

# CHAPTER 1

## THE OPPOSITION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

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### **The perception gap**

There is no doubt that the legitimacy of Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe is now seriously disputed in many quarters. Also being questioned are a whole host of his government's policies and actions; particularly those relating to fiscal and monetary matters, land and company invasions, food security and human rights. But establishing an adequate explanation of how this state of affairs has come about remains an intransigent problem.

What follows is an attempt to look at the conundrum of post-colonial Zimbabwe from the perspective of democratisation, especially with regard to the nature of the state, civil society and the opposition. This chapter first describes the national crisis, then locates the position of civil society and the opposition in this discussion.

Though there may be differences in identifying the causes and nature of the current situation, it is indisputable that the country is in a state of unprecedented crisis. Zimbabwe's crisis is multi-layered, the resolution of which requires a multi-pronged approach. Zimbabwean opposition, civil society and the SADC region have been largely immobilised by the lack of consensus as to what should be done to extricate the country from this largely self-created quagmire.

Any solution to the Zimbabwe crisis will have to achieve a delicate balance that will include economic and political exigencies, on the one hand, and justice and reconciliation concerns on the other. The disparate forces at play are too evenly balanced for any single entity to achieve a unilateral solution, hence the suggestions in many quarters that, despite the acute tension, no all-out confrontation is likely to occur. None of us can claim to have the prophetic insight to say with certainty what will happen in Zimbabwe over the next year or so, though many commentators suggest that eventually there will have to be a negotiated settlement in Zimbabwe that will see Mugabe retire from the presidency.

## The origins and nature of Zimbabwe's crisis

The essence of the Zimbabwean crisis has to be sought in a confluence of several colonial and post-independence experiences:

- First, a violent and fraudulent process of colonisation and domination that dehumanised black people, characterised their past as barren of innovation and achievement, branded their intellect as infantile and denigrated African culture as atavistic.
- Second, a violent and hegemonic struggle for decolonisation that culminated in a largely symbolic independence devoid of material gain for the majority black population. This led to an acrimonious disjuncture between the interests of various classes among the black population.
- Third, the failure of the independence leadership to transform the repressive colonial state structure into a democratic institution. Related to this is the failure of liberation movements (ZAPU and ZANU-PF) to transform themselves into democratic governments and concomitantly the failure to deliver on the independence promise of freedom.
- Fourth, the dismal failure of IMF/World Bank structural adjustment policies, which had a very weak human development component, and resulted in the mass impoverishment of Zimbabweans.
- Fifth, the capture of the state by a corrupt, self-seeking and authoritarian political elite.
- Sixth, the contradictory nature of neo-liberal democracy that prescribed the weakening of the state at precisely the moment that the human developmental deficits accumulated during the colonial and cold war eras required an interventionist state. This, in part, compounded the inability of the state to redistribute resources in a coherent and orderly manner, hence the crisis of legitimacy and politics of chaos referred to elsewhere in this chapter.
- Seventh, the rise of the crisis of "followership"<sup>1</sup> caused by the failure of post-independence leadership Patronage systems based on region, tribe and political affiliation have led to the demise of meritocracy and competitive economics.<sup>2</sup> These systems have turned mediocrity into a virtue and 'ethics' into a rude word. Zimbabwe has become a nation of accom-

plices joined together by tribe, region, political affiliation and war credentials. Government, among its other vices, specialises in subterfuge and denial. It is for this reason that a justice system managed by kinship and party cadres is as evil as the Rhodesian system constructed along racial lines.

- Eighth, the culture of intolerance and impunity inherited from the country's colonial past. This is not Robert Mugabe's invention, but rather a sad relic of the Rhodesian era. The Mugabe regime has used it as a fallback position when its fortunes have been severely compromised.

These broad factors have had their most dramatic manifestations in the following:

- Endemic political violence and gross human rights violations perpetrated at the behest of the state or political elite, while access to justice is denied to those without political contacts.
- Unbridled corruption resulting in asset stripping and poor stewardship of national resources.
- Terminal levels of both *de jure* and *de facto* impunity for various types of criminals. The most evident symptoms of this are the disregard of the doctrine of separation of powers and the general breakdown in the rule of law. Parastatal arms of terror have assumed a status above the law and have thus effectively become a parallel government; invading farms, companies, NGOs and arrogating to themselves the powers of state agencies.
- Bad politics that has produced a declining economy, but increased misery and despondency. This has led to capital flight and fatal levels of 'brain drain' as young professionals seek less troubled waters in which to fish. At worst, this 'politics of chaos' might result in civil strife.<sup>3</sup>
- Increased militarisation of the state and state institutions.
- Expropriation of the voices of the peasantry through economic and physical coercion. Food has been used as a political weapon to manipulate starving communities. Related to this is the failure of the fast-track land reform programme to resolve the contradictions in the agrarian sector by effectively dealing with questions of access to credit and inputs, tenure, and traditional leaders' role in transformed agrarian relations.

