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The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2010-16

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COMMENT

THE unwarranted prominence of recent publicity in the government-controlled media reporting on alleged tension between Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his party's Secretary-General, Finance Minister Tendai Biti, exposes the skewed news values these media hold.

While it is important to report on such issues where they occur in any one of the parties to the coalition, they have assumed a greater importance in the government media than news about the unresolved disputes between the partners themselves, which threaten the welfare of the unity government.

This was apparent in *The Herald's* report (4/5) of Tsvangirai's news conference held primarily to update the media – and the public – about the MDC-T's perception of the stalemate in negotiations over unresolved issues relating to the implementation of the Global Political Agreement.

Tsvangirai's report on these problems were completely censored in favour of reporting on his observations about the attempts to divide the MDC-T leaders, albeit under a headline to the paper's front-page lead story denying the rift.

While the paper did report Tsvangirai admitting he was ***"shocked by the energy and magnitude of the efforts to undermine our [the MDC-T] agenda,"*** it resorted to reporting the alleged content of an interim report on earlier violence at the party's Harvest House headquarters ***"said to have been compiled by an official in Mr Tsvangirai's office…and leaked to The Herald,"*** which the paper said, contained ***"a litany of allegations"*** against Mr Biti and MDC-T director-general Toendepi Shonhe. The paper made no attempt to corroborate the authenticity of this report and its content, although it had the perfect opportunity to do so at Tsvangirai's press briefing.

Such unprofessional journalistic conduct exposes the real intention of *The Herald* at least, to give maximum publicity to problems evidently affecting the MDC-T and then embellish them with spurious uncorroborated evidence and the opinion of unnamed sources that help to exacerbate the evidence of tensions within the party.

While MMPZ would be concerned if accurate information about these problems plaguing the MDC-T were censored, Zimpapers' past record of censoring news of divisions within ZANU PF helps to illustrate the newspaper group's bias and its intention to use their dominance of the daily newspaper market to discredit the former opposition party. Giving precedence to the MDC's problems while censoring news of those affecting the government simply compounds the professional distortion of news emanating from these newspapers.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

PROBLEMS affecting Zimbabwean workers in all sectors of the economy came under spotlight this week as the country joined the world in commemorating International Workers' Day on Saturday, May 1st.

Both the government and private media highlighted how these problems have affected the workers and quoted their unions criticizing the inclusive government for failing to address their grievances. Private radio stations, however, ignored this important event. Although Workers' Day was the most significant event of the week, the endless power-sharing dispute between Zimbabwe's coalition parties once again earned the media's greatest attention. The on-off constitutional reform process and fresh twists to the proposed sale of Chiadzwa's controversial diamonds also attracted significant media coverage.

Fig 1: Topical issues in the media

Media	Power sharing	Workers' Day	Constitutional reform	Chiadzwa diamonds	Human rights
Official papers	18	21	11	4	0
ZBC	12	16	16	11	0
Private papers	29	14	7	2	18
Private radios	8	0	4	4	4
Private onlines	6	4	0	4	0
Total	**73**	**55**	**38**	**25**	**22**

Confusion over ‘pay freeze’ mars Workers’ Day

ALL the media focused their Workers’ Day reports on the evident contradictions between Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s statement that their was no government freeze on civil servants’ salaries despite an earlier statement by Finance Minister Tendai Biti announcing this news as part of efforts to contain government expenditure.

The Sunday Mail and *The Standard* (2/5) quoted Tsvangirai denying the freeze while addressing workers affiliated to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in Harare’s Dzivaresekwa suburb.

The Standard reported Tsvangirai as having been ***“forced to make a public retraction of recent statements…that all salaries had been frozen in a bid to contain growing unrest among workers...”,*** while *The Sunday Mail’s* page one lead headline noted: *Civil servants salaries: Tsvangirai, Biti clash*. It quoted Tsvangirai saying government had not ***“put in place a definite policy on the issue”*** and suggested that the suspension of salary increases ***“could only be implemented simultaneously with a freeze on basic commodity prices and services charges”***.

The government media quoted both the ZCTU and the ZANU PF-aligned Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU), accusing government of not doing enough to address their problems, which included poor wages, a reluctance by some employers to respect Labour Court rulings, the high number of work-related accidents, and government’s failure to reform labour laws (ZTV, 1/5, 8pm and *The Herald* & *Sunday Mail*, 1 & 2/5).

The private media also quoted the ZCTU and analysts arguing that Zimbabwean workers had nothing to cheer about as the inclusive government had failed to address their plight since its formation last year (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 30/4). Apart from identifying poor wages as the major problem affecting workers the private media reported civil servants, and teachers in particular, as among victims of political violence, especially in rural areas (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 2/5). The private media, however, ignored the ZFTU’s views and the events it held to mark Workers’ Day (See Fig 2).

Fig 2: Most quoted voices on Workers’ Day

Media	ZCTU	ZFTU	Professional	Alternative	Ordinary people
Public media	10	15	6	2	5
Private media	3	0	1	6	0

State media distorts Chiadzwa ruling

HIGH Court Judge Bharat Patel's dismissal of an urgent application by the British-based African Consolidated Resources (ACR) seeking an interim order interdicting government and two South African-based mining companies from selling condemned Chiadzwa diamonds generated considerable attention in both the official and private media.

