

In the shadow of empire

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The dominant account of the debacle in Zimbabwe is one which dismisses both history and the international context as irrelevant. The focus of blame and outrage is on events within Zimbabwe, and specifically on the actions of its president, Robert Mugabe, since the late 1990s. Yet for the last 120 years, Britain has cast its shadow over Zimbabwe.

The British point of view was set out succinctly by the UK's former Foreign Secretary, Lord Peter Carrington:

For 15 years [following independence in 1980] Zimbabwe didn't do too badly [...] It was all right and then things went wrong so Mr. Mugabe played the race card, and then that didn't work because all the [land] redistribution went to all the friends and the people who didn't do anything about it. And then subsequently he's become more and more authoritarian and you've seen Zimbabwe, the strongest economy in Africa, go down the drain. And it's a disgraceful state of affairs.

Lord Carrington's comment was made in a BBC 'Breakfast with Frost' [programme](#) in 2005. The other participant in the interview was Zimbabwe's Ambassador to the UK, Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, who intervened:

Well let us not forget, you know, Lord Carrington referred to the race card. The question of race has never been very far in Zimbabwean politics. We all know that during the 90 years of colonial rule the land was forcibly taken from the black majority.

The black majority was brutalised, we never heard of any human rights [...] And indeed the question of land being owned by white people in Zimbabwe was not introduced by President Mugabe. It was introduced by the British colonial administration. Therefore, any land reform programme in Zimbabwe had to acquire land from white people, that's how the race sector comes in, in order to distribute to the black majority.

The noble lord responded by dismissing the colonial past, as if it had no effect on shaping the present:

This is absolutely irrelevant to what is happening in Zimbabwe at the present time. The white farmers and all the rest of it, that's all history. What has happened since, there's been an authoritarian government, oppressing the people of Zimbabwe, you've seen what's happened to the currency, you've seen what's happened to the food, they're starving.

Land, lies and bullets

The territory which was then known as Matabeleland and Mashonaland was acquired by the British Empire through a combination of state-sponsored entrepreneurial activity, deception,

the exploitation of hostilities between indigenous leaders and groups, and superior military technology. Following the discovery of gold deposits in the area, the wealthy adventurer and politician Cecil Rhodes, based in the British Cape Colony in what is now part of South Africa, sent envoys to persuade Lobengula, the Ndebele king, to accede to a mineral concession. In 1888, Lobengula eventually signed what became known as the Rudd Concession, in exchange for 1,000 rifles, ammunition, a river patrol boat, and a monthly payment of £100, having been assured that only ten white miners would arrive.

On the basis of this contract, the British Government awarded Rhodes' company, the British South Africa Company (BSAC), with a Royal Charter; this gave the company the authority and military backing of the Crown to administer the region on behalf of the Empire, enshrining Britain's exclusive of possession of Matabeleland and Mashonaland to the exclusion of the other European colonial powers which were also scrambling for Southern African territory- the Portuguese, the Germans and the Dutch Boers.

The following year, 300 colonial policemen and 200 settler 'pioneers' established a British military base in Mashonaland; they named it Fort Salisbury after the British Prime Minister at the time, Lord Salisbury- this base would become the capital city of the colony. Enticed by the promise that they would each receive gold mining claims and 3,000 acres (1200 hectares) of land, hundreds of European settlers began to arrive.

Realising that he had been tricked, King Lobengula repudiated the Rudd Concession, and attempted to appeal directly to Queen Victoria. He was rebuffed. Then, when approached by Edouard Lippert, who was believed to be a representative of Boer and German interests, Lobengula signed another contract, which included the leasing of tracts of land; hoping thus to play the colonialists off against each other. But Lippert sold this contract to the BSAC, and the company then used the clauses of the Lippert Concession as legal cover for carving up Ndebele land and apportioning it to the British settlers.

This double deception was followed by a military campaign. After a punitive Ndebele raid against some Mashona villages near Fort Victoria, the British, declaring that they were acting to protect the Shona people, made war on King Lobengula's forces, devastating the Ndebele warriors with the awesome firepower of the newly-invented Maxim gun. In the process, the British military forces and the BSAC seized loot including 200,000 head of cattle. Demoralised and defeated, Lobengula died in 1894.

Subsequently, as a Zimbabwe government background [paper](#) records:

...the acquisition of black land had begun in earnest both for crop and livestock production as well as for speculative purposes. Henceforth the dispersal of the African populace into mostly marginal lands would be embarked upon with a ruthless determination following the creation of the Gwaai and Shangani Reserves in Matabeleland in 1894.

Historical records of the period leading to the 1896-97 First Chimurenga/Imfazwe, depict a story of a systematic violation of the rights and dignity of the indigenous people under white domination. Confirming the official sanctioning of this policy, the Rhodesia Herald of 19th April 1895 reported thus:

"For the Rhodesian it was absurd to take the untutored savage, accustomed as he is from time immemorial to superstitious and primitive ideas of law and justice, and suddenly try to govern him by the same code of laws that govern a people with many centuries of experience and enlightenment."

The 1896-97 [war] was therefore fundamentally a struggle for the recovery of lost land and dignity.

Known in Zimbabwe as the First Chimurenga or First War of Independence, the insurrection of 1896-97 involved both the Ndebele and the Shona peoples; it was planned by Mlimo, who was the spiritual leader of the Ndebeles. In the belief that the indigenous people had been subdued, the British South Africa Company sent most of its military contingent in Matabeleland off to a mission of white-on-white violence, the ill-fated 'Jameson raid' against the Boer settlers in the Transvaal, who were allied to Britain's imperial rival Germany.

Seizing the moment, the indigenous forces launched the revolt; combining siege warfare and guerilla tactics, the Shonas and Ndebeles killed hundreds of white settlers. Realising the importance of Mlimo as a gifted tactician and inspirational figure, the British sent two officers behind enemy lines to assassinate him. Surprising him in his cave while he was performing a ritual dance, alone and unarmed, the officers shot him just below the heart. The assassins later [described](#) Mlimo as "60 years-old, with very dark skin, sharp-featured, and a cruel, crafty look".

