Southern Africans Rally Against British Assault on Zimbabwe

by Lawrence Freeman

There is no better timely example of the British colonial-imperialist policy towards Africa then the current self-defeating temper tantrum by Britain's new leader. The ghost of the infamous conqueror of Southern Africa, Cecil Rhodes, is alive but not well in the body of Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Fortunately, South African President Thabo Mbeki, with overwhelming support from the leaders of the Southern African Development Community, has brought about a compromise between the ZANU-PF ruling party, and its opposition, the British-backed leadership of the Movement for the Democratic Change (MDC). This has thwarted, for the moment, British attempts to instigate a regime change of Zimbabwe's elected President, Robert Mugabe, before the March 2008 multiple national elections.

On Sept. 18, according to the Zimbabwe *Herald*, the MDC and the government unanimously agreed to the Constitutional amendment proposal mediated by Mbeki. On Sept. 20, Brown wrote in the *Independent* newspaper that he would not attend a joint summit of the European Union (EU) and African Union (AU), scheduled for December in Lisbon, Portugal, if Mugabe were allowed to attend. This direct affront to Zimbabwe's sovereignty was challenged by several Southern African Development Community Presidents as an unacceptable attack on their own sovereignty, and that of the AU itself. During the regime of his fellow Labor Party imperialist, Tony Blair, the last six proposed summits of the AU-EU were cancelled because of Blair's threats to stay home, if Mugabe were allowed to participate in the summit of the two unions. This time it looks as if Brown will have to stay home and stomp his feet, because Portugal has decided to proceed with the planed summit with Mugabe, whether Brown attends or not.

While Mugabe was in New York City preparing to speak to the United Nations General Assembly in September, the Zimbabwe Parliament in Harare voted up Amendment 18 to become part of its Constitution. This amendment provides for the Parliament to choose the successor to the President, if the President steps down, or is incapacitated while in office. Since the MDC is split into two factions, and is not trusted by Southern African Development Community leaders because of the British connections of its leadership, it is expected that Mugabe will win the Presidency, and that ZANU-PF will control the Parliament, and thus the selection of the future leader of Zimbabwe, should Mugabe step down.

Mbeki is rightly credited with engineering this compromise, which should ensure an orderly election process, and a peaceful transition process. Needless to say, Brown and his masters in the Privy Council, were not very happy about the prospect of Mugabe's successor being determined in an orderly process that all sides in Zimbabwe have agreed to, thus undermining the ability of the British to impose regime change, and destabilize the entire region of southern Africa.

The nations in the region are already dealing with serious economic crises resulting from the collapse of the international financial system, and destabilization in any one of them threatens to spread throughout the region, endangering them all.

Reflecting the desire by other governments in the region for the compromise worked out by Mbeki, Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa countered Brown directly, saying he would not attend the EU-Africa summit in Portugal if Mugabe were not invited. Mwanawasa, who in March had likened Zimbabwe to a "sinking Titanic," had been a critic of the Mugabe government, and of a quiet diplomatic approach. But, motivated by what is at stake in the region, he changed his position by the time of the Aug. 16-17 Southern African Development Community summit in Zambia, so as to facilitate Mbeki's mediation. To successfully make this shift in Zambia policy, on Aug. 22 he had to dismiss his foreign minister, Mundia Sikatana, a long-time ally and close personal friend, who refused to change his critical view on Zimbabwe, despite the compelling strategic reasons motivating Mbeki's initiative.

The Historic Battle Against British Colonialism

Unfortunately, most Americans have little or no understanding of the bloody conflicts that have taken place on the African continent, by Africans, to free themselves from British colonialism. As has been the case with the fulminations against Sudan, in which most people genuflect to "group think,"—public opinion—in mindlessly repeating that the cause for the horrible tragedy in Darfur could be simply reduced to genocide by Muslims against Africans, so too, in a similar vein, public opinion has vilified Mugabe. Such ahistoric thinking about Africa, repeated by our babbling President, George Bush, once again in his speech before the United Nations in September, ignores more than a century of conflict and injustice.

Modern history in Southern Africa begins with Rhodes's seizure of Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia—named after himself),

after consolidating his base of operation in what is today South Africa, in the last decades of the 19th Century, on behalf of the British South Africa Company, which was modelled after America's long-time enemy—the British East India company. The liberation war against Ian Smith's Rhodesia, led by Mugabe, and those of his generation, only ended a little over a generation ago in 1980.

The justified Zimbabwe land reform in 2000 returned 3.4 million hectares of Zimbabwe's most arable land—from which the British had forcibly removed the Africans during the British colonial period—back to its people from the 4,500 white British-Rhodesian farmers, to whom it had been reserved by the British. During the colonial period, the British had banished rural Africans to "Native Reserves," later called "Tribal Trust Lands," where the land was not as good. Zimbabwe's overturning of land distribution that was based on this British colonial policy was quickly seized on by the British, who started an international clamor against Zimbabwe, and called for a change in government.

This is not to suggest that the British will give up in their desire to overthrow Mugabe, and push Zimbabwe into civil war, if they can. Driven by the accelerating meltdown of the global financial system, British geopolitical strategy is to maximize destabilization and war across the continent in order to to secure control of Africa's raw material wealth, and prevent it from being used to develop African nations.

This has been the intent by the British in the multisided war in Darfur: to break up Sudan through internal conflicts by orchestrating religious, ethnic, and tribal conflicts. Some are coming to acknowledge that there is not now, and never was, genocide by the Khartoum government in Darfur.

The Parliament in Harare is also considering a law that will force companies doing business in Zimbabwe to agree to a 51% ownership by Zimbabwe citizens. This is not a move to nationalize these companies, as some have misreported, but is a protective measure to prevent looting by predators like Rio Tinto Zinc and other Anglo American cartels which are after Zimbabwe resources. However, as useful as these protective measures may be, the Zimbabwe government cannot pull the nation out of its hyperinflationary crisis simply by itself.

As is the case for all of Sub-Saharan Africa, without the overthrow of the "free-trade" British Monetarist System, and its replacement with an American Economic System of directed credit for long-term investments in state, regional, and continent-wide infrastructure, hundreds of millions of Africans existing on $1-2/per day will continue to live and die in misery.

Documentation

The following are excerpts from Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe's speech before the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 26, 2007.

Mr. President, Zimbabwe won its independence on 18th April, 1980 after a protracted war against British colonial imperialism which denied us human rights and democracy. That colonial system which suppressed and oppressed us, enjoyed the support of many countries of the West who were signatories of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even after 1945, it would appear that the Berlin Conference of 1884, through which Africa was parceled to colonial European powers, remained stronger than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is therefore clear that for the West, vested economic interests, racial and ethnocentric consideration proved stronger than their adherence to principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The West still negates our sovereignties by way of control of our resources, in the process making us mere chattels in our own lands, mere minders of its trans-national interests. In my own country and other sister states in Southern Africa, the most visible form of this control has been land despoiled from us at the onset of British colonialism. That control largely persists, although it stands firmly challenged in Zimbabwe, thereby triggering the current stand-off between us and Britain, supported by her cousin states, most notably the United States and Australia. Mr. Bush, Mr. Blair, and now Mr. Brown's sense of human rights precludes our people's rights to their God-given resources, which in their view must be controlled by their kith and kin. I am termed dictator because I have rejected this supremacist view, and frustrated the neo-colonialists.

Mr. President, Clearly the history of the struggle for our national and people's rights is unknown to the president of the United States of America. He thinks the Declaration of Human Rights starts with his last term in office! He thinks he can introduce to us, who bore the brunt of fighting for the freedom of our peoples, the virtues of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What rank hypocrisy!

Mr. President,

I lost eleven precious years of my life in the jail of a white man whose freedom and well being I have assured from the first day of Zimbabwe's Independence. I lost a further fifteen years fighting white injustice in my country.

Ian Smith is responsible for the death of over 50,000 of my people. I bear the scars of his tyranny which Britain and American condoned. I meet his victims everyday. Yet he walks free. He farms free. He talks freely, associates freely under a black Government. We taught him democracy. We gave him back his humanity. He would have faced a different fate here and in Europe if the 50,000 he killed were Europeans. Africa has not called for a Nuremberg trial against the white world which committed heinous crimes against humanity. It has not hunted for perpetrators of this genocide, many of whom live to this day, nor has it got reparations from those who offended against it. Instead it is Africa which is in the dock, facing trial from the same world that persecuted it for centuries.