The current crisis in Zimbabwe is therefore a confluence of four interlinking themes: land and food security; governance and citizenship; civil society and democratisation; and regional and international interventions. The discussion in this chapter is confined to the manner in which these themes affect civil society and the opposition in Zimbabwe. This can only be done effectively by first tracing the context and process of the emergence of the MDC out of the Zimbabwean civil society movement.

## **The emergence of opposition politics**

Zimbabwe attained independence after a protracted war of liberation led by ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU. These nationalist movements paid scant attention to issues of individual and civic rights in fashioning their vision of a liberated Zimbabwe. They were preoccupied with the transfer of power from white to black hands rather than with the conditions in which such power should be exercised.<sup>4</sup> This approach developed precariously within the context of a brutal colonial state and the concurrent emergence of a middle-class nationalist leadership within both ZANU-PF and ZAPU, which advocated an implacable internal unity. This hegemonic approach gave rise to a legacy of repressive and monolithic state politics in the post-colonial politics that was suspicious and intolerant of notions of pluralism and independent associational life.<sup>5</sup> Pluralism and dissent of any kind have often been characterised as anti-revolutionary and therefore divisive.

The militarism of the liberation struggle also created a unique use of coercion as an instrument of mobilisation. Thus in a very significant way, the liberation struggle emphasised a non-consensual means of legitimisation.<sup>6</sup>

The war came to an abrupt end in 1979, when the belligerents met at Lancaster House to negotiate a ceasefire as well as a new constitution for an independent Zimbabwe. The ceasefire constitution agreed to was a compromise between the transfer of political power to blacks and the entrenchment of the economic privileges of white settlers and international capital.<sup>7</sup>

The focus of the new independence government in the early 1980s was on majoritarian issues and state-led developmental programmes.<sup>8</sup> This approach mocked the advocacy of civil and political rights as a veiled attempt to subvert genuine efforts by the state to empower the newly liberated black populace. In practice, though, the discourse of human rights became not only a rallying cry for citizens who genuinely contested the arbitrariness manifest in governance,

but also a shield for those anti-establishment and ‘uncivil’ elements who sought a legal umbrella under which to preserve and reproduce their privileges.<sup>9</sup> Talk of good governance, the rule of law and human rights within this context seemed inherently contradictory, if not reactionary.

Thus it is fair to state that the seeds of Zimbabwe’s destruction were contained within seemingly benign concerns for collective national development. These concerns are briefly explored later in this chapter.

## **State security and the culture of impunity**

The public arena in Zimbabwe between 1980 and 1988 was dominated by state security concerns. At the time, Zimbabwe was faced with real threats to its constitutional order from the apartheid regime in South Africa, insurgency groups in the Matabeleland/Midlands<sup>10</sup> and Renamo bandits along the eastern border with Mozambique. The exigencies of state security were used as a guise for liquidating all forms of dissent and keeping a tight reign on the emergence of independent associational life. Thus the contours of an authoritarian state were determined early on in the post-independence era. The excuses for doing so always seemed genuine and were rooted in arguments for national sovereignty.

The first few years of independence were characterised by aggressive state building as opposed to nation building. Repressive colonial legislation such as the Law and Order Maintenance Act (Chapter 11:07) were consistently employed to stifle the emergence or continuance of opposition voices.<sup>11</sup> In a sense this resort to the oppressors’ instruments of power subverted the genuine achievement of majority rule while unwittingly keeping the ghost of Rhodesia alive in the post-independence era.

Following the genocidal actions of state security agencies during the period of dissidence in Matabeleland/Midlands, ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU signed a Unity Accord in December of 1987, which effectively ended the military occupation of Matabeleland. The Unity Accord was succeeded by a presidential amnesty, which pardoned all dissidents, and a Clemency Order, number 1 of 1990, pardoning all state security forces for atrocities committed by them in the *bona fide* execution of their mandate in Matabeleland/Midlands.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after the Unity Accord, the enlarged ZANU-PF began pushing aggressively for a one-party state as the only vehicle through which comprehensive

national unity and development could be achieved. This notion of unity at all costs dealt a further blow to the country's already poor human rights record.