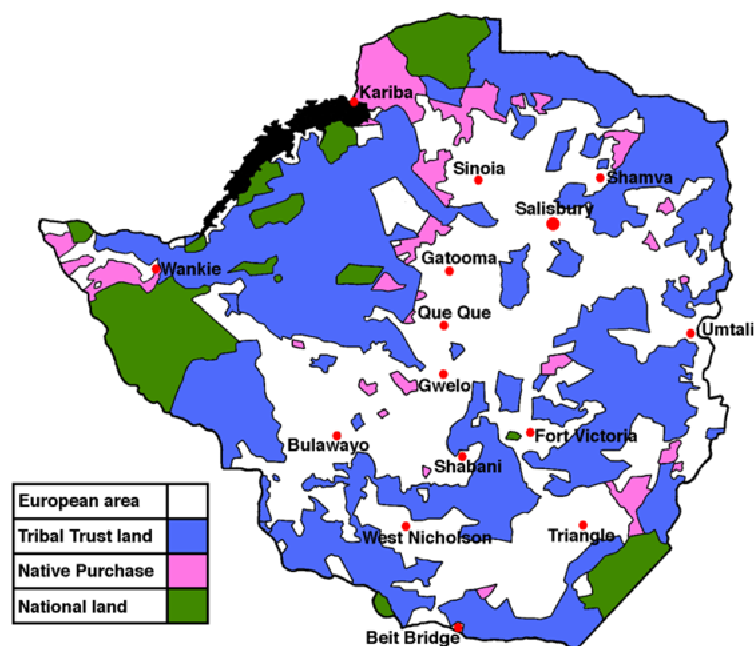


**Print from a British newspaper in 1896-
The Assassination of Mlimo.**

But clearly, not as cruel or crafty as the British. Bereft of their leader, the Ndebele forces surrendered, though the Shonas fought on. Despite their superior weaponry and the arrival of British troop reinforcements, it took 18 months for the colonial forces to regain full control.

Having secured clear military supremacy, the British proceeded to step-up the process of fast-track land redistribution. The Native Reserves Order in Council of 1898 set up 'reserves' for the indigenous people; these were areas generally of low rainfall and hence low agricultural productivity; also, as can be seen from the map, the reserves (which were later re-named 'tribal trust lands') were scattered and non-contiguous. By 1914, 2,000 white settlers were operating as commercial farmers in the colony, which was at first given the name of Rhodesia, then Southern Rhodesia, then later simply as Rhodesia again, in honour of its chief conqueror, Cecil Rhodes.

In 1930, the Land Apportionment Act gave legal sanction to an explicit racial distribution of farmland; it designated 51% of the farming area of the colony as a zone in which only whites were allowed to own land. This position was reinforced by the Land Husbandry Act of 1951 and the Land Tenure Act of 1969.



Land apportionment in Rhodesia, 1965

This legislation was determined within a political system of democracy for the tiny minority of white settlers and exclusion for the indigenous black majority. The 1961 constitution of Southern Rhodesia, adopted with the approval of the British government, glossed this racist political domination by means of an elaborate system which gave the vote to people who owned a specified amount of property, earned a specified annual income, and had completed a specified number of years of schooling- in other words, the whites.

Thus:

*By 1976, a total of 4,5 million Africans were crowded into the infertile and unproductive Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). The net result was overstocking, over population, serious environmental damage, severely reduced agricultural productivity and increased poverty in the communal areas.

The farms of the Africans in the TTLs were small patches of often arid land, averaging less than three hectares per household, while the 6,000 white-owned commercial farmers owned huge tracts of 1,200 hectares or more; and many of these whites owned several farms.

Whitewash for white rule

For Zapu and Zanu, the black political parties which arose in the early 1960s, the fight to overthrow the white regime and establish an independent Zimbabwe was not merely about abstract principles; the practical issue of overturning the racist distribution of land was a key element of the struggle. Both these parties were banned and their leading members were imprisoned; these included the Zanu activist Robert Mugabe, who was arrested in 1964 for "subversive speech", and then spent almost eleven years in a Rhodesian jail. Zanu and Zapu turned to armed struggle.

It was Lord Salisbury, who was British prime minister when Zimbabwe was conquered by the British, who remarked of "the sentiment that the sun never sets on the British Empire"; as Rajani Palme Dutt added, it was also an empire on which the blood never dried. But by the mid 1960s, the British sun had fallen low in the African sky. The subject nations were fighting for, and gaining, independence. The United States, which was now the vastly superior capitalist power, had its own agenda which demanded that the UK should release its colonies- in order that the USA could further extend its own hegemony.

For Britain, the question was no longer whether to decolonise, but how to decolonise. The ideology and practice of white racial supremacy, previously a key element of British colonial rule, was becoming an embarrassing encumbrance. The British Government had to salvage some credibility from the wreck of empire, and to have openly supported the continuation of explicit racial supremacy would have made the UK into a focus of opposition and unity for the black independence movements and governments in Africa, and worse, would have driven the Africans into a closer alliance with the USSR and/or China.

So, when the former British settlers led by their Prime Minister Ian Smith sought to further their own interests by seeking independence on the basis that the whites, 3% of the population, would continue to rule the country, it was politically impossible for the British Government to agree. As a BBC [article](#) reported:

British authorities were only prepared to permit independence on the basis of giving the black majority population a fair share of power.

Under Mr Smith's system there will be white minority rule, where 220,000 white Rhodesians will enjoy privileges over nearly four million black Rhodesians.

On 11th November 1965, the white settlers declared unilateral independence (UDI) from Britain. Militarily, the UK could easily have crushed this impertinent coup d'etat by a tiny racist minority within its colonial territory; and had it done so, it would have the support of the vast majority of Zimbabweans. The BBC noted:

Both Rhodesian opposition parties - the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu) have [...] called upon the British Government to use force to suspend the Smith Government.

As was shown in many previous military actions, and later by the sending of troops to occupy Northern Ireland by a Labour Government in 1969, and to make war in the Malvinas / Falklands by a Conservative Government in 1982, Britain was not averse to defending its colonial territory by the use of armed force. But in the case of Rhodesia, the UK strangely declined this option; resorting instead to the use of financial and trade sanctions, which for several years the white settler regime in Salisbury was easily able to subvert. On 15th November 1965, the Soviet Union issued a [statement](#) which contained this angry and penetrating analysis:

The South Rhodesian racialists would not have dared to carry out their criminal plans [ie, UDI] without a deal with the colonialists, who have permitted the racist régime in Salisbury to acquire economic and military strength and who have rendered it all-out support.

Nor could this crime have taken place without the blessing of the governments of other N.A.T.O. countries, and in the first place the United States of America. The creation of yet another centre of racialism-this time in Southern Rhodesia-is part of the overall plan of imperialist circles to erect an obstacle in the way of the national liberation movement of the African peoples, the waves of which are drawing nearer and nearer to the last bulwarks of colonialism.

The Soviet government fully shares the view of the independent African states, expressed in decisions of the Organisation of African Unity, that the ruling circles of Britain will never be able to escape responsibility for this crime against the African peoples, for the national tragedy of the Zimbabwe people, who for many years now have been waging a stubborn struggle for their rights.

At the present time the government of Great Britain, in words, is condemning the actions of the South Rhodesian authorities and is asking the [United Nations] Security Council to examine the question of Southern Rhodesia. It is clear, however, that these statements of the British government are at present only an attempt to whitewash its actual policy.

As long ago as 1961, having put into effect a "constitution" worked out by the British government itself which formalised the racist system, Britain laid the foundations for the present régime of the racialists' colonial rule over millions of Africans.

Following that, she armed the South Rhodesian racialists and helped them to consolidate their positions by encouraging the colonial alliance of Southern Rhodesia with the racist régime in the Republic of South Africa and the

Portuguese colonialists in Angola and Mozambique [...]

Loyal to its steadfast policy of supporting the national liberation movement of the peoples, the Soviet government declares its full solidarity with the Zimbabwe people and again confirms its readiness to co-operate with the African countries in rendering them all-out support in their just struggle for genuine national independence.

The Soviet assessment that Britain and the USA were effectively complicit in the Rhodesian UDI was shared by many Africans.



1965: following UDI, racist coup leader Ian Smith waves and smiles as he enters 10 Downing Street for discussions with British PM Harold Wilson.

As the Zimbabwe *Herald* noted in an [editorial](#) on July 30th 2008, it was the socialist countries, chief among them the USSR and the People's Republic of China, that provided Zimbabwe's liberation movements with the military, financial and diplomatic solidarity which eventually enabled them to overcome the racist regime. [NB- the *Herald*, like other Zimbabwean organisations supportive of Zanu-PF and the government, is subject to concerted attacks by hackers who are frequently succesful in disabling its website.]

The newly independent African states, including neighbouring Zambia which had won freedom from British rule in 1964, and (following its independence from Portugal in 1975) Mozambique, allowed Zapu and Zanu to establish military bases on their territory. The South African apartheid government provided economic and military support to the Rhodesian regime.

The land at independence

By the late 1970s, the successes of the armed liberation struggle had made it apparent that the racist regime was doomed, and Ian Smith accepted the proposal of the British government to negotiate the transfer of power to the black majority. In these negotiations, which culminated in 1979 at the Constitutional Conference at Lancaster House in London, the issue of land ownership was one of the key issues.

Britain (represented by foreign secretary Lord Carrington) played the part of honest broker,

while the USA worked behind the scenes. Dr I S G Mudenge, Zimbabwe's Minister of Foreign Affairs, summarises the position taken by the Patriotic Front (Zapu and Zanu) as follows:

The liberation movements led by the Patriotic Front made it clear that land was at the heart of the matter. They also made it clear that they did not have the resources to buy their land from the white settlers, neither did they think it historically and morally correct to tax the colonially deprived and impoverished Zimbabwean population in order to raise such resources since the land was never bought from them in the first place. They stressed that the British government, as the former colonial power was, morally and legally, bound to compensate the white settler farmers for the land to be acquired for resettlement.

As Margaret Lee of the University of Oslo [observed](#):

During the negotiations to end the war of liberation held at Lancaster House in England in 1979, Britain and the US insisted that white political and economic privilege be maintained.

The British-drafted Lancaster House Constitution stipulated that whites, who represented approximately 1 percent of the population, would retain 20 seats out of 100 in parliament, and would vote on a separate voting roll for seven years after independence. In addition, whites could not be fired from civil service positions for ten years. The most controversial provision was that related to the protection of private property. In addition to upholding the principle of private property, the Constitution stipulated that the government could only acquire land on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis. Only underutilized land could be compulsory acquired. The government was required to pay the market value of the land in foreign currency. Such payments had to be made promptly. This provision of the Constitution was to remain in effect for 10 years.

Mugabe, along with Joshua Nkomo, leader of the Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF ZAPU), refused to agree to the provision of the Constitution relating to the land until both Britain and the United States promised that money would be forthcoming for purchasing white commercial farms for land resettlement.

Their leaders having made these substantial concessions, the people of Zimbabwe finally achieved independence and majority rule in 1980. The election of Zanu rather than Zapu as the majority in the new Zimbabwe parliament was a surprise to most foreigners, and subsequently the most influential explanation of this has focussed on the fact that Zapu was mainly supported by the minority Ndebele ethnic group, whereas Zanu drew its main support from among the majority Shonas.

But neither of the parties espoused policies which favoured one of the black ethnic groups against the other; and at the outset of their armed struggle in the 1960s, each of the parties had activists and substantial influence among both the Ndebeles and the Shonas.

The ethno-centric account of the emergence of Zanu's Robert Mugabe, rather than Zapu's Joshua Nkomo, as the leader of Zimbabwe in 1980 misses the crucial matter of the difference of military strategy between the two parties which were allied in the Patriotic Front. Zapu concentrated most of its military efforts on building, at its bases in Zambia and Angola, a formidable army and air force, equipped with tanks, armoured personnel carriers, artillery and jet fighter planes; these forces, thousands of Zimbabwean revolutionary fighters who were trained and supplied with modern equipment by the USSR, were being readied for a conventional military strike against the Rhodesian armed forces and administrative centres. This growing threat was a key factor in the decision of white racist leader Ian Smith decision to accede to negotiations.

Meanwhile Zanu, which received arms from the Soviet Union and China, put its main efforts into guerilla warfare in the countryside, projected from its bases which were mainly in Mozambique; in doing so, it demoralised the white racist civilian population and the Rhodesian armed forces.

The military strategies of Zanu and Zanu were complimentary, and together they forced the Smith regime to concede power- however, the fact that Zanu was more present on the ground in the countryside where the vast majority lived, its guerilla fighters able to educate the people as well as harassing their oppressors; this in the end made Zanu the more potent electoral force when the Zimbabweans were at last allowed to decide who should lead the nation.

After Zimbabwe's first general election in 1980, Zanu was in government; but still the black majority controlled neither the most productive land, nor the industry of the country. Following the 90 years of white colonial rule, the allocation of land in 1980 was as follows:

Land category	Area in Hectares (Million)	Percentage
Large Scale Commercial (exclusively white-owned)	15.5	39
Small Scale Commercial	1.4	3
Communal Areas (the former Tribal Trust / Native Reserve lands)	16.4	42
State Farms	0.3	1
National Parks	6.0	15
TOTAL	39.6	100

At the British government's insistence, the property rights of the approximately 6,000 former colonial farmers had been guaranteed for the first ten years of independence. The land could not be confiscated by the government; it could not even be bought on a compulsory basis by the government. If any of the white farmers wanted to sell their land to the government, it would be up to the farmers to decide the price. Land re-distribution following independence therefore proceeded very slowly.

But after 1990, the constitutional limitation agreed at Lancaster House no longer applied- and still the land reform proceeded slowly. Even by 1996, sixteen years after independence, only 3.5 million hectares, less than 23% of the white-owned commercial farmland, had been bought by the government and re-distributed to indigenous people.

One of the difficulties was a series of legal challenges by the intransigent white farmers,

which delayed the government's attempts at compulsory purchase of land. But the government faced an even more serious difficulty, that of resources. This problem was two-fold: the state of Zimbabwe had to come up with the cash, not merely that which would be required to buy the land from the commercial farmers, but also to provide the infrastructure, machinery, fertilisers and other material inputs, and the training which would be needed by the new black farmers.

As Zimbabwe's foreign minister Dr I S G Mudenge [stated](#):

It was recognized from the outset that a programme to reverse the pattern of land ownership entrenched during the colonial period would be a massive one which would call for substantial sums of money. Figures ranging from US\$1.5 billion to US\$2 billion were mentioned by key British and American players in the search for a figure that might approximate the financial requirements of the mammoth task at hand. Considering the outlay of \$200 million made available for Kenya's land reform at independence, those figures were considered to be safe estimates, allowing for inflationary factors.

Britain and the USA had promised to help fund the costs of land reform; in the event the UK provided a miserable £43 million; the USA provided nothing.

Will they? Can they?

It was not only the land which remained outside the control of the black majority. Zanu was committed by its party constitution to the establishment of a socialist society, but the other sectors of material production, mining and manufacturing, remained largely owned, not only by whites, but but by foreign investors. In 1985, 48% of manufacturing was still controlled by foreign companies and individuals, and the government was doing little to alter the 90% foreign ownership in the mining sector. Marcia Burdette and RJ Davies of the University of Zimbabwe [noted](#) in a paper published in 1987:

...the new government's stance on foreign capital has been quite restrained. Little nationalization has occurred and, when it has, the former owners have either been compensated or have become partners in a joint venture.

In an interview with *Time* magazine published in March 1980, Robert Mugabe [spoke](#) pragmatically to his Western audience:

We are socialist. We will espouse socialist principles, but our principles must take cognizance of the realities of our country—the history, traditions and particular circumstances in which we find ourselves. The country is based on free enterprise and is therefore capitalistic. We have to accept that we will not bring about an immediate disruption of the economy; we can work in gradual phases until we get to our goal. In the civil service, of course, racialism will have to go. But it would be a very foolish man who would immediately take over and overthrow the system.

This pragmatism should be understood in the global and historical context of Southern Africa during the late Cold War. Policies recognisable as moving Zimbabwe in a socialist direction would have resulted in Britain, the USA and the European Community taking action to isolate

Zimbabwe economically and diplomatically, preventing the country from importing industrial and agricultural technology and depriving it of export opportunities. By the early 1980s, the socialist bloc of countries headed by the USSR was (for reasons considered in an [analysis](#) published by *21st Century Socialism*) declining in its rate of economic growth, and China was at that time an insignificant player in the world economy. It was doubtful whether the socialist countries would be able to substitute for the loss of good relations with the West.

Worse: as every African politician was aware, Mozambique and Angola, which following their independence from Portugal in 1975 had explicitly adopted the 'non-capitalist path of development' and nationalised their industries, were as a result subject to very effective proxy warfare by the USA which was providing finance, weapons and military advice to dissident movements- these, with the assistance of armed incursions by apartheid South Africa, were able to inflict devastating strikes on economic targets, cause misery among the population, and block social progress. If Zimbabwe sent the wrong signals to the West, the risks would be extremely high.

In their thoughtful paper, published in over 30 years ago but which still has great relevance today, Marcia Burdette and RJ Davies remarked:

The pre-eminence of foreign-owned companies in the productive sectors of the country [Zimbabwe] meant that the new government would have to move cautiously in lessening this influence for fear of weakening mining, manufacturing and commercial agriculture. The new government would find its freedom of action constrained by the power of foreign capital and its desperate needs for new machinery, technology, and even raw materials. Under such pressures [...] the government might take a cosmetic approach to social changes, masking the continued foreign-capital dominance through joint ventures and partial takeovers. Extensive nationalization was unlikely because the government lacked the money [...]

In addition to the acknowledged dependence on foreign capital, a form of 'internal dependence' would exist in the new state with the African majority government dependent on White businessmen and technicians who own or staff many factories and most commercial farms. Such individuals and companies would have to be handled gently as they had both substantial capital for reinvestment and also, perhaps more importantly, vital skills and experience.

The paper by Burdette and Davies concluded on this note:

It remains to be seen whether the new government, already demonstrating signs of personal accumulation for those in power, will be side-tracked into extensive corruption and disorganization. The negative economic conditions from 1982 through 1986 have greatly lessened room to manoeuvre. One could also argue that with rapid inflation, the basic needs of the poorest sectors will not be met in the near future.

Will the government take up some of the suggestions of their early sympathetic supporters and the current generation of academics? Will the leaders engage in serious land reform, lessen foreign involvement through careful state planning and industrial integration while under pressure from South Africa and internal classes clamouring for access into a capitalist economy? Can they?

As was seen in the example of post-apartheid South Africa, 'personal accumulation' by members of the former revolutionary elite, whether through corruption or by legal means, became almost inevitable once it had been accepted that capitalist rather than socialist principles would prevail.

Economic and structural impoverishment

Nevertheless, there were some successes during the 1980s. As a World Bank [report](#) admitted:

To reduce Zimbabwe's deep socioeconomic disparities, the government that came to power at independence in 1980 invested heavily in health and education and, through parastatals [state-owned enterprises], in rural development and the productive sectors. This led to an increase in public expenditures, which for most of the 1980s made up 45 percent of the GDP.

As a result, the report conceded:

...social indicators improved, particularly in health and education...

But, as the report asserted, "per capita income stagnated." Neglecting to mention the declining prices of basic commodities during the 1980s, through which the whole of sub-Saharan Africa suffered as a result of the loss of income from exports, the World Bank blamed Zimbabwe's economic 'stagnation' on high government spending and excessive state involvement in the economy.

In 1991, the Zimbabwe government ended any semblance of working in 'gradual phases' towards the goal of socialism. It agreed to implement a neo-liberal 'Economic and Structural Adjustment Program' (ESAP) designed by the World Bank.

Although local forces- as Marcia Burdette and RJ Davies described them, the 'internal classes clamouring for access into a capitalist economy'- played an important part, the decision by Zanu-PF to accept ESAP must be understood in its global and historical context. The USSR and East-Central Europe had fallen to rampant capitalism; China had taken the path of market reforms towards capitalism. Not only socialism- but also social democracy, state welfare, and state-led economic development- all were in global defeat and disarray before the triumphant resurgence of privatisation and market forces, led by Britain and the USA.

