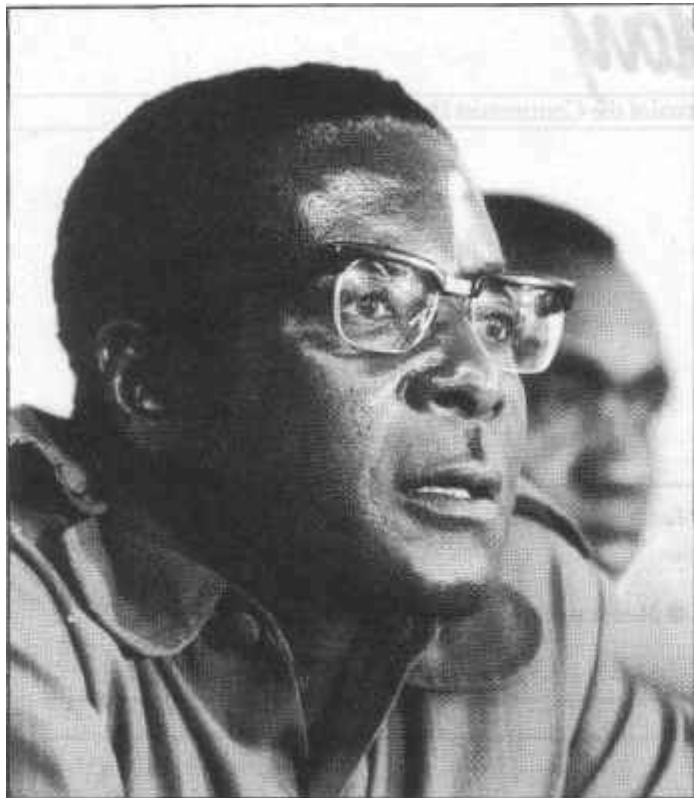


FOCUS



Robert Mugabe



Joshua Nkomo

ZIMBABWE IN TURMOIL

The elimination of ZAPU as a political organisation must be the aim of the rampage of the Fifth Brigade through Matabeleland, the exile of Joshua Nkomo, and all the preceding debilitating attacks on ZAPU leaders over the past year. Something of this nature, a showdown, was on the cards even before independence when the Patriotic Front, which had temporarily joined ZAPU and ZANU, split for the election which brought Robert Mugabe his resounding victory and revealed to Nkomo that his electoral constituency did not extend much beyond the borders of Matabeleland.

The showdown was signalled by the well publicised discovery of arms caches last year on property belonging to ZAPU, and then by the expulsion of Nkomo from the cabinet. In rapid order came desertions of former ZIPRA guerrillas from the National Army (ZIPRA had been the ZAPU army) and a quick separate peace with Mugabe by one group of ZAPU leaders. Four stayed as Ministers and another as a deputy Minister. Other senior ZAPU figures had already been pushed sideways into non-controversial diplomatic posts, or had moved out of politics. Seven top officials were put

on trial for treason, and then thousands of activists or supporters were swept up all over the country and placed in detention camps.

Some of the army deserters, quickly labelled 'dissidents' (in the early 60s it was the anti-Nkomo faction in ZAPU who were the 'dissidents') returned to the bush. The government sent units of the National Army against them into Matabeleland, where desertions again occurred. The more reliable and solidly Shona Fifth Brigade were sent in; they set about terrorising the local populace. The interpretation abroad was that this was tribal war. Nkomo, in fear of his life, fled.

Yet this brief history, if it is viewed solely as a new development in ZAPU/ZANU rivalry, or as evidence of a putative Ndebele/Shona split, or as the final phase of an ancient rancour between Nkomo and Mugabe, explains little. Why is Mugabe setting out on his present highly visible and damaging course when initially political pressure alone was getting rid of his rivals?

One thesis being mounted by sources inside Zimbabwe is that he needs to destroy first of all a real military threat, and then a potential threat from the Left for whom ZAPU's grassroots structures could be a vehicle. He needs to counter the re-form-

ation of ZAPU as a national left wing opposition party. It is a thesis that merits at least as much attention as Mugabe's claim that he is destroying bandits or coup-makers.

