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Cover Story
Mugabe Sworn in Officially...Simultaneously Loses his Legacy...
The African World
By Bill Fletcher, Jr.
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I remember reading of the origin of the term "*Pyrrhic victory*." It came from a battle in which Pyrrhus, the King of ancient Epirus, won a victory over the Romans at such a terrible cost, that he and his forces were ruined.

Robert Mugabe has been declared the victor in the Zimbabwean elections. The elections were so tainted by murder and intimidation that they lost all credibility. Leaders of African nations who, hitherto, had been reluctant to criticize the undemocratic practices of President Mugabe have now spoken out. South Africa's former President Nelson Mandela felt compelled to break with his successor, President Thabo Mbeki, in denouncing President Mugabe and his "failure of leadership." In the middle of this, President Mugabe stands firm, as if a character out of a Shakespearean play, proclaiming his eternal rule and willingness to go to war should he lose an election.

Progressives around the world must now take a deep breath and reflect on the situation. Those who have been entranced by President Mugabe's anti-imperialist rhetoric must do an assessment of the situation on the ground. The Black farm workers

who worked the land of the white farmers, did not measurably benefit from Mugabe's land seizures; inflation is at a scale virtually unimaginable in economics; hundreds of thousands of people were removed from their homes two years ago in the middle of the Zimbabwean winter, having no place to go, allegedly because they were vagrants living in shacks, but more likely because they were a base of support for the opposition; assassinations and physical intimidation became the *modus operandi* of pro-Mugabe militias in the aftermath of the first round of elections this spring as a way of suppressing the opposition; and the homophobic President continues to ignore the depth of the HIV/AIDS crisis in his country.

As noted Syracuse Professor Horace Campbell remarked in a debate on the Pacifica program "Democracy Now!", while it is absolutely true that there are other countries in Africa (and certainly around the world) who have horrendous human rights practices, this in no way lets Zimbabwe off the hook. Zimbabwe was, according to its leaders, supposedly attempting to carry out more than political independence from colonialism, but was to be engaged in a project of social transformation. For this reason alone we should hold Zimbabwe, and President Mugabe, to a higher standard than we would someone like Egypt's President Mubarak.

The dilemma for progressives in the USA who support the people of Zimbabwe revolves around what steps we can take. In fact, what we are most often asked is whether we support the various actions by the Bush administration to put pressure on President Mugabe.

I wish that I could support such efforts. I simply cannot. Neither the USA nor Britain possesses the moral authority to engage constructively in the Zimbabwe crisis. At best they can play a supportive role where African nations are taking the lead. The Bush administration is not in a position to lecture anyone on human rights or genuine elections. This fact, however, should NOT mean that we remain silent simply because President Bush holds President Mugabe in disdain. The enemy of our enemy is not necessarily our friend.

Many progressives in South Africa have taken a leading role in opposing the Mugabe tyranny, and they have done this without the support of their own government. Several weeks ago, for instance, a Chinese ship full of weapons destined for Mugabe's government attempted to unload in South Africa. South African dockworkers refused to unload the boat. Ultimately the ship had to turn around and sail back to China.

The example of the refusal to unload the Chinese ship was interesting in that the workers imposed their own sanctions on the Mugabe regime. It was also interesting, as a side note, that China was supplying small arms to Zimbabwe in the middle of a political crisis; small arms that would have been of little use against external invaders but certainly useful for suppressing internal dissent.

Subsequently, and in the context of the fraudulent, second-round Zimbabwean elections, the Congress of South African Trade Unions went one step further and called on South Africans to blockade Zimbabwe. They actually took an additional step: they have called upon friends of the Zimbabwean people to engage in total non-cooperation with the Mugabe regime. I believe that this is the course that should be followed. Nothing should be done to assist or give the slightest bit of credibility to the Mugabe regime. The Mugabe regime should henceforth be recognized to be an oligarchy administered by an autocrat in the name of a clique that is currently benefiting at the expense of the Zimbabwean people.

Those who support the people of Zimbabwe should not follow the lead of President

Bush or British Prime Minister Brown. They have nothing to offer and they will, in fact, worsen the situation. Rather, we should be calling upon the African Union and Zimbabwe's neighbors to take action. Perhaps with the right amount of genuine pressure, a transitional government can be put into place. A transitional government, however, cannot be a mechanism for the practical elimination of the opposition. It must be a means to step back from the precipice of civil war.


A final point and actually one that I have made at other moments in discussing Zimbabwe. Much has been made of the contradictory and often pro-Western politics of the principal opposition group, the Movement for a Democratic Change. In fact, and quite ironically there have been times when Mugabe was perceived to be and portrayed as being pro-Western. He certainly introduced economic policies to the satisfaction of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the 1980s.

Opposing the Mugabe autocracy does not mean supporting the MDC. The future of the MDC, let alone Zimbabwe, should be in the hands of the people of Zimbabwe. What we, progressives and friends of Zimbabwe should recognize is that we have a duty of solidarity with the people of that country fighting to complete that which their Liberation War started so very long ago.

BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of the **just released** book, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

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