The majority of governments in the Third World succumbed to World Bank and IMF programmes during this period. Zimbabwe went with the flow. The World Bank described it thus:

The ESAP sought to transform Zimbabwe's tightly controlled economic system to a more open, market-driven economy. The restructuring sought to promote higher growth and to reduce poverty and unemployment by (1) reducing fiscal and parastatal deficits and instituting prudent monetary policy; (2) liberalizing trade policies and the foreign exchange system; (3) carrying out domestic deregulation; and (4) establishing social safety net and training programs for vulnerable groups [...]

It dismantled the foreign exchange control system, freed all current account

transactions from exchange controls and import licensing, removed public monopoly over the marketing of agricultural commodities, deregulated the financial sector, lifted price controls, and abolished investment licensing for all but large foreign investments. By dismantling many of the economic controls, the reforms established a better basis for self-sustaining growth.

The ESAP programme not only failed to increase economic growth, it reduced economic growth. It also resulted in de-industrialisation, rising unemployment and greater poverty. The number of households classified as poor rose from 40 percent in 1991 to over 60 percent in 1995. The World Bank blamed this on bad weather and a failure to implement the ESAP programme with sufficient consistency and enthusiasm:

A severe drought in 1992 left Zimbabwe in its worst recession since independence [...] Although the government reduced spending significantly, from 46 to 39 percent of GDP between 1989 and 1994, the cuts did not go far enough.

For most Zimbabweans, the cuts had gone quite far enough.

The rupture

It was during the ESAP period that President Mugabe reached the height of his popularity in the West- to the extent that in 1994, Britain's then Conservative government summoned him to receive an honorary knighthood from the Queen. But within Zimbabwe, popular support for Robert Mugabe and Zanu-PF was crumbling. Only 32% of eligible voters turned out in the presidential election of 1996 (by comparison, turnout at the 1985 general election was 84%, and the turnout at the 1990 presidential election was 54%). In a report for *AfricaFiles* in January 1996, Richard Saunders [noted](#):

What is indisputable [...] is the role of Zimbabwe's failed structural adjustment programme (known by the acronym ESAP) in fostering the widespread, popular disaffection that now confronts the ruling party.

As Saunders remarked, one of the political effects of ESAP was to begin to turn key elements among the ruling party's core supporters against the party and the government:

ZANU(PF)'s apparent abandonment of many of its old constituencies has been met with a rising chorus of complaint, in which a broad range of popular groups have harmonised on broadly popular-nationalist leitmotif. The 'new' nationalism contains different themes, including criticisms on the one hand of the continued dominance and privileges of white private society; and on the other, of the controlling presence of foreign capital and international financial institutions. It's a compelling mix that resonates deeply in black society, and threatens to undo ZANU (PF)'s links to its mass constituency in civil society.

But instead of allowing Zimbabwe some breathing space, the Western-controlled financial institutions demanded more:

Zimbabwe now appears firmly lodged in a quagmire of mounting debt, generally inadequate growth and plummeting living standards. Most

macroeconomic indicators show continued overall decline and little relief on the horizon. [...] Rather than recommending the rescheduling or cancellation of some or all of this debt, however, international donor agencies have applied greater pressure for bigger sacrifices at home. In May [1995], the IMF temporarily suspended its ESAP-related lending programme in reaction to Zimbabwe's failure to "gain control" of its deficit.

And while in this vulnerable economic position, also suffering a weakening base of support at home, the Zimbabwe government now faced a rapid reversal in its relationship with the Western powers. Along with the failure of ESAP to deliver on its promises, two other major factors were salient in this. One was the cessation by Britain of its- hardly generous- financial support for Zimbabwe's land redistribution programme, followed in November 1997 by the infamous letter from Britain's then Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, in which she repudiated the UK's responsibility to contribute to the costs of land reform in its former colony. It amounted to a unilateral declaration of amnesia.

The letter, addressed to Zimbabwe's then Minister of Agriculture and Land, Kumbirai Kanga, included the following paragraphs:

I should make it clear that we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe. We are a new government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish, and as you know, we were colonised, not colonisers.

We do, however, recognise the very real issues you face over land reform. We believe that land reform could be an important component of a Zimbabwean programme designed to eliminate poverty. We would be prepared to support a programme of land reform that was part of a poverty eradication strategy but not on any other basis. I am told Britain provided a package of assistance for resettlement in the period immediately following independence. This was, I gather, carefully planned and implemented, and met most of its targets. Again, I am told there were discussions in 1989 and 1996 to explore the possibility of further assistance. However, that is all in the past.

If we look to the present, a number of specific issues are unresolved, including the way in which land would be acquired and compensation paid. Clearly it would not help the poor of Zimbabwe if it was done in a way which undermined investor confidence [...]

I am sure that a carefully worked out programme of land reform that was part of a programme of poverty eradication which we could support would also bring in other donors whose support would help ensure that a substantial land resettlement programme such as you clearly desire could be undertaken successfully. If is [sic] to do so, they too will need to be involved from the start.

It follows from this that a programme of rapid land acquisition as you now seem to envisage would be impossible for us to support. I know that many of

Zimbabwe's friends share our concern about the damage which this might do to Zimbabwe's agricultural output and its prospects of attracting investment.

The claim that the 'diverse backgrounds' of members of the UK Cabinet, and specifically Ms Short's own Irish ancestry, absolved Britain from responsibility to assist Zimbabwe to overcome one of the most glaring legacies of British colonialism was most extraordinary.



Clare Short: "We do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe"

On the other hand, the arrogance of her other main argument- that Britain would provide assistance only on the basis that it, rather than Zimbabwe, would determine the nature and pace of the land reform- is quite normal in the context of international 'aid'; in which 'development assistance' becomes a post-colonial means of perpetuating the control, by rich nations, over the economic and political policies of poorer countries. Notable also is the assumption by the British government minister that 'poverty eradication' is only to be achieved by means of serving the interests of foreign investors.

An international donor conference held in September 1998 yielded a few promises, but no financial support was actually delivered. As Foreign Minister Dr I S G Mudenge [noted](#):

Out of the conference emerged a two-year Inception Phase located within the Second Phase [of land reform], which envisaged a donor-supported yearly acquisition of 1 million hectares of land for settlement over 5 years [...]

Virtually no progress was registered in 1999 on the Inception Phase, with the modest resettlement programme undertaken that year being financed solely by the Government of Zimbabwe. The lack of progress was a result of:

- * The reluctance of donors to make good [on] pledges made at the September Conference;

- * The resistance of commercial farmers to land reforms expressed through

legal challenge to the acquisition of almost all the 804 farms that government had gazetted and sought to acquire, forcing government to abandon the whole process;

* An unhelpful British stance on land reform in Zimbabwe, which had the effect of discouraging donors from participating in any practical manner.