For those who had hoped that Zimbabwe would join the other revolutionary states of southern Africa, Mozambique and Angola, after the conclusion of its own armed struggle there has been only disappointment. A black bourgeoisie allied to Western interests and a white farming bourgeoisie seem firmly in control. Britain and the US are very happy with progress so far. However, ZAPU was no left wing party either and there is little reason to believe that Nkomo in power would have behaved any differently. Like ZANU, it was a national liberation movement and a bundle of interests united against the overriding oppression of Ian Smith and his settler government.

However, ZAPU supporters believed that the Left was stronger in their organisation and definitely within ZIPRA — and that it could have organised and been effective if the PF had stayed united. This is what one ZIPRA commander (now in detention) had to say at the time of the break-up: 'Splitting the PF will enable the right wing in both parties to gain the control

they need to neutralise the fighters. Just wait and see how they will use that power.' He added: 'By splitting the PF the real aim is to divide and destroy the revolution in Zimbabwe. If we cannot unite ZANLA and ZIPRA the revolution in Zimbabwe will be destroyed, and we (the guerrillas) will be used to destroy it.'

Ex-ZIPRAs have been harried out of the National Army or have deserted. With much less publicity ex-ZANLAs (ZANLA was ZANU's army) have also deserted — around 1,500 last year compared to almost 3,000 ex-ZIPRAs. It is unnecessary of course to claim that all desertions or armed engagements are expressions of left opposition. The ZANLA commander, Josiah Tongogara, killed in a road accident in Mozambique just before independence, publicly stated that he would not lead ZANLA back into Zimbabwe if it and ZIPRA returned as separate armies. Today the anti-Mugabe elements among former ZANLA guerrillas are believed to call themselves the Tongogara group. Even the Fifth Brigade is said to have experienced some internal conflict.

These reports, coming from sources in Zimbabwe close to ZAPU, are difficult to verify: the former guerrillas were immediately isolated in camps before demobbing or being taken into the National Army. The government has made it very difficult for journalists to contact them.

So, too, it is difficult to confirm claims that battles between the army and the dissidents are not confined to Matabeleland but have also take place in the north and north east, Shona territory. ZAPU was never a solely Ndebele/Kalanga movement and it still has organisations in western Mashonaland, in Harare itself, and some in eastern Mashonaland. Will the government move against these too, as it has done in Matabeleland if clashes spread throughout the country?

These problems are really the spawn of Lancaster House. The radicalisation process which could have placed the Left in a stronger position in a united Patriotic Front was cut off. The agreement specified that no party to the war had won, and left all the questions to be resolved later, in a situation more favourable to the national bourgeoisie and to imperialism. Crucially, Britain was given the task of solving the returned guerrilla problem.

The new government's and Britain's aims coincided when it came to ZIPRA. ZIPRA's thinking just after independence in 1980 was revealed in a letter to the chairman of the KGB in Moscow, written by Dumisa Dabengwa, ZIPRA's head:

'The masses of Zimbabwe are deeply convinced that Mugabe has turned out to be actually more reactionary and pro-Western than Muzorewa and that his policies will undermine the national interests of Zimbabwe and her people. It has also become clear that the British and US governments intend to make a stance in their neo-colonialist aspirations and make Zimbabwe into a key country in the region for their Southern African axis of influence.'

The letter has been presented as evidence of coup plotting in the present treason trial. Its substantial point had been a request that ZIPRA's KGB contact in Lusaka should not be withdrawn, now the liberation war was over. If this was a bid to retain the Soviet Union as a supporter in the new war against Mugabe's government there seems little likelihood that it succeeded. Indeed, they can expect little support from anywhere in the region other than South Africa, which has a reputation for sponsoring dissident organisations to weaken the scope for independent action of its neighbours.

Pretoria has been training and apparently infiltrating the 'auxiliaries' of Bishop Muzorewa which it took over after independence. There is little evidence, however, that it has yet taken over any of the former ZIPRAs — and to the degree that they are politically conscious they will avoid such contact as the plague.

It is clear that no coherent political organisation or platform has yet been created by them, and the government is making sure that the grassroots ZAPU structures are not used, filled with a new content. A new guerrilla war in these circumstances, many observers in Zimbabwe feel, will fail. On the political front left wingers are keeping their heads down and waiting for better times. ZAPU's remaining public spokesmen, such as its vice president Josiah Chinamano, are being very cautious.

The situation is complex, with class and national elements at play, as well as imperialist forces — but the people have had a long war and a high degree of politicisation. Perhaps a better fate awaits them than did Kenyans after that country's independence.

David James