The end of dissidence meant that government critics could no longer be characterised as dissident sympathisers or as the enemy within. This window of opportunity accidentally ushered in a period of press freedom and increased freedom of speech,<sup>13</sup> although the Unity Accord became an excuse for the Mugabe regime to advocate a one-party state agenda. In 1987 the executive introduced the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act No 7. This introduced an executive presidency with an unlimited term of office, and Mr Mugabe became the first incumbent with "omnipotent powers typically given to executive presidents in a one-party state".<sup>14</sup> This constitutional amendment shifted power significantly towards the executive, in the process marginalizing the legislature and the judiciary. The rationale behind this constitutional amendment was apparently to facilitate rather than limit the exercise of state power.

The amendment to the constitution also abolished the bicameral legislature and extended the remaining single chamber parliament from 120 representatives to 150 members. The additional 30 members were directly or indirectly appointed by the executive president as follows: 10 chiefs elected by the Chiefs' Council, 8 provincial governors and 12 special appointees. To bolster this, Mugabe created a Ministry of Political Affairs in which the Ministry of Women's Affairs was submerged. This new ministry could use public funds in activities that directly supported the ruling party's initiative towards a one-party state.

## **The emergence of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement**

At the time when these events were unfolding, the then Secretary-General of ZANU-PF, Edgar Tekere, opined that "democracy was in the intensive care unit" in Zimbabwe. As is shown later on, much ground has been covered since then, sadly all in the wrong direction.

Edgar Tekere thus became the first person within the ZANU-PF leadership to publicly oppose the one-party agenda. He had earlier publicly castigated his party colleagues for corruption and wanton violation of the leadership code of conduct. This set Tekere on a collision path with his peers and, as expected, he was expelled from the party in 1988.

Tekere later joined forces with disgruntled sections of the student movement and workers to form the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) in April 1989.

ZUM attracted a significant following in the urban areas, particularly among the youth. This was the earliest indication of a serious generational disjuncture between the nationalist leaders and the non-combatant generation of young Zimbabweans. The euphoric support that ZUM drew within urban centres exposed the extent of the growing popular discontent as well as the anti-democratic tendencies of ZANU-PF.

The state authoritarianism described above was accompanied by frightening levels of corruption in both the private and public sectors. Thus Zimbabwe progressively accelerated towards an official dictatorship and a *de facto* one-party state.

## Legalising repression

A conspicuous feature of this era was the consistent use of the law as an instrument of coercion and repression. In 1992, for example, the government passed the Labour Relations Amendment Bill, having passed the University of Zimbabwe Amendment Act the previous year. These two pieces of legislation were intended to pre-empt mass protests by both labour and student movements at the imposition of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP). Labour was particularly incensed with the attempts in the new legislation to weaken trade union powers. In response the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) organised a national demonstration on 13 June 1992. The police suppressed the demonstration using very crude force.<sup>15</sup> 'Law' thus achieved a sinister connotation in the vocabulary of oppressed Zimbabweans.

It was in this context of severely proscribed civic and political space that a blistering critique of the ruling party emerged in the late 1980s and the 1990s. The critique emanated initially from academics,<sup>16</sup> the student union at the University of Zimbabwe and the labour movement. The latter two movements had just emerged from nearly a decade of state paternalism.<sup>17</sup> An equally organised force during this period was the women's movement, which, since independence, had been engaged in very successful advocacy around inheritance laws and issues of women's human rights. The women's movement questioned the extensive exclusion of women from structures and processes of governance, and its unique contribution to the politics of nascent civil society in the post-colony was the notion of social exclusion as an expression of limited citizenship, mis-recognition and dehumanisation.<sup>18</sup>

The student/labour critique, on the other hand, focused mainly on corruption, welfare and political rights issues. Later on, intellectuals, minor opposition political parties, human rights groups, professional associations and NGOs brought into this critique questions of economic justice, governance and political liberalisation.

There were also calls for reform from within ZANU-PF itself as the party battled with its own internal dynamics, as revealed in the expulsion of its secretary-general, Edgar Tekere, in 1988<sup>19</sup> and in the late 1990s in the revolt by war veterans demanding payment of gratuities and other benefits for their participation in the war of liberation.