The other salient factor in the rupture between Zimbabwe and the West was the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Zimbabwe, together with Angola and Namibia and under agreements concluded by the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), sent a military contingent to assist the Congolese government which was defending itself against invading troops from Uganda and Rwanda. Uganda and Rwanda were supported by Britain and the USA.

Zimbabwe was severely criticised in the West for this intervention. But it might just as pertinently be asked, 30 years after the de-colonisation of most of Africa- what business had Britain and the United States in backing Rwanda and Uganda against the DRC?

The Zimbabwe government abandoned ESAP. Policy shifted away from neo-liberalism and towards a re-assertion of state involvement in the economy. In December 1999, the London *Independent* [reported](#):

The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other donors have suspended aid programmes to Zimbabwe because of differences on economic management, especially government spending in the Congo.

The relationship- markedly one-sided but at least one of mutual toleration- between the state of Zimbabwe and the Western powers, had come to an abrupt end. In 2001, not only had international aid from the rich countries and international institutions been terminated, but Zimbabwe was placed under extra-territorial financial sanctions by the US government.

Back to the land

Within Zimbabwe, the protests in the late 1990s included actions by veterans of the liberation war who had suffered along with the majority of their compatriots under ESAP. Professor Sam Moyo of the Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies has remarked the significance of this in terms of the explosion of the long-festering land reform issue:

In 1997 there was a confrontation between the war veterans' leadership and the ruling party elite, in which they (war veterans) demanded that the government pay them huge pensions. This was more or less at gunpoint. Everybody missed that point, but this was a critical point. At that same point, at which they (the Zimbabwean government) were ... abrogating their macroeconomic policy, saying 'forget about this market business of buying land, just get land' ... the government in 1997 listed 1,471 farms and started a mass-based compulsory acquisition [...] Following that there was a movement in 1998 towards the donors conference on land reform and redistribution that took place in September, which led to a government proposal on what it would do in five years and its compromise of a more gradual 10-year programme.

... Now leading to this, there was a lot of doubt in 1998 among war veterans and different communities that the government would follow through with land redistribution, so there were about 30 high-profile land invasions that took place involving war veterans and chiefs and others who were basically saying we don't believe the deal you are going for is going to work and if you try to bluff us we are still going to get our land anyway.

That was not led in any formal sense by ZANU-PF, even war veterans were not fully behind it - there were different elements in different communities, who were individually challenging the whole programme. So in 1998 the government evicted all these land occupiers after this conference, saying 'we have agreed now and we are going to get money'. Come 1999 there was a whole year when donors wouldn't move (to provide funding) [...] This is when the Zimbabwe government saw in 1999 that they were not getting any money and they felt they were being isolated - which they were by the international community. This is where the idea of going it alone begins to emerge towards the end of 1999. This is where the hard line about introducing it into the constitution that was being drafted came ... When this hard line is rejected (in a referendum in February 2000) the war veterans and everybody who were part and parcel of this, started saying 'where has the donors' conference and negotiations taken you' ... and there was mass mobilisation across the country.

The British Government's current [position](#) is that it would support what it regards as the correct kind of land reform, ie, "a process that would be carried out within the rule of law; would be transparent and fair; and would be within a well-managed economic policy framework that contributes both to poverty reduction and Zimbabwe's economic prosperity"; but it opposes the land reform which is actually taking place, because it does not meet these standards:

Land reform carried out by the Zimbabwean government has not met these international criteria and has decimated the agricultural sector. Zimbabwe cannot now feed itself, and its capacity to generate foreign exchange from agricultural exports is greatly reduced. These factors contribute directly and substantially to the accelerating decline of Zimbabwe's economy, and its related consequences: soaring inflation, unemployment, infrastructural collapse and the exodus of skills; together with serious declines in GDP, life expectancy and the standard of living for most Zimbabweans.

Zimbabwean Government policy is at the heart of this [...]

The UK has honoured its commitments, from Lancaster House onwards, and remains willing to contribute to an equitable land reform programme. Its objections are to the arbitrary seizure of property, the use of that property as a means of political patronage rather than to benefit the needy, the use of illegal violence; and the destruction of Zimbabwe's agricultural productivity – and therefore its economy – in the interests of the few and at the cost of the many.

This is the Blair / Brown version of 'Catch 22'. Land redistribution should be well managed, and carried out only on the basis of the principles which Britain regards as proper (for 'rule of law', read: paying the market price for land). To carry out an extensive land redistribution on

this basis would cost an estimated £2 billion, which Zimbabwe cannot afford. And- as was shown by the period from 1980 to 1996, when Zimbabwe was following British orders on land reform and the UK assisted with only £44 million- the money will clearly not be provided for a thorough land reform, even on the proper British principles.

Effectively, the UK position is that there should be no extensive land reform programme in Zimbabwe.

In the British critique of land redistribution, the charge of "political patronage", or, as the media puts it, cronyism, figures strongly. In refutation, Dr Mudenge has asserted:

Distortions by sections of the press have promoted the impression that Government's land reform efforts in the past were based on favouritism, as they targeted educated elites. Such an impression results from confusing the programme to resettle landless indigenous people on land acquired for the purpose with the Commercial Farm Settlement Scheme [CFSS], a selective exercise that integrates resourceful and skilled indigenous farmers into the mainstream of commercial agriculture. Through this instrumentality, which predated Zimbabwe's independence, indigenous Zimbabweans are incorporated into a scheme from which they were excluded in the past.

Successive colonial government in the then Rhodesia used this Scheme to empower selected members of the white community who showed potential for agriculture. White veterans of the two world wars, senior civil servants, and members of the uniformed forces used to be allocated large farms on long leases for a nominal charge as rewards for good service. This scheme, which was heavily subsidized by the state, elevated many white personalities to the level they are today.

At independence, the Zimbabwean Government continued with the same instrument but now to empower blacks who had potential for commercial agriculture to produce for the marketplace alongside their white counterparts, who had been given a head's start by the arrangements of the past. Land used for CFSS is state land held on a lease - hold basis, and is different from land acquired for resettlement [...]

The CFSS is extended to any qualifying indigenous Zimbabwean. The list of beneficiaries of this scheme includes members of both the private and public sectors with diverse political backgrounds, among them the Secretary General of the MDC, an opposition party.

In an interview he gave in 2001, Professor Sam Moyo of the Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies commented:

This whole debate the British and others introduced about cronyism generated a lot of anger among the black elites. They were saying the Rhodesians who got land used to work for government, that they used to be in the ruling party and used to be former British soldiers, war veterans as well, who were rewarded with land for fighting the first and second world wars, settlers came and they were given grants, etc. So they were asking 'what is the standard'?