The government-controlled media however, interpreted the ruling as a greenlight for government to proceed with the sale of the diamonds despite the fact that government had not yet complied with the recommendations of global diamond regulator, Kimberley Certification Process. *The Herald* (27/4) quoted Justice Patel dismissing ACR's application on the grounds that it was "not urgent" and that ***"the sale of diamonds would not prejudice the company in the event they succeed on appeal as they can be compensated for the loss"***.

However, nowhere in the report was Justice Patel quoted giving the government the go-ahead to ***"start selling"*** diamonds mined from Chiadzwa, as claimed by the paper.

ZTV meanwhile, carried an editorialized report in its news bulletin (28/4, 8pm) that ***"most"*** Zimbabweans were of the ***"feeling"*** government ***"must go ahead and sell its diamonds",*** while *The Sunday Mail* (2/5) quoted Mines Minister Obert Mpofu saying government was ***"losing patience"*** with the Kimberley Process for taking too long to approve its diamonds and attributing the delay to ***"some forces"***, bent on ***"perpetuating"*** Zimbabwe's economic problems.

In contrast, the private media more accurately reported Justice Patel's ruling, quoted the ACR insisting that the judgment was specifically on the urgency of the application, and carried the comments of global human rights watchdogs warning government against selling Chiadzwa diamonds without the KP's approval (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday* & *The Standard)*.

SW Radio Africa (28/4) quoted ACR chief executive Andrew Cranswick refuting government media reports that the High Court had approved the sale of diamonds, saying the court had only ***"ruled on the urgency of the matter"*** and ***"not the main arguments of the case itself"***.

MISSING STORIES

THE government media missed or distorted a number of stories that should have appeared on the record.

- Former Irish President Mary Robinson's criticism of Zimbabwe's poor human rights record (Studio 7, 28/4). *The Herald* (27/4) actually reported her praising the unity government instead.
- The death of 12 children from measles in Buhera over the last two weeks and the infection of 60 more people in the same area with cholera (*The Zimbabwean On Tuesday*, 27/4).
- Botswana's reported refusal to release a US$70 million loan it pledged last year citing "bilateral differences" (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 30/4).

THE MEDIA'S MOST POPULAR VOICES

FORMER Irish President Mary Robinson was the most quoted individual in the government-controlled media.

She was accessed for comment 10 times, followed by ministers Obert Mpofu (Mines) and Paurina Mpariwa (Labour), who were quoted six times each; MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa (four); and the Prime Minister's spokesman James Maridadi (three times). Robinson was quoted commending progress in the implementation of the power sharing agreement, including respect for human rights, and calling for the empowerment of women. Mpofu was heard praising High Court Judge Bharat Patel for allegedly giving government the go-ahead to sell Chiadzwa diamonds and suggesting that government was considering auctioning them without the blessing of the KP. Maridadi and Chamisa were quoted refuting reports that the MDC-T was paying its staff hefty salaries and speaking on government's activities.

Lindiwe Zulu, a member of South African President Jacob Zuma's facilitation team, was the most quoted individual in the private media. She was quoted seven times.

Mpofu (six), Biti and Maridadi (four times each), and Chamisa (three) closely followed. Zulu was heard expressing concern over the failure by Zimbabwe's coalition parties to conclude the drawn-out power-sharing deadlock, Mpofu was quoted welcoming Patel's ruling, while Biti was quoted announcing a pay freeze on civil servants' salaries.

Human rights abuses in the media

THE government-controlled media continued to ignore human rights abuses, which the private media, the MDC-T component of government and human rights organisations say were on the increase.

The private media reported seven new incidents, including:

- The arrest of ZimRights official Joel Hita for showcasing pictures of victims of the 2008 political violence at a photo exhibition in Masvingo and the disruption of CSOs' outreach programmes by war veterans in Chipinge (SW Radio Africa & *The Zimbabwean,* 27 & 29/4);
- Harassment of three journalists from *The Standard* at Dzivarasekwa Stadium in Harare by ZCTU security officers (*The Standard,* 2/5); and
- The eviction of 80 farm workers in Chinhoyi by RBZ deputy governor Edward Mashiringwane for allegedly refusing to work for him (*The Standard,* 2/5)

Quotes of the week

"The journey we have walked since May 1 last year is like we are moving backwards. The explanation from government since 1980 is still the same; that there is no money. This is very worrying for us because there is money for everything else except salaries for workers" – ZCTU secretary-general Wellington Chibhebhe (*The Standard*, 2/5).

"As government, we understand that people are facing difficulties and we are doing our best to find ways to improve the economy until the situation improves." – Prime Minster Tsvangirai (*The Sunday Mail*, 2/5).

"It is becoming a luxury to rely on the decisions of our detractors who want to continue controlling our resources. We are going to be on our own. In fact, we have been on our own. We are going to benefit from our diamonds with the KP or not" – Mines Minster Obert Mpofu (*The Sunday Mail*, 2/5).

"If the government goes ahead with its plan to sell diamonds without approval from the Kimberley Process, it will be in breach of its commitments and should face suspension…If Minister Mpofu really wants the Zimbabwean people to benefit from the wealth beneath their feet, he should start by withdrawing the army from the area…" – Global Witness campaigner Elly Harrowell.

Ends/

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