

Zimbabwe: Zanu-PF clings onto power

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IN August, Emmerson Mnangagwa managed to gain just enough votes, 50.8 per cent, to win Zimbabwe's presidential election, thus securing the post that he gained by force in the November 2017 military coup that ousted Robert Mugabe. That slim majority means that the ruling ZANU-PF candidate did not have to face a second round against his rival, Nelson Chamisa of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), who gained 44.3 per cent.

Opposition parties won majorities in almost all the urban centres, including in the capital Harare, and among oppressed ethnic groups like the Ndebele people. They soon discovered what Mnangagwa, nicknamed 'the Crocodile', has in store for them, when police and other state forces raided MDC offices, arrested its leaders and physically attacked its post-election rallies, killing at least six people.

Chamisa appealed against the result but lost his case, albeit apparently without putting forward much evidence of actual electoral fraud. Indeed, ZANU-PF won over 144 of the 210 parliamentary seats contested, demonstrating that it does still have a real electoral base.

There were election monitors from various countries, including the USA, China and the EU, albeit not the UK, due to its imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe. These monitors reported minor irregularities, but did not question the result. The irony of China's rulers being an authority on electoral matters will of course not be lost on the Chinese people; nor on Zimbabweans, for that matter, given that Mnangagwa flew to Beijing to seek Chinese approval a few days before he launched his coup against Mugabe.

Neoliberalism or neoliberalism?

Clearly, some of Mnangagwa's support derived from his role in getting rid of a hated dictator. A military coup it might well have been, but it was also accompanied by huge celebrations on the streets.

This jubilation however has since largely subsided in the cities, as well as in those parts of the country where memories remain of the Crocodile's role as ZANU-PF's security chief, overseeing the genocidal massacre of over 20,000 Ndebele people in Matabeleland between 1982 and 1987. But in large parts of the countryside, where two-thirds of the population live, a ZANU-PF effectively under new management continues to embody the spirit of anti-colonial resistance.

Naturally, this illusion could not be further from the truth. ZANU-PF's 'People's Manifesto' euphemistically stated:

'We are now in a New Dispensation under the leadership of ZANU-PF, where the focus and preoccupation of the new administration is opening the country for business, fighting corruption, creating jobs, modernising the public sector and promoting investment, economic empowerment re-aligning to an investor friendly trajectory leading to economic growth and employment creation.'

Wages, trade union and democratic rights, crucial public services and tax breaks will all now be ?realigned? to the needs of foreign imperialist investors. The only real difference with the Mugabe era is that Mnangagwa will now court US and British as well as Chinese investors, in a bid to play off one imperialist camp against the other. Theresa May?s trade tour of southern Africa in August emphasised the UK?s eagerness to take up this offer.

To pave the way for Britain?s dropping of economic sanctions, which is expected soon, Mnangagwa has promised to compensate evicted white former landowners, has offered 99-year leases to those remaining, and has even suggested incentives to return for those who emigrated to Zambia and elsewhere. No wonder the Crocodile proved a hit in January in the Alpine resort of Davos, where he was the first Zimbabwean leader to be invited to the World Economic Forum in January.

Time to move away from the MDC

Another factor for ZANU-PF?s victory however lies in the fact that what the opposition offered was little better, and in many ways was actually far worse. The MDC?s manifesto effectively promised ?agricultural reform? in reverse, by opening up a free market for arable land. This could only have the effect of increasing land hunger and the monopolisation of the land, by returning redistributed lands to their (white) former owners.

The MDC went even further than ZANU-PF did in offering ?ease of doing business? reforms for foreign investors. Moreover, it was also tainted by its years of loyally passing anti-working class legislation when it was a junior partner with Mugabe in 2009-13.

The reason why the MDC continues to have mass support among large parts of the working class is that it began life as a workers? party, having been set up in 1999 by the trade union bureaucracy. Its initial leader Morgan Tsvangirai was General Secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU).

Despite its origins however, the MDC courted support from Western imperialism and from white farmers right from the start, even going so far as to promise to implement the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Structural Adjustment Programme in full. White capitalist agribusiness quickly came to control many of the levers inside the party, and this year the MDC stood in alliance with six smaller capitalist parties. Rather than call for a new party, however, the ZCTU leadership has, opportunistically and in an unprincipled manner continued to support the MDC-led alliance.

New workers? party

What is needed is a new working-class party. Zimbabwe?s trade union movement, while it has suffered defeat and retreat in recent years, is still one with a proud record of militancy.

The rank and file of the unions, in an alliance with the urban and rural poor, need to break free from the death-grip of the established union leaders. They can begin to do this by organising resistance to the clampdown and the employers? offensive that will surely follow the election. They can call local and national conferences to discuss the lessons of the MDC?s failures and betrayals, and take steps towards setting up a new party, under the control of the rank and file and with a revolutionary anti-capitalist and anti-colonial programme.

This new party should also reach out in international solidarity, and seek ties with similar moves afoot in neighbouring South Africa in particular. The goal of a new party should be to complete the struggle for national independence in the only way possible, by fighting for a Socialist Federation of Africa as part of a socialist world.

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