## **Socialist rhetoric and capitalist lives**

In 1990, the state responded to global events by abandoning its majoritarian, developmentalist rhetoric and adopting IMF and World Bank prescriptions for economic structural adjustment (ESAP). ESAP prescribed, amongst other things, the downsizing of the state, the removal of subsidies in social services, deregulation of financial services and privatisation of state-owned enterprises. Western aid during the ESAP years was tied to questions of governance and political liberalisation. Thus the emergence of post-1990 pro-democracy movements in Zimbabwe was, in part, linked to the contextual changes in the global political economy as well as to explicit donor interventions. Herein arose the curious alliance between the interests of international capital and those of the impoverished masses, despite the latter's objective critique of the global system.

On the one hand, ESAP authored the very conditions of impoverishment and social exclusion that have made governance a topical issue in Zimbabwe; and on the other, it brought in the political and economic liberalisation around which post-1989 civic struggles have been and continue to be waged. For instance, in the late 1990s civil society's critique of the economic conditions authored by ESAP was linked to calls for greater democratisation in the form of a discourse of constitutionalism.

The popularity of the constitutional discourse was demonstrated eventually by the emergence of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in May 1997.<sup>20</sup> This new discourse was for the most part conducted on the terrain of liberal human and civic rights. The NCA succeeded in forging a broad alliance to advocate a new, home-grown constitution for Zimbabwe. Notably, in the post-1989 dispensation of global governance, conditionality had become an

integral part of donor funding. Arguments for alternative economic models were drowned by the triumph of neo-liberalism. Thus mobilisation for national democratisation offered new opportunities and a broader regional and international audience. Other developments within the African region encouraged this discourse: the liberation of South Africa; the fall of dictatorships in Zambia, Malawi, Zaire and later Ghana; and constitution-making efforts in Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Malawi, Namibia and South Africa.

## **The radicalisation of ZCTU**

The ZCTU held its extraordinary congress in 1988, where it severed all ties with the ruling ZANU PF party. At the time there was still a naïve belief within the ruling party circles that ZCTU had been effectively neutralised and had ceased to be a force to reckon with. It was this belief that had induced the ZANU PF regime to introduce ESAP—this despite the fact that ESAP was by nature designed to adversely affect the urban working population. In retrospect, it is clear that ESAP eroded a significant number of the gains that had been made by organised labour within the first decade of independence.<sup>21</sup> The actual introduction of ESAP met with very little resistance from ZCTU and this seemed to vindicate ZANU-PF's belief that organised labour was now a spent force.

During this period of apparent weakness, however, ZCTU began to professionalise its functions, especially its secretariat, under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai. The focus of the newly elected ZCTU leadership was on strengthening internal democracy mechanisms as a means of increasing accountability to the membership and affiliates. This helped to increase the interaction between the representatives and the general membership, and had a significant impact on ZCTU's efforts to represent industrial labour. The organisations earlier narrow mandate now was extended to include the representation of all working people in Zimbabwe.<sup>22</sup> Thus ZCTU underwent a metamorphosis unhindered by the supervision and surveillance of the ruling party, which had already written it off as a political force.

The new-look ZCTU began to critique the political circumstances of labour relations while continuing with its traditional role of representing workers' interests at shop floor and national levels. The process by which ZCTU was weaned from state patronage comprised many experiences and opportunities, some planned and others seized. However, a key factor in this transformation of state-labour relations was the fast changing global political economy paradoxically associated with the triumph of neo-liberalism.

In 1988, John Nkomo was appointed as the new minister responsible for labour issues. His first act of office was to engage in a bitter war of words with the ZCTU leadership.<sup>23</sup> ZANU-PF seemed to be suffering from the problem of “overkill”. This was evident, for instance, in its marginalisation of ZCTU in the introduction of ESAP in 1990 and its aggressive pursuit of the one-party state agenda. ZANU-PF seemed totally oblivious of both the national and global realities associated with political liberalisation and the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

The emergence of ZUM had dented the credibility of the ZANU-PF leadership and caused the party to refocus its attention on organised labour, particularly because, in the absence of a credible opposition, labour offered a potential organisational vehicle for anti-establishment forces. The government launched a sustained attack on the leadership of the ZCTU, alleging that they were subversive elements motivated by self-interest.<sup>24</sup> In response, the ZCTU leadership strengthened the organisation’s regional and district structures and built formal alliances and alliances of solidarity with other civil society groups such as civil servants and student organisations.<sup>25</sup>

## **Mobilising for protest or transformation**

ZCTU organised meetings in residential areas to discuss community needs regarding housing, transport, education and health services. Its critique of urban councils permitted the labour movement to serve as the voice of the unemployed, illiterate, homeless and sick within urban constituencies, whose needs were meant to have been catered for by the city councils.<sup>26</sup> ZCTU also criticised the government’s foreign direct investment drive as an “intention to entrench capitalism, which exploits the workers” and presented to government an alternative national development and economic policy document in which it called for a planned economy with state control of the financial sector, mining and industry as well as a radical and orderly land redistribution. It became clear from the ZCTU critique that the labour movement was mobilising its constituents to push for a transformation in the manner in which the country was being governed. This caused panic within the establishment as it threatened the power base of the existing political elite.

