

## British Colonialists Misfire in Zimbabwe

by Lydia Cherry

As Zimbabwe's March 9-10 elections approach, Africa's former colonial masters, led by Britain, have so accelerated their war of propaganda and manipulation against the Zimbabwe government, that they run the risk, not only of having their candidate *not* win this extremely important election, but also of losing some of their control elsewhere in Africa. The Feb. 17 decision of the European Union (EU) to slap selective sanctions on the Mugabe government, after a disagreement about election observers, and a like action by the United States, are being seen by some African leaders as parallel to President George Bush's "axis of evil" speech. The assumption in each case is that whatever the Europeans or the United States demand, will be accepted by the world.

The two major contenders in the election are the ruling ZANU-PF party led by President Robert Mugabe, and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by British puppet Morgan Tsvangirai. The underlying issues for the British are that Zimbabwe is important for British leverage on South Africa, and that Mugabe is exposing the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Mugabe's program of taking back land for Africans from large European holdings, however, has been Britain's political "bloody shirt."

### The Continent Opposes British Policy

There is a strong thrust for African unity in the organizing for the founding summit of the African Union, in South Africa in July. The continent is nearly unanimous in opposing the British attack on Zimbabwe's election.

African leaders all across the continent called the sanctions against President Mugabe and his cabinet ministers "unfortunate" and "unwise." The pro-Western President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, told a news conference in

Rome that it was sad that the EU had rejected Mugabe's request that the group of African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries take the lead in a joint observer mission. "I think we must understand that this country is a sovereign country," he said. The Mugabe government had invited nine European countries—France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Greece, Luxembourg, Ireland, Portugal, and Austria—to come as part of a joint mission led by the ACP group. Those not invited were Britain, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Obasanjo said the EU's pullout would make no difference. "If because [the EU election monitors] would have to leave, you expect that the elections in Zimbabwe will therefore no longer be free and fair—I would not say that the fact that there are no European observers, means an election anywhere would not be fair and free." No one complained at the absence of European observers in the U.S. Presidential elections in 2000, he said.

South Africa said the EU's decision was "difficult to fathom." Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad, who speaks for President Thabo Mbeki, told SABC radio, "We're really surprised at this decision, because if there are allegations that elections might not be free and fair, then it is important to ensure that many neutral, objective, impartial observers are in place." The official statement from Pretoria on Feb. 18 said the EU sanctions were "regrettable and unfortunate." It accompanied the announcement of the South African observers going to Zimbabwe, along with those from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Organization of African Unity. The Mbeki government has consistently refused to play the role that its Western friends have wanted concerning Zimbabwe.



*Tony Blair's (right) British government has let out all stops to prevent re-election of Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe (left) in the March 9 elections, despite unanimous opposition from the African nations, to British Commonwealth colonialist tactics.*

The West has mounted “a vicious campaign to vilify President Robert Mugabe because he was stepping on the corn on the foot of the West,” said Kedibone Molema, national secretary and leader of a small political party in South Africa, the Azanian People’s Organization, in response to the sanctions. “The ZANU-PF government will go on distributing land, no matter what.” She noted it was common practice and a “very African tradition” for leaders to stay in power for long periods of time.

Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa on Feb. 20 characterized recent British and EU moves as “neo-colonialism and economic colonialism.” At a village rally in northern Tanzania’s Kilimanjaro region, he urged African countries not to let themselves be manipulated by the EU and other powerful nations.

Mkapa likened the EU move to the balkanization of Africa at the 1885 Berlin Conference, where Europeans parcelled out Africa among themselves, adding, “I’m saying this because some are beginning to forget that it was in Berlin where they had gone to decide on the balkanization of this continent, into countries which they later came to colonize.” Mkapa stressed that Mugabe was right to defend his country’s policies in defiance of the “donor community,” stressing that Zimbabwe is an independent nation and should be let alone to decide its destiny.

Just days before the EU pulled its election monitors from Zimbabwe, African Union Secretary General Amara Essy, speaking in Lusaka, the Zambian capital, said that Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa acted within reason when he rejected the EU report on his country’s Dec. 27, 2001 general elections. He suggested that the continent would be much better off if African countries monitored their own elections: “They do not ask or invite us to go to the United States or

Europe to monitor elections there,” Essy said. “I hope this will not continue.”

### **The Stakes**

The March 9-10 elections are not just an exercise in “multiparty democracy,” but a crucial choice of policy direction. President Mugabe made his policy direction clear as early as his December 2000 speech at a special party congress of the ruling ZANU-PF party. He said it was a mistake to adopt the IMF policy orientation, saying, “The hardships we endure today arise from the programs of adjustment in which we acquiesced at the beginning of this decade, which have had the terrible effect of simply wiping off the phenomenal social gains we had made during the first decade of our independence. . . . For the past decade, we adjusted and liberalized the economy. . . . The question we could not answer is: For whom are we adjusting the economy? By hindsight and by sheer deepening misery of our people, we can now answer that question. We adjusted the economy to serve the external interests, which is why our people have nothing to show, ten years into the adjustment.” At that congress, Mugabe laid out his land redistribution program as central to the policy he hoped would address the failure of IMF “adjustments.”

Against Mugabe is the two-year-old opposition MDC, which wants cooperation with the IMF. The British Conservative Party’s shadow deputy foreign secretary, Richard Spring, filled in the picture in addressing the Cape Town Press Club on Feb. 19. Spring said of the MDC, “We are very close to them; we are in virtual daily contact,” according to SAPA news service. The same day, a Conservative Party spokesman told BBC that Zimbabwe is on its way to becoming a “rogue state,” unless Mugabe does as he is told regarding election monitors.