Socialist alternative

The workers and poor peasants of Zaire need to reject both the imperialists' 'negotiated settlement', and any attempts by Kabila to impose a one-party 'transitional' government which will continue to sign away Zaire's rich resources to the multinationals.

The workers in Kinshasa can take the lead in breaking these reactionary plans by building on their general

strikes. If they build new organisations, their own workers' councils, they can move on to seize control of Kinshasa. Against the imperialist plans for a government over which they will have no control, the masses must fight for the immediate convening of a revolutionary constituent assembly elected by all over 16 years. Such an assembly could only begin to address the burning needs of the masses if it was protected by the armed people against Kabila's Stalinist one-party state plans and against the imperialists' manoeuvres. It could only advance towards fulfilling those needs if it went on to recognise a government based on real workers' councils.

The workers and peasants of Zaire can only begin to repair the damage inflicted on their country if they seize control of the mines, factories and refineries and big farms, and of the assets of the imperialist multinationals. Only by establishing workers' control, and using the enormous mineral wealth of the country to rebuild the roads, railways, schools hospitals and industry through democratic socialist planning, can any real solution be offered to the poverty stricken masses of the city and countryside.

For this to happen the workers need to organise their own party, a revolutionary party which fights for all the toilers in Zaire and presses on towards a socialist revolution.

I Down with the imperialist deal!

I Imperialist troops out of Zaire and the Congo!

I For the immediate expropriation of all the wealth of Mobutu and his collaborators!

I For the expropriation of the imperialist holdings!

I Place Mobutu on trial and demand the imperialist banks immediately send back all looted assets from Zaire!

I For a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly!

I For a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government!

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