Sale of the century

In parallel to the confrontational and often disorderly struggle for land redistribution, another confrontational and often disorderly struggle developed: that between Zanu-PF and the new Western-backed opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The MDC was founded in 1999, at the initiative of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and headed by senior trade union official Morgan Tsvangirai. The MDC's trade union origins and connections have assisted the party to attract more sympathy among well-intentioned people at home and abroad than would otherwise be attained by a political organisation which is so clearly supported by right wing governments and media outlets in the West. But the policies of the MDC are not those which would conventionally be expected from a trade union-linked party.

Immediately on its foundation, the MDC moved swiftly into alliance with business interests, the white commercial farmers, and Western governments. Professor Patrick Bond, an academic with impeccable record as a critic of Zanu-PF, notes the [following](#) about the proffered alternative:

[During the mid to late 1990s] various urban labor and social movements—trade unions, human rights advocates, ghetto residents' groups, militant students, church and Jubilee anti-debt campaigners, women's organizations, community health workers, and many others—began to offer opposition [to the Zanu-PF government]. They came together in the streets during mass protests (1996–1999), then through a National Working People's Convention (February 1999), the National Constitutional Assembly (1999–present), and the launch of the MDC (September 1999). But very quickly, what had begun as a working-class party resisting Mugabe's neoliberalism, malgovernance, and repressive state control was hijacked by international geopolitical forces, domestic (white) business and farming interests, and the black petite bourgeoisie.

Fundraising from these sources had become crucial to the MDC's ability to contest the June 2000 parliamentary elections.

The word 'hijacked' is perhaps too strong as a description of this transaction; as an alternative, the phrase 'willing seller - willing buyer' might be considered. And the MDC made it clear that, should it gain power, there would be another sale- that of Zimbabwe itself, to the Western powers and their transnational companies. The party appointed Eddie Cross, the former vice-chairperson of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, as its spokesman on economic policy; in March 2000, Mr Cross boasted:

We are going to fast track privatisation. All fifty government parastatals [state-owned companies] will be privatised within a two-year time frame, but we are going far beyond that. We are going to privatise many of the functions of government. We are going to privatise the Central Statistical Office. We are going to privatise virtually the entire school delivery system. And you know, we have looked at the numbers and we think we can get government employment down from about 300,000 at the present time to about 75,000 in five years.

A few excerpts from the MDC's 2008 [programme](#) give some flavour of the party's current policies:

MINING

The MDC does not believe that government should be involved in running businesses and it will restore title in full to all companies. It does, however, believe that businesses should pay taxes to the government [...]

The MDC government will continue to operate the Mining Commissioner's Office but would overhaul it along the lines recently adopted for Mozambique. This will require the Commissioner to inspect all mining operations to ensure that they comply with the law and are recording true values and paying appropriate taxes. All other mining agencies will be privatized, except for the Mining Affairs Board [...]

MANUFACTURING

Private enterprise in general, and industry in particular, will be the engine of economic growth in a new Zimbabwe. Accordingly, the major focus of policy is to create an economic and socio-political environment that entrenches a vibrant mixed market economy in the country, provides existing businesses with the confidence to maintain and expand their enterprises, and encourages foreign direct investment. The MDC government will remove price controls and reverse the coercive indigenization proposals recently adopted [...]

Consistent with the establishment of a market economy, private entrepreneurs will make decisions regarding investment, production and pricing with the objective of making a sound return on their investment. The major role of government will be to aid and encourage the private sector by providing incentives and the required supporting infrastructural facilities.

The establishment of a vibrant enterprise economy will be underpinned by an unwavering commitment to:

- * The safety and security of individual and corporate property rights.
- * Opening industry to foreign direct investment and the unfettered repatriation of dividends.
- * The repeal of all statutes that inhibit the establishment and maintenance of a socio-economic environment conducive to the sustained growth and development of the industrial sector [...]

In the medium to long term, industrial development will be aimed at:

- * Ensuring that market forces play the central role not only in determining the nature, breadth and depth of investment in the sector but also in all pricing decisions for goods and services [...]

ELECTRICAL ENERGY

The MDC government will tender for experts to assess ZESA's capabilities and requirements and to establish the country's current, medium-term and long-term electricity requirements. They will be expected to come up with realistic solutions for rural electrification in the short term, as the regeneration of rural areas requires electricity. It is anticipated that rural areas will initially benefit

from favourable tariffs to enable new business start-ups. The experts will also be expected to recommend new cost-effective energy sources. The exact nature of the immediate actions in respect of the unbundling and privatization of the electricity sector will depend on the state of the industry at the time [...]

POSTAL AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

The MDC will retain the Posts and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) as a regulatory authority to deal with opening up private sector participation in postal and telecommunication services.

Postal Services

It is accepted that a post office is an important institution in the daily lives of the people and that this remains an important system for the provision of certain services. To this end the Zimpost will be taken over by a new board reporting to Parliament. However, POTRAZ will make sure that the atmosphere is conducive for private-sector participation in this sector in order to decentralize postal services to all corners of the country. The board will operate under the following mandate:

- * To turn postal services and the POSB into fully commercialized enterprises [...]

Telecommunications

Internationally, the telecommunications industry is playing an increasingly crucial role in economic and social development. The availability of a good and affordable telecommunications infrastructure and, associated with this, a widening range of telecommunications services and applications at internationally competitive prices are decisive corporate-location factors. This sector has been the subject of considerable attention in recent years, and in many countries the system has been broken up and privatized, the reason being that a state-controlled institution finds it difficult to stay abreast of developments and that the private sector is in a better position to finance new development and respond to customer needs [...]

INFORMATION

The MDC government will completely review the operations of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation and decide future policy towards the electronic media. It will look into:

- * The full privatization of the electronic media [...]

In the 178 pages of the MDC programme there are many paragraphs proposing privatisation, marketisation and de-regulation, but there is not one word about international joint ventures as a means of gaining access to technology and investment. Given that state-to-state and state-to-company joint ventures are prominent among the means by which economic co-operation between African countries and China is developing, the MDC is sending an unmissable message that under its rule, Zimbabwe will 'open up' to the West rather than to China.



MDC spokesman Eddie Cross

It can be surmised that the MDC's continued mass support within Zimbabwe has been derived not so much from widespread public conviction that the party's policy of ultra-privatisation is correct, but rather from the dreadful hardship which the country's present economic situation is imposing on most of the public.

