

# ZIMBABWE'S 2005 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

## *Lessons for the Movement for Democratic Change*

By  
*Sehlare Makgetlaneng*

Dr Makgetlaneng is Head of Southern Africa Programme of Area Studies  
at the Africa Institute of South Africa  
PO Box 630 Pretoria 0001  
Tel: + 27(0)12 304 9700; Fax: +27(0)12 326 1786; Mobile: 072 263 5167  
e-mail: sehlare@ai.org.za (work); sehlare@telkomsa.net (home)

### ABSTRACT

*The paper analyses the theoretical and practical weaknesses of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the main opposition political party in Zimbabwe. To do justice to its struggle for political power, the MDC must wage a decisive war against these weaknesses, which are among the key reasons why it lost the March 2005 parliamentary elections and are important challenges it is facing in its struggle to defeat the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF). In focusing on these weaknesses the paper makes extensive use of the literature produced by critics of the ruling party. The paper maintains that the MDC has not recognised either in theory or in practice the strategic importance of mobilising for political, economic and ideological hegemony and has failed to provide comprehensive theoretical and practical alternatives to the ruling party as prerequisites for the realisation of its aim to replace it. As a result, the paper concludes, the MDC faces the danger of being reduced to exerting pressure upon the state of Zimbabwe and other Southern African countries for policy changes and victories which will not be sufficient for it either to achieve political power or to consolidate or expand these changes and victories.*

### INTRODUCTION

The MDC has been chosen for this case study because, since its formation, it has posed a more serious threat to Zanu-PF rule than any other political party and, with the ruling party, is one of two major parties in the country and the only one apart from Zanu-PF to have fielded candidates for all 120 contested seats in the parliamentary elections. The other parties – the Zimbabwe People's Democratic

Party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Ndonga (Zanu-Ndonga) and the Zimbabwe Youth in Alliance, which took part in the March 2005 elections, and the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe, the International Socialist Organisation and the National Alliance for Good Governance are minor parties. The MDC is the official opposition and is represented in both houses of Parliament.

The ruling party won the 2005 elections with an increased majority, taking 78 seats to the MDC's 41 and, according to the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC), winning nearly 60 per cent of the vote, an increase of 11 per cent over its showing in the 2000 elections in which it won 62 seats to the MDC's 57. Jonathan Moyo, former Minister of Information, who contested the election as an independent candidate, was the only independent to win a seat, taking the Tsholotsho constituency from the MDC. The MDC's share of the vote decreased by 9 per cent to 39 per cent. With an additional 30 seats allocated by the president to the ruling party, Zanu-PF occupied 108 of the 150 seats – more than the two-thirds majority it needed to change the Constitution.

Responding to the results, the MDC, citing massive inconsistencies, demanded new elections under a new constitution, contending that elections could not be free and fair in the current socio-political and economic situation. It also maintained that it had won 94 seats and not the 41 allocated by the ZEC. However, it did not specify how a new constitution should be drafted and approved, how new elections should be conducted or how it calculated the figure of 94 seats.<sup>1</sup>

The pattern of the results of the 2005 elections is essentially the same as that of the 2000 elections. The MDC won almost all the seats in the main cities, Harare and Bulawayo, where civil society organisations are relatively effective in their opposition to the ruling party. It also won a majority of seats in Matebeleland, where Ndebeles who had supported Zanu under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo continue to oppose the Shona-dominated ruling party. Zanu-PF won overwhelmingly in rural Mashonaland, where the majority of the population lives. Emmerson Mnangagwa, Speaker of the previous Parