

# Left-wing Monster: Robert Mugabe

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IN COMPARISON TO Zimbabwe, neighbouring Mozambique and Zambia, once the far poorer countries, now look wealthy. South Africa and Botswana, moderately successful by African standards, look like first-world countries. Zimbabwe is becoming the most benighted sub-Saharan nation, the heart of Africa's darkness and the soul of its shame. The death of this once-rich and thriving country has been the lifetime project of its Dictator for Life, Robert Mugabe.

Other countries, especially in Africa, suffer from despotism. But Mugabe's Zimbabwe is a special case. While he is as much a connoisseur of everyday brutality as other dictators, only Mugabe, along with his longstanding friend and supporter, North Korea's Kim Jong Il, has Mugabe the monster

used famine in his quest to bring his people to heel and wipe out all opposition. As in the case of his North Korea brother in crime, he has made hunger a weapon. Over 4 million Zimbabweans--one third of the population--need food aid. The country is afflicted by 70 percent unemployment, chronic fuel shortages, and triple-digit inflation. The World Bank has described Zimbabwe's economic situation as "unprecedented for a country not at war."

This was not always the case. As recently as the mid-1970s, Zimbabwe--then Southern Rhodesia--was sub-Saharan Africa's second-largest exporter of food, primarily wheat, maize, and tobacco, all of it grown on large, white-owned (mostly Anglo but many Afrikaner) farms. But in 1979, following a long civil war, blacks led by Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), supported by Maoist China and Castro and subsidized by the European Left, seized power. As a result, life in the capital, Harare (formerly Salisbury), and in Zimbabwe generally, began its long spiral downward. Cleanliness disappeared and crime became a way of life as apartheid-era Rhodesia, after a

brief experiment with pluralism and open politics, was replaced by Mugabe's tribal Shona dictatorship.

## The Making of a Tyrant

Robert Gabriel Mugabe was born in 1924 at the Kutama Mission in Zvimba, then Southern Rhodesia, only months after the country became a British crown colony. Son of a peasant farmer and carpenter, he began his education at a nearby Jesuit mission and then taught in various schools while studying for certification to go on to the University of Fort Hare in South Africa, from which he received a B.A. in English and History. He then studied at Drifontein, Salisbury (now Harare), Gwelo, and Tanzania, and eventually obtained by correspondence a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of London. Next he began teaching in Accra, Ghana (1958-60), where he met Sally Hayfron, his first wife.

When Mugabe studied there, Fort Hare, which was paid for by apartheid South Africa's white taxpayers, was the premier black university of all English-speaking Africa, producing a number of famous African leaders. At that institution

Mugabe became radicalized, as did such future "freedom presidents" as Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda and future rivals over absolute power in Rhodesia like Herbert Chitep. Ghana, which at the time was under the rule of American-educated Kwame Nkrumah, was also a center of anti-Western, "anti-imperialist" propaganda. By the time Mugabe returned to Rhodesia in 1960, he was a committed Leninist.

The term "Leninist" is used purposefully. There is no indication that Mugabe (or his colleagues, supporters, or mentors among the African liberation movements leaders, such as Amilcar Cabral in Guine Bissao, Samora Machel of Mozambique, and Sam Nujoma of Namibia) ever read Marx. If anything, they perhaps read Lenin and Stalin's brief treatises on how to take and keep power. One of Mugabe's colleagues in this regard is Mengistu Haile Mariam, a briefly American-trained Ethiopian dictator and Stalin emulator, who has been a guest of Mugabe's since 1991, while he faces charges of crimes against humanity in Ethiopia, whose government has been seeking his extradition.

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The Zimbabwe liberation movements of the 1970s--primarily Mugabe's ZANU and its competitor ZAPU (Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union)--had a confused history of idealistic rhetoric, Marxism-Leninism, and systematic atrocities. They were encouraged by Western liberals and provided safe havens across Rhodesia's borders with Mozambique (which supported ZANU) and Zambia (sponsoring ZAPU). In the larger scheme of things, Moscow helped ZAPU and China supported ZANU. In fact, the two movements, militarily ineffective as they were against the (mostly black) Rhodesian military, were fundamentally instruments of the ethnic/tribal bosses of the country's two main ethnic groups: the majority Shona for ZANU and ZAPU for the minority Ndebele, close relatives of South Africa's Zulus. Marxism Leninism was a cover for political ambition.

Mugabe's ZANU was always the more violent and racially minded of the two organizations. The movement's inner dynamics worked in favor Robert Mugabe, who in the 70s was the least talented, least well-known, but most ruthless ZANU leader. His early

opponents were the relatively more moderate Sithole and Herbert Chitepo. The first was defeated by Mugabe in a leadership struggle in 1974, the latter was killed in Zambia the following year. His killing remains an unsolved mystery, but Mugabe was clearly the beneficiary.

By 1979 the choice in Rhodesia was no longer between a white minority regime or a majority black one allied with the whites. It was between several competing radical black groups--this despite the fact that black moderates under Bishop Muzorewa were already in government and allied with the white minority that produced and controlled most of Southern Rhodesia's wealth. Against them were pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese radical groups that, although they had won neither on the military battlefield nor in the realm public opinion, had the backing of London and Washington.

The argument was that Muzorewa's alliance with the white minority somehow made him insufficiently "democratic," and that only the basically tribal revolutionary organizations like ZANU and ZAPU would be able to govern.

Numbers (and ZANU's open intimidation of voters) ultimately counted, and Mugabe won the elections in 1980, which resulted in ZANU's gaining 63 percent of the vote and 57 seats, while Nkomo's ZAPU won 20 seats. The whites, guaranteed 20 seats, gave them all of the Rhodesian Front of former prime minister Ian Smith. The black voters, threatened by the armed thugs of the "liberation movements," inevitably and wisely chose to support the perceived winners: those very same groups. It was a classic example of the "one man, one vote, one time" pattern widespread in Africa then and since.

### **Dictator for Life**

Once in power as prime minister, Mugabe allowed no opposition. First he pushed Nkomo aside. Then in 1982, using militias trained by North Korea, he crushed ZAPU's military arm, destroying entire Ndebele villages in the process. In 1987 the position of prime minister was abolished, and Mugabe assumed the new office of executive president, gaining additional powers. He was reelected in 1990 and 1996, and, by open fraud, in 2002. Most of his supporters, including illiterate Shona peasants, voted

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for him out of a well-founded fear: The government was not above conditioning deliveries of outside food aid on political loyalty.

In this way, Mugabe and ZANU quickly consolidated absolute power in the newly named Zimbabwe. They have used that authority to concentrate all political power in the ruler and economic power with his family and tribal clique, and to openly promote anti-white racism, anti-capitalism and, in foreign affairs, the pursuit of "anti-imperialist" (anti-Western) goals. As the *Economist* put it, "Mugabe feels safer when whites and white-collar blacks leave the country; then they cannot vote. He pushes them out in various ways. Employing thugs to break their fingers is one. Confiscating private property is another. But he also uses more subtle techniques. For example, in May 2004, his government ordered the country's private schools to reduce their fees or close. Armed police were sent to enforce the edict, so most schools complied. Given rapidly rising costs, this guarantees that standards will fall, which will prompt more middle-class parents to emigrate."

Around 1990, Mugabe took his secretary Grace Marufu, 40 years his junior, as a second wife (his first wife would die two years later). The marriage was a strange one, entered into under a traditional African law which allows a junior wife. Grace is infamous for her influence on her husband and for her family's voracious takeovers of former white farms.

Mugabe pressured the local Catholic hierarchy to celebrate his marriage with a nuptial mass. But on social policy, Mugabe has evolved into a rabid enemy of the Catholic Church, or indeed any Christian church, and a persecutor of homosexuals. Ironically, in the past Mugabe himself had been accused of being a homosexual by South African and Rhodesian intelligence services.

### **Stalinist economics and the war against the whites**

From the start, Mugabe was against the whites. He began by changing laws so as to deny citizenship to whites (always less than 5 percent of the population) such as the Salisbury-born former commander of Rhodesia's military, Gen. Peter Walls. Whites' guaranteed parliamentary seats

were taken away, and their remaining MPs, including most prominently Ian Smith, were harassed, isolated, and sometimes denied passports. Following an interview with Ian Smith, in fact, this author was briefly detained in Harare in 1984 and expelled to South Africa. No credible explanations were given.

As long as the apartheid regime lasted in neighboring South Africa, Mugabe had to tread carefully, considering his country's reliance on South African trade and energy. But these constraints disappeared when majority rule came to Pretoria in 1994 where Mugabe's abuses against whites are now tolerated, if not overtly encouraged.

The source of Mugabe's anti-white bigotry is not difficult to discern. About 4,000 white farmers, some of whom had been established in the country for generations, produced the majority of the country's consumer foods and all its agricultural and industrial exports. White-owned farms were an attractive prey for his own family and political clique, as well as an opportunity for political demagoguery. By 2006, there

were only 200 left, and those were literally under siege.