Two sides of the crisis

So to the causes of Zimbabwe's dire economic circumstances; and firstly to consider the main internal cause, the effects of the intensified struggle for land. The mass land occupations, the eviction of the commercial farmers and the rapid land re-distribution occurred within a national economy which had already been substantially de-industrialised, and was deeply in debt, following the Economic and Structural Adjustment Program of the 1990s. The struggle was not merely about the most productive agricultural land, it took place on that land- thus production ceased or was greatly reduced on millions of hectares.

The resumption of production to previous levels, on the new farms of a much smaller size and under the management of previously landless people, would have required huge investments in material infrastructure, the creation of new supply systems for water, fertilizers, machinery and other inputs, and a massive expansion in the country's 'agricultural extension' programmes, which provide outreach training and advice to farmers. The finance for these necessities was not available- indeed the refusal of the 'international community'- principally Britain and the USA- to assist with the finance of land reform was key among the factors which provoked the land take-overs.

As a result of the crisis, production fell not only on the commercial farms but also in the communal farming areas. A May 2008 IRIN report [quoted](#) Michael Jenrich, of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO):

Before the land redistribution programme a symbiotic relationship existed between many of the commercial farmers and communal farmers, but the agricultural landscape changed radically in 2000: commercial farmers had sustained large-scale agricultural industries, that meant communal farmers were indirect recipients of "a very sophisticated [agricultural] input system," Jenrich noted.

"Because a large part of the fertiliser industry was used by commercial farmers, production was both big and reliable, and fertiliser was cheap, so even many

communal farmers could buy and access it for a very reasonable price"

"Communal farmers were benefiting from cheap and reliable seed supplies, fertiliser and transport systems that were all geared for a certain sector [large-scale farmers]. Because a large part of the fertiliser industry was used by commercial farmers, production was both big and reliable, and fertiliser was cheap, so even many communal farmers could buy and access it for a very reasonable price," he told IRIN.

The economic decline brought about the collapse of the fertiliser industry, disrupted the transport industry and saw a sharp decline in foreign currency earnings from the demise of export crops. This also had "a lot of indirect consequences for communal farmers that has impacted on their productivity," Jenrich said.

The reduction in Zimbabwe's foreign currency earnings also had a negative effect on the rest of the productive economy, including the very important mining sector, because items which had to be sourced from abroad, including fuel and machinery, could not be imported. There was also a surge of emigration by skilled workers. The government's attempts to maintain the provision of services, despite the falling national income, led to steeply rising inflation. This [report](#) from Mineweb in 2007 is typical:

In the 12 month period to March 2007, Zimbabwe's gold production was a meagre 8 tonnes. In the peak year of 1916, the country recorded production of 29 metric tons of gold and in a recent mini-peak in 1999 of 27 tonnes. Calendar 2006 output was around 16 tonnes.

Jack Murehwa, the chairman of the Zimbabwe Chamber of Mines, said Zimbabwe remains the only country yet to gain from the current high global mineral prices. "Our industry continues to experience declines in volumes despite the very buoyant mineral prices which have prevailed for the past 18 months," he said.

Murehwa [...] bemoaned "policy inconsistencies" in the economy that have spurred hyperinflation, acute shortages of gasoline and hard currency for equipment and spare parts. Power outages and an exodus of most of the country's skilled mining personnel for greener pastures in other countries are the other reasons cited. He said despite the high world prices, investors in mining were staying away from Zimbabwe.

But that is only one side of the story. Zimbabwe's economic crisis also has external causes. In an [article](#) for *NewZimbabwe*, Tawanda Hondora noted:

Zimbabwe has a critical shortage of foreign currency. However for the past four years or so, Zimbabwe has been unable to obtain finance or credit facilities from international lenders to inject into the economy. And this is a direct consequence of a sanctions regime imposed against the Zimbabwe by particularly the US, and the EU.

Tawanda Hondora is a Zimbabwean dissident, whose opinion is that Robert Mugabe is "an evil, brutal, dictator"; he also accuses Zanu-PF of economic mis-management. Nevertheless, as he observed:

The US introduced economic sanctions on Zimbabwe through the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act, 2001. (ZIDERA) Through this enactment Zimbabwe's access to finance and credit facilities was effectively incinerated.

ZIDERA empowers the US to use its voting rights and influence (as the main donor) in multilateral lending agencies, such as the IMF, World Bank, and the African Development Bank to veto any applications by Zimbabwe for finance, credit facilities, loan rescheduling, and international debt cancellation [...]

Simply put, owing to the size of the US vote and influence in these institutions, neither the IMF, World Bank nor the African Development Bank will lend to Zimbabwe, or offer it credit facilities. Therefore, needless to say, as a direct result of the US 2001 Act, Zimbabwe's relationship with these multilateral lending agencies was immediately and severely affected.

In addition, Zimbabwe's ability to reschedule its loan payments and to apply for debt cancellations in times of severe financial crisis was severely affected.

And once the IMF and World Bank stopped doing business with Zimbabwe, this had an immediate and adverse impact on Zimbabwe's credit and investment rating. And with a drop in investment rating went the dream of low cost capital on the international markets.

ZIDERA was a masterstroke. At the stroke of a pen, Zimbabwe's access to international credit markets was blocked. And relying purely on barter trade, and trade, mining, agricultural concessions, and on exports-generated foreign currency, Zimbabwe's economy has been slowly but surely asphyxiated.

And the consequent foreign currency crisis has resulted in the continued devaluation of the domestic currency, rapid inflation, and all else that has manifested itself in the current Zimbabwe economic crisis.

In addition, both the US and the EU have frozen financial and other assets of persons, or companies linked to ZANU PF. It is alleged that such companies sustain the ZANU PF government. There may be a grain of truth in that observation. However, what is often ignored in the race to rid Zimbabwe of Mugabe is that companies operating in Zimbabwe provide a livelihood to thousands of families, and contribute to the development of the country [...]

Zimbabwe recently managed to stave its expulsion from the IMF by reportedly paying £150 million towards its debt obligations to the institution. It was all too obvious however that Zimbabwe paid the money out of desperation. The country cannot afford the payment it made. Zimbabwe paid the money because, owing to US influence among others, it was unable to formally reschedule its IMF loan payments [...]

It is apparent therefore some of the most powerful countries in the world have put in place measures to bring about the downfall of Mr. Mugabe by orchestrating the economic collapse of Zimbabwe.

If that campaign succeeds, will these powerful countries reward Zimbabwe for removing its president? In Tawanda Hondora's view, this is not a reliable prospect:

It cannot be right to say that economic support will be provided to the country once its leader is out of power. As Zimbabwe all too dearly knows following the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 on the land question, such promises are impossible to enforce.

And, as Zimbabwe's history since the time of Cecil Rhodes and King Lobengula demonstrates, experience is a more reliable guide than promises.