

# Africa Backs Zimbabwe, But Buys Globalization

by Lydia and David Cherry

After the bitter election fight in Zimbabwe, some African leaders have intervened there to mitigate the political mischief and economic wrecking operation run by Britain and its allies. As this work proceeds—likely at a slow pace—Zimbabwe will continue to be a test case for Africa’s sovereign independence from the British empire.

Despite general African acceptance of President Robert Mugabe’s victory over his British-backed challenger—including endorsements by the official observer teams from South Africa and Nigeria—the Presidents of those two countries were instrumental in suspending Zimbabwe from British Commonwealth councils. This is a kind of slap on the wrist against Mugabe for having played rough, to counter British interference in his country’s politics. How did this zig-zag come about? Both South Africa’s President Thabo Mbeki and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo personally recognize the validity of the election and support Mugabe’s land reform program.

## Tony Blair’s Threat

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the British establishment went into a rage over the outcome of the election, since the British-backed candidate, Morgan Tsvangirai, president of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was defeated. It had been decided beforehand, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Australia, that the Zimbabwe election would be assessed by a troika of Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Mbeki, and Obasanjo, using the report of the Commonwealth Observer Mission (COM) as their only basis. Since the COM included members from countries whose governments had expressed extreme prejudice against Mugabe before the election, it was a rigged game. Nevertheless, the two Presidents had the option to break out of the game by refusing to act because the COM report was so prejudiced; or, of rendering a judgment on the basis of a broader range of testimony, for the same reason.

Obasanjo and Mbeki came under great pressure from the British to agree to an adverse judgment, and impose on Zimbabwe an indefinite suspension from the Commonwealth, along with economic sanctions. Blair threatened to torpedo the G-8 nations’ funding for Mbeki’s and Obasanjo’s cherished New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) if they didn’t come through. The two buckled under, but managed to whittle the punishment down to a token one-year suspension, no economic sanctions, and no demand for a re-

run of the elections. At a London press conference, Australian Prime Minister Howard announced the result while Mbeki and Obasanjo stood silent.

Mbeki’s and Obasanjo’s ill-fated NEPAD initiative, to which 19 African countries are committed, is a plan for collective commitment to “democracy and good governance” in exchange for a promise of billions of dollars of investments in Africa from the G-8 industrialized countries. The plan means more globalization and free trade poison for Africa. Mongezi Guma, director of the South African Council of Churches’ ecumenical service for socio-economic transformation, commented, “NEPAD correctly states that current ‘globalization’ policies fail to lift Africa out of socio-economic decline, but then goes on to say that Africa therefore needs more of the same policies.” NEPAD is not based on any physical-economic conception of Africa’s development, but adopts the axioms of free trade, making African leaders vulnerable to Blair’s blackmail.

The chief party whip of South Africa’s ruling African National Congress (ANC), Nosiviewe Napisa-Ngakula, put the case against Britain best: She insisted, in a parliamentary debate on March 19, that Blair’s prejudging of the Zimbabwe elections, and his vow never to accept a victory by Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party, “was not only unfortunate, but extremely dangerous, coming as it did from the head of a former colonial power. . . . We [South Africans] would be extremely naive if we were to believe that Zimbabwe’s future was not linked to our own.”

Napisa-Ngakula’s fingering of Britain followed ANC Secretary General Kgalema Motlanthe’s naming of Britain as the “hostile force” seeking to destabilize Zimbabwe. Said Motlanthe, as he left a three-day ANC executive committee meeting on March 18, “Britain and America seem to have an agenda to remove President Mugabe. . . . We will never align ourselves with the U.S. and Britain. If it is possible for Tony Blair to say the election won’t be free and fair unless one side wins in Zimbabwe, they’ll do the same for South Africa as well, tomorrow.”

In an opinion column in Kenya’s *East African Standard* on March 18, Chaacha Mwita wrote, “In Mugabe, Africa has incidentally found an issue on which they are united against the West. . . . It is difficult to see how Tsvangirai could have won, when he is depicted at home and abroad as a puppet of the West.” Mwita says the election was a referendum on Mugabe’s land redistribution plan: “Few, including myself, may like Mugabe. But many, and that includes me, would cast a vote for him if only to get a piece of land they call theirs.” He concluded, “What’s distressing, is the Western media’s assertion that for Zimbabwe to survive economically, Mugabe has to style-up and cozy-up to the West and the IMF in beggary.”

## Reconciliation and Economic Recovery

It will be a difficult task to stabilize Zimbabwe, given the political polarization and economic collapse to which Britain

has made so generous a contribution. Nigerian President Obasanjo told BBC World Service on March 20, "Whether you run two elections or three elections is not the issue—the problem of Zimbabwe is the reconciliation [between Mugabe and Tsvangirai], the revival of the economy, the shortage of food." But, he added, the political polarization makes it impossible to solve the economic problems.