Beyond his longstanding racial animosity, Mugabe's main problem with whites is political and ideological. Politically, he has to satisfy his own Shona clique's desire for the land and wealth that had long been concentrated in white hands (although only a few of the confiscated farms were transferred to local peasants). While "land reform" was the pretext for Mugabe's move, the reality was that most farms were transferred to a parasitic clique around the president. Tens of thousands of black farm employees were left unemployed, and the state lost most of its tax and export revenues.

Ideologically, the whites initially represented "the bourgeoisie," Mugabe's equivalent of Stalin's "class enemies." As he stated five years ago, "As a collectivity, they [white farmers] are a natural fissure and beachhead for the retention or re-launch of British and European influence and control over our body politic." That is also the reason why the assault against the whites went beyond the agribusiness domain. The

regime has now begun confiscating and vandalizing white-owned property in Zimbabwe's cities. During Mugabe's earlier "Clean out the Filth" slum-clearing campaign, according to the UN, some 2.4 million people lost their housing. Many areas "cleared" were in fact prime real estate locations, ready for the regime's speculator sharks to take over for nothing.

In August 2002, Grace Mugabe, aided by the military, took over a 3,000-acre farm for her family, arresting the 78-year-old owner and dismissing the farm's black workers. Two of Mugabe's sisters, his brother-in-law and his wife's nephew, have also received farms. ZANU party members have burned millions of acres of crops and prevented many more acres from being farmed. As was the case with Stalin's creation of mass famine in the Ukraine in the 1930s, the burning of crops had a clear political goal: a hungry population is easier to control.

The confiscations, along with arbitrary currency manipulation, have led to astronomical rates of inflation--more than 500 percent in 2005--and a growing black market. Primary school enrollment

has dropped precipitously with Zimbabweans so poor that they cannot afford state school fees of \$4 a term. Infant mortality has doubled while life expectancy fell from age 60 to 35. All this is after the regime drove some 3.4 million Zimbabweans, one quarter of the population, into exile, 1.2 million to South Africa alone, according to Harare's own figures. Today, Zimbabwe has no credit. Boeing has cut off supplies to Air Zimbabwe. Even China, Mugabe's old friend, avoids investments in the country.

### **Foreign Policy**

Except for ensuring the survival of his regime, Mugabe's foreign relations policies have been no more successful than his domestic program. To a large extent, Zimbabwe's foreign policy is intended to compensate for the failures of the regime's domestic economic decisions. Thus, its 1999 military intervention in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which cost millions of dollars a month despite the fact that Zimbabwe had no interests there, was intended to compensate for the trade loss brought about by the destruction of Zimbabwe's

entrepreneurial native class, largely white and Asian.

The beneficiaries of the Congo intervention were of course the presidential clique. Zimbabwean troops were stationed in the diamond mining areas of Congo, and, as Zimbabwean Defense Minister Moven Mahachi put it, "Instead of our army in the DRC burdening the treasury for more resources, which are not available, it embarks on viable projects for the sake of generating the necessary revenue." Two companies based in Zimbabwe and DRC were granted licenses to buy and sell diamonds and gold, and to set up offices manned by military officers, and in October 2000, the DRC's Kabila, who barely controls his country's capital, awarded Zimbabwe's Agricultural and Rural Development Authority more than 500,000 hectares of farming land in DRC.

Zimbabwe, with few friends remaining, has aligned itself with anyone who supports anti-white, anti-Western racism. From the outset, Mugabe's friends included some of the most odious governments in the world: North Korea, Libya (which subsidized Mugabe until

only recently), Cuba, Iraq, Iran, and China. While in Rome in October 2005 to mark the 60th anniversary of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Mugabe accused U.S. President Bush and the UK's Prime Minister Blair of illegally invading Iraq, asking "Must we allow these men, the two unholy men of our millennium, who, in the same way as Hitler and Mussolini formed [an] unholy alliance, formed an alliance to attack an innocent country?" Some FAO delegates applauded Mugabe, and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez paid tribute to him, saying "The president of Zimbabwe is made out to be a villain-because he takes land from those who don't need it to give it to those who need it to live." It is thought that Mugabe intends to follow North Korea and Iran in using a nuclear threat to blackmail the West into subsidizing its economy.

### **An Enduring Reign**

A combination of factors has allowed Mugabe to maintain his grip on power. These include the incompetence of Zimbabwe's domestic opposition, continued outside support, mostly from South Africa, and an unduly indulgent "international community."

Many middle-class Zimbabweans have the means to make their ideas about democracy heard. They bankrolled the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), an opposition party that would have won the last two national elections had those votes not been rigged. But the MDC, led by Morgan Tsvangirai and supported by Archbishop Pius Ncube of Bulawayo, remains divided, vulnerable to factionalism, and lacking international support, even from otherwise vocal human rights organizations and from neighboring South Africa.

Because of Mugabe's thuggery, the educated middle classes of Zimbabwe, by now almost all black, have been forced to leave in droves, denying the remaining opposition its leadership and resources. However, as the *Economist* noted, "You have to admire Robert Mugabe's chutzpah. First he makes life so miserable for Zimbabweans that busloads of them emigrate. Then he asks the fugitives to send money home to prop up the regime that drove them out in the first place." When they do send money, he confiscates it through currency manipulations.

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Mugabe's destruction of the independent media played a major role in defeating the opposition, and he was thorough in that respect. His attacks have been relentless and often Orwellian. In January 2006 Security Minister Didymus Mutasa stated that "the net will soon close" on those remaining journalists whose criticism of the government threatens the nation's security. Journalists were arrested, including those of the independent radio station Voice of the People (now transmitting from a Dutch-funded station in the Malagasy Republic), which was accused of being "driven by the love for the United States dollars and British pounds, which they are paid by the foreign media houses to peddle lies." There are hardly any media left in Zimbabwe, and even fewer foreign correspondents. The regime refuses or postpones indefinitely journalists' accreditation and then accuses them of breaking the law by operating without it.

Mugabe has benefited from the support or benign neglect of his fellow African presidents, particularly South Africa's Thabo Mbeki. It took a long time but it finally seems that the African Union is

beginning to understand the danger to its credibility represented by its silence over Mugabe's atrocities. Thus the AU Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, meeting in Gambia in January 2006, expressed concern over "the continuing violations and the deterioration of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe, the lack of respect for the rule of law and the growing culture of impunity."

South Africa almost single-handedly controls Mugabe's fate. Were South Africa's northern Limpopo border closed both ways, it would bring Zimbabwe to its knees in a matter of weeks. However, while domestic, anti-immigrant protests are pushing South Africa toward trying to control the influx of Zimbabwean immigrants, it continues to send vital supplies to the very regime that is pushing the emigrants out.

Zimbabwe's geopolitics are identical to what they were when South Africa withdrew support from the Ian Smith government, thereby ending it. But the Communist Party and radical elements in his own African National Congress would never allow South African President

Mbeki to do likewise. Moreover, there is a growing movement among radicalized blacks in South Africa who seek to imitate Mugabe's suicidal "land reform" in the name of the same anti-white racism and economic idiocy. Namibia's president, Sam Nujoma, for instance, shares Mugabe's racist and Marxist background and follows the Zimbabwe model.

### **The "international community"**

It is important for donor countries and human rights advocates in the West--Live-8 producer Bob Geldoff, U2's Bono, and NGOs included--to appreciate that, far from being a unique case, Mugabe's recipe for destroying a prosperous country appears to have more imitators than critics within Africa. Indeed, all who wish Africa success can only be shocked and dismayed when Mugabe's racism, totalitarianism, corruption, and blatant disregard of all norms of decent behavior are not just tolerated but, by silence or commission, encouraged by the very same third-world leaders who demand and expect Western aid.

Although Prime Minister Blair has taken a strong and persistent position in

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condemning Mugabe, virtually all Western media and academia continue to pretend that the racism at the core of Mugabe's worldview actually played no part in Zimbabwe's transformation from food exporter to basket case. Even Western human rights groups, while condemning Mugabe's atrocities, avoid using the word "racism."

Not all of Zimbabwe's neighbors support Mugabe, as was demonstrated when Zambia, and Mozambique cut power deliveries to Zimbabwe due to nonpayment. Even more significant, both countries welcomed the expelled white Zimbabwean farmers; Mozambique even offered them free land.

Similarly, the large and growing Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain is vocal in its criticism of Mugabe, resulting in an EU ban on travel for Mugabe and his government members, who were already banned by France and Italy. As to aid, while it is clear that Zimbabwe's famine is due exclusively to Mugabe, the West continues to send food aid, even though this only strengthens the very regime that makes such aid necessary. The impotence of the United Nations, the

African Union, and the West in general to deal with Robert Mugabe's reign of terror suggests that "world opinion" is just that: opinion, without action.

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