Morgan Tsvangirai openly accused the ZANU-PF leadership of being in an ideological crisis.<sup>27</sup> As early as May 1988, John Nkomo asked the ZCTU, “How can ZCTU start saying that the government is insecure? Are they trying to form another government?”<sup>28</sup> He accused the ZCTU of being run by selfish

people who were blinded by “ambitions to take the shortest route to the House Chamber”. Mugabe was reported in the *Sunday Mail* of 27 November 1988 as having said: “Trade unions are free to discuss political issues and refer their recommendations through the proper channels. We do not want to see a situation where the ZCTU becomes a political party.”

The year 1989 saw several wildcat strikes by brewery workers, railway artisans and shunters, junior doctors and telecommunication technicians. These strikes all took place between June and September, and on 4 October 1989 students at the University of Zimbabwe went on strike to commemorate the anti-corruption demonstrations that had been held the previous year. The following day Morgan Tsvangirai issued a statement in solidarity with the striking students. The police responded swiftly, arresting student leaders Arthur Mutambara and Enoch Chikweche (now Munyaradzi Gwisai) together with Morgan Tsvangirai. The trio were detained under the emergency powers regulations. Tsvangirai was kept incommunicado for a week without access to his lawyers and accused, among other things, of “attempting to bring the downfall of Government through unconstitutional means”.

The prosecutor strenuously argued that there was reasonable suspicion that Tsvangirai was “acting under external influence and that his conduct constituted a serious danger to the safety and security of the state.”<sup>29</sup> The High Court in Harare ruled, on 18 October 1989, that the state had failed to prove its case and ordered Tsvangirai’s release. He was re-arrested immediately on the claim that he had been recruited by the South African National Intelligence Service (NIS) in 1988 to create and spread discontent and turmoil in the Zimbabwe labour movement with the intention of achieving nationwide strikes and work stoppages. The state further alleged that Tsvangirai was under instruction from NIS to use his position in ZCTU to generate political discontent against the government and facilitate its overthrow by unconstitutional means. The state also made the broad allegation that Tsvangirai was actively involved in the South African strategy of destabilising Zimbabwe’s economy and security.<sup>30</sup> Once again, on 24 October 1989, the High Court ordered Tsvangirai’s release.

Arguably, this attack raised Morgan Tsvangirai’s profile in the public eye. His resilience earned him the respect that would later serve as political capital in his ascent in the broader civic movement and the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC). The state thus unwittingly turned Morgan Tsvangirai into a national figure as well as its most avowed opponent.

## Formation of the MDC

A number of developments between 1997 and 1999 contributed to the formation of the MDC. For most of the 1980s, organised labour had seen its role purely as that of collective bargaining for better wages for workers in the urban industrial setting. In the later 1980s and early 1990s, there was a deliberate shift to a broader agenda and a wider constituency base.

The relevance of the ZCTU and its new politics was aided by the heavy-handed manner in which the state responded to democratic expressions of dissatisfaction by the citizenry. The state reached unprecedented levels of arrogance and repression through the regular and unnecessary use of the army and police force. While this was carried out under the guise of maintaining law and order, disorder of a different kind (namely corruption) decimated the public service. Several top-ranking civil servants were investigated for corruption,<sup>31</sup> and sadly, instead of attending to these vices, the Mugabe government attempted to shift the burden to the taxpayer.

In 1997, for instance, the government arbitrarily awarded gratuities amounting to Z\$2,5 billion to war veterans who were protesting that they had been neglected by the government since independence. The amount awarded had not been budgeted for and almost caused the collapse of the country's financial system. In an attempt to recoup these losses, the government attempted to introduce three taxes: a war veterans levy, an increase in service tax of 2,5% and a tax on pensions. The proposed taxes irked the entire working population, which had been highly critical of Mugabe's award to war veterans. In an effort to save the situation, ZCTU made strenuous attempts to engage the government in dialogue over this matter. When this seemed unfruitful, ZCTU, along with its allies in the NCA, called for a nationwide strike on 9 December 1997.<sup>32</sup> The initial strike was followed by two other successful mass stay-aways in March and October 1998. These repeated actions finally led the state to announce the scrapping of the tax proposals. An unsuccessful attempt was made in late March 1998 to ban the ZCTU as an organisation, using provisions of the Labour Relations Act (Chapter 28:01).<sup>33</sup>

What these developments demonstrated was the triumph of strategic mass action against state repression and intransigence. This set the leadership of ZCTU and the political elite within ZANU-PF on a collision course. So deep was the resentment that the state daily paper, the *Herald*, habitually referred to labour leaders as "stooges of white imperial interests".<sup>34</sup> The rift between

the two seemed irreconcilable as, spurred on by the victories of 1998, workers throughout the country as well as sections of the intelligentsia began calling for the formation of a broad-based political party to oppose ZANU-PF. The inevitable leader of such a process seemed to be the ZCTU, given its numerous victories against the Mugabe government. Thus the leadership of the ZCTU was confronted with the unavoidable responsibility of leading this process.

## The Raw Data Report

The ZCTU commissioned its advocacy officers to carry out a nationwide survey on various dimensions of the crises facing individuals and communities in Zimbabwe. The survey also sought to establish what the general populace perceived as possible solutions to their dilemma. The findings of this survey were summarised in a report known as the 'Raw Data Report',<sup>35</sup> and a broad civic alliance led by the ZCTU and NCA leadership then convened a Working People's Convention in February 1999 to analyse this report and chart a way forward.<sup>36</sup> Five experts were requested to make presentations to smaller working groups of participants, drawn from across urban and rural Zimbabwe, on the five broad areas covered by the Raw Data Report.

After extensive deliberations within the smaller working groups, the Convention went into plenary, where designated rapporteurs presented their groups' resolutions. While debating the way forward, the delegates unanimously agreed on the following:

- That the government and ruling ZANU-PF party had failed to safeguard the interests of the majority of Zimbabweans in the broad areas covered by the Raw Data Report.
- That there was a need for a more cohesive opposition party to contest the 2000 general election and the 2002 presidential election, implying, therefore, that such an opposition political party was not yet in existence.
- That the ZCTU, along with other civic groups, should facilitate the formation of such a broad-based, credible opposition.

Following this process several report-back and consultative meetings were held at both the national and local levels to drum up support and promote understanding and popular ownership of the Convention resolutions. After

these extensive consultations, the MDC was officially launched at Rufaro Stadium on 11 September 1999.<sup>37</sup>

## The first Congress

The launch was followed by a Congress at which a substantive leadership was elected. Morgan Tsvangirai became the first elected president and Gibson Sibanda his deputy. The election of Tsvangirai and several other labour and civic leaders to the first MDC executive raised several issues. On the one hand, the formation of the MDC answered the political dilemma of what to do with a new constitution should the government prove amenable to it. On the other hand it partly responded to the moral quandary of whether civic leaders should assume an overtly political role by holding elective office in political parties. It was clear to the majority of civic leaders that protests alone were insufficient to address comprehensively the governance crisis facing Zimbabwe. However, the risks of politicising civil society on a partisan basis seemed too huge, for a variety of reasons. The first was an appreciation that the state would use this to discredit the entire civic movement as politically biased and actuated by self-interest. The second was the simple realisation that depletion of the civic ranks in order to staff political parties would severely compromise this sector.

This multi-layered dilemma was complicated by the government's response to the defeat of its proposals in the constitutional referendum of 2000. In a sense the leadership of the NCA realised that civic initiatives without the prospect of political implementation were futile. Since May 1997, the NCA had been carrying out extensive consultations with Zimbabweans on the need for a new constitution and by 2000, had come up with a consensually evolved draft constitution, which the ZANU PF parliament and executive would not accept. This sparked an interesting discussion within the NCA and the broader civic movement. Many argued that not only did Zimbabwe deserve a new constitution, it also urgently deserved a 'new leadership'. But where would such leadership come from if not from civil society? This, as mentioned earlier, was a discomfiting reality for many social theorists and activists. The risks of misinterpretation and subversion of the civic agenda seemed too real to be ignored.