Obasanjo is but one of numerous intervenors in Zimbabwe's crisis. Also involved are leaders of various factions and strata in Zimbabwe, and leaders of member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC); in particular, South African President Mbeki, SADC chairman Bakili Muluzi (who is President of Malawi), and Mozambican President Joachim Chissano. The ANC and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) also have particularly crucial roles to play. There is an historically strong alliance between COSATU and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU)—although the same is not true of COSATU and Tsvangirai's political party that came out of the ZCTU in 2000.

In his inaugural address on March 17, Mugabe declared, "Never again shall Zimbabwe be a colony," but he also offered an olive branch to Tsvangirai and his MDC, saying: "As we move now to face up to the two daunting tasks of Zimbabwe, stabilization of our economy and nation-building, we call upon all, including the MDC, to come closer and work together with us as we deliberate in Parliament and even outside Parliament. Let us recognize there are areas where we are different, but there are areas where, even if we want to differ, it is impossible to differ. If you are a Zimbabwean national, you can never be something else. We have the same destiny."

Mugabe stressed that "government must and will invest in productive employment-generating activities, including the infrastructure. . . . We have set out to evolve an integrated rural development strategy that covers provision of enhanced agricultural extension services, infrastructural rehabilitation, dam development, rural electrification."

These words, however, fell short of the kind of generosity towards the Movement for Democratic Change, that would bridge the chasm between the two parties. After all, immediately after Mugabe's victory, paramilitary youth groups were carrying out a campaign of intimidation against known or suspected MDC supporters, with little interference from police. And Tsvangirai and some of his aides were facing imminent treason charges.

South Africa's President Mbeki and Nigeria's President Obasanjo met with Mugabe and then Tsvangirai on March 18, in an attempt to get the two to meet and work together on economic development. The effort failed; Tsvangirai foolishly hopes that sanctions against Zimbabwe will be advantageous to him, and apparently thought that any such meeting might have forestalled the Commonwealth or other sanctions. He still hopes Mugabe can be forced to hold another election.

## ANC States South Africa's Role

When the Mugabe government went ahead with the treason charge against Tsvangirai on March 20, the African National Congress announced that the decision was part of the "process of healing, with the aim of closing the wounds forever." The ANC thus seems to have decided that reconciliation between Mugabe's ZANU-PF and the MDC would be impossible with Tsvangirai at the MDC's helm.

The pro-government newspaper in Harare, *The Herald*, reported on March 26 that—according to its sources in the MDC—Tsvangirai felt the heat and wanted to negotiate with Mugabe, but was dissuaded by "Young Turks" (pro-British ultras) at an MDC national executive council meeting. They now threaten to remove him from the party's presidency.

Tsvangirai knows what he has been doing, in counting on British threats and policies against Zimbabwe's government. When *EIR* interviewed Tsvangirai in 1996, he was head of the ZCTU trade union movement, and was the one opposing the IMF program; President Mugabe, at that time, accepted that destructive program. Tsvangirai told *EIR* then, that the British "are totally patronizing; they still think we are their colony. . . . IMF officials are literally taking over the running of the Ministry of Finance. . . . The Structural Adjustment Program [austerity regime] is making the government totally helpless in directing the resources to where the majority of the people live. The IMF says that the government must keep their hands off, and allow the markets to determine what should happen. Our trade union federation argues strongly against this." Tsvangirai at that time said that Mugabe "is a bit muddled about the whole thing. He was forced into this program."

The theme of cooperation for economic development, sounded by Mbeki and Obasanjo, is also consistently that of the South Africa's independence party. ANC Secretary General Motlanthe on March 17 emphasized that "hostile forces, particularly the United Kingdom," were mobilizing to destabilize Zimbabwe; and insisted that only a united Zimbabwe would defeat that destabilization. Mbeki has now made Motlanthe responsible for overseeing South Africa's contribution to the reconciliation process in Zimbabwe. ANC whip Napisa-Ngakula called on Zimbabweans to unite to "defeat the enemies they have been facing for a long while now, of poverty, landlessness, unemployment, and disease." She noted that South Africa had experience that could contribute to the ideal of peace and nation-building, since South Africans had succeeded in keeping their own country from blowing up.

South Africa will hold discussions with Botswana and Mozambique about getting the three countries to actively participate in a recovery program led by Zimbabwe, according to South Africa's Minister of Trade and Industry, Alec Erwin. The focus will be on the critical areas: stepping up agricultural production and regaining food security; and increasing employment. Erwin noted that economic sanctions against Zimbabwe would not work if members of the SADC do not back them.