In the end, a compromise was reached within both the NCA and the ZCTU to release those of the two groups' leadership who wanted to engage in party politics. As anticipated, the ramifications of this decision were both positive and negative. On the one hand, it facilitated the emergence of a new

leadership in both the NCA and ZCTU, respectively. This in a sense nominally de-linked the two organisations from the direct politics of the MDC. On the other hand, the new leadership was saddled with the task of proving its autonomy from its predecessors. The government played on this linkage and lumped the NCA, ZCTU and MDC together.

## **The white commercial farmers and external responses**

As demonstrated above, white commercial farmers did not found the MDC. The sudden influx of whites into the MDC occurred after the referendum following the “No Vote” victory. It was as if the whole nation got a sense of the possibility that ZANU-PF was not, after all, invincible. Thus the white commercial farmers, who for personal and other reasons (not least their grievances over the government’s more aggressive stance over the land question), were dissatisfied with the way things were developing in the country, threw their weight behind the MDC. They assisted in forming support groups within the commercial farming areas and made donations of cash and kind.

The critical question within the MDC leadership was always whether to accept these gifts and the givers as strategic allies or to shun both. The latter option made no sense in the absence of other sources of funding, especially when fighting a party that often used public resources to gain a competitive advantage against its opponents. ZANU-PF seized on this opportunity to castigate the MDC as a front for white interests<sup>38</sup>. Given his dwindling fortunes, Mugabe employed propagandists who capitalised on the white element to alienate all oppositional voices from regional sympathies.<sup>39</sup>

It did not help matters that the UK and EU took an active interest in the unfolding crisis in Zimbabwe. Their interest was so intense that it allowed Mugabe to allege that they were behind unconstitutional attempts to oust him. Herein was established Mugabe’s theory of an axis of evil between civics, MDC and white imperial interests. Once the axis of evil propaganda was accepted, it was used as justification for committing the most heinous violations of human rights since the Matabeleland/Midlands genocide of the 1980s. Human rights organisations have to date recorded in excess of 550,000 cases of serious human rights violations ranging from murder, arson, abductions, rapes and severe assaults to death threats.

The SADC regional response has been to hear no evil and see no evil. At worst, South Africa has often appeared to be playing the role of Mugabe’s

international public relations manager. Indeed, even after its own observer group had been attacked, the official South African government position was that the 2000 Zimbabwean parliamentary election was legitimate, this notwithstanding that the election violated a significant portion of the SADC Parliamentary Forum's minimum conditions for free and fair elections.

The external response to the Zimbabwean crisis has been blurred by hopes that the chaos would end once the land reform process was completed. The concluding remarks of this chapter deal briefly with this matter.

## **Where is the MDC now?**

The MDC is a creature of the circumstances outlined above. Its formation involved a process that may explain why it has so far survived such battering from the state: the MDC was formed in a very inclusive and extensively consultative manner. There are thus many constituencies that have an interest in preserving it as a vehicle for sustaining the politics of transition. These range from workers, peasants, students and young intellectuals to businesspeople and minority races.

ZANU-PF's policies have been a motley assortment of state capitalism and market-unfriendly individualism. Thus, apart from those who have been able to use their political affiliation to benefit from the current crisis, there are many businesspeople who are unhappy with the ad hoc and incoherent manner in which the economy has been managed. Equally, the declining economy has grossly eroded the capacity for leisure amongst young professionals and this has resulted in a massive brain drain, while ZANU-PF's policies have also not proved especially beneficial for the majority of women in Zimbabwe. Given ZANU-PF's widely articulated notions of selective citizenship, there seem to be limited choices for minority groups that feel excluded from the party's newly defined nation. These and many other constituencies have a stake in keeping the opposition alive. A convincing demonstration of this was the protest vote in the June 2000 parliamentary election as well as in the March 2002 presidential election. Urban citizens withstood long hours of hostile weather to cast their vote against ZANU PF and Mugabe. Mugabe lost in almost every single urban area, and the general feeling within urban Zimbabwe remains that Mugabe stole the presidential election and is therefore an illegitimate leader.

The human rights abuses referred to earlier and, indeed, those that continue to take place in Zimbabwe today, are a reflection of a regime whose sole

source of consent is coercion. This was likened by one communal farmer to the situation of a man who deludes himself into believing that he is loved by his spouse but stays on for fear of physical and pecuniary harm.

The last three years have seen repeated use of the militia and war veterans to contain oppositional forces in both urban and rural areas. Zimbabwe's High Court has ruled, in several of the election petitions filed by the MDC, that there was indeed widespread violence and intimidation that vitiated the freedom of the election process. The violence of the presidential election is common knowledge, as is the violence associated with several bye-elections. Both the MDC and civil society groups continue to note instances where food is repeatedly used as a political tool or where the MDC is impeded from accessing the rural areas.

The elections held over the past three years have been a farce. The violence and the unevenness of the electoral playing field have led to the failure of the electoral process in Zimbabwe. Unless the legal and institutional framework of elections changes radically, the chances of reviving electoral democracy are very slim.

## **The MDC: A party put to the test**

What the presidential election and the events prior and subsequent to it have done is to present new challenges and severe tests to the MDC. The first challenge is one of cohesion. When the MDC was created, the actors were bound together by the possibility of dislodging Mugabe through an electoral process. The thinking was that issues of ideology and participation would be negotiated once this was accomplished, although in fact much was done to avert clashes of interests between the doves and the hawks, the leftists and the conservatives, the young and the old, patriarchy and feminists; the list is endless.

The post-presidential election period requires the MDC to define a new set of values (inspirational and strategic) that will keep the bond intact. There are evident cracks, with some sectors calling for mass uprising whilst others prescribe negotiations and international intervention. Feminists within the party are beginning to demand more gender-sensitive policies and workers are now more vocal about their interests. The lines of synergy are being increasingly blurred.

Mr Tsvangirai, as leader of the opposition, is neither in Parliament nor in government. In a sense, many of the recognised activities of the MDC are taking

place without his active involvement. The dilemma is that there are situations where a parliamentary caucus agenda may be different from the broader party's position. Thus there have been instances where sentiments attributed to various pockets of the MDC leadership are contradictory. Cases in point are Eddie Cross's views on privatisation and Munyaradzi Gwisai's position on the land issue.<sup>40</sup>

The second challenge for the MDC is one of leadership. Many of its leaders came to be there because of the sense of urgency among the supporters to remove Mugabe at the polls. Their democratic credentials as well as their integrity and capacity were never interrogated. However, the post-presidential poll period requires greater clarity, immense integrity and commitment to the ideals of building a truly democratic Zimbabwe.

The third challenge is one of street credibility. There were expectations that if Mugabe stole the election there would be an uprising by the masses. The MDC leaders seem to have expected the masses to initiate this uprising, whereas the masses looked to the MDC leaders to do so. There is thus a crisis of leadership in the alternative movement. This is exacerbated by the fact that many of the MDC leaders are facing treason charges that may be deterring them from calling the much-awaited mass action. However, if the MDC leadership remains indecisive on this matter, it will lose street credibility as the crisis in Zimbabwe worsens. This ambivalence has been met with brutal attacks against MDC MPs by state security agents and the militia. There is a sense of frustration among MDC supporters that may fuel spontaneous, riotous conduct. This can only be averted if clear leadership is offered from the top. The MDC has also not been as effective in demonstrating its continuing relevance to the people's strongly felt needs in the present situation. In a sense, the MDC has missed many good opportunities to regain the upper hand in the political contest in Zimbabwe.

The fourth challenge the MDC faces is one of articulation. As indicated earlier, Mugabe has displaced the crisis from the national to the regional level as a pan-African struggle against imperial domination. The MDC has not been as successful in its regional diplomacy. There is thus a need for the MDC to rethink its regional strategy and refine its prescriptions for a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. In particular, the MDC needs clearly to articulate its position on the contentious issues of race relations, north-south relations, resource redistribution and the broader pan-African agenda. The simple question after the presidential poll has been, "What is the MDC's agenda now?" That agenda must be well articulated, well publicised and owned by the membership.

The fifth and last challenge facing the MDC in Zimbabwe has to do with its resource base. The nominal assistance it obtained from the white commercial farmers (in cash or kind) can no longer be expected or counted on. State funding is grossly insufficient to sustain its activities and external funding is undesirable and, in any event, illegal. Thus the MDC membership will be compelled, in the post-presidential poll period, to find alternative sources of support for the party. The much-desired change will have to be paid for from within. Given the depressed economic environment, this is a very difficult proposition to make.

Despite these numerous challenges, the MDC seems unlikely to disintegrate. It represents too broad a movement and its objective of removing Mugabe is also too broadly shared to collapse either due to frustration or infiltration. There may, however, be some changes in the party's middle leadership. Some of the necessary changes include bold decisions that the current leadership must take in the inevitable restructuring exercise that faces them.

However, the MDC's real survival lies in its ability to re-engage its civic partners in formulating an agenda for the post-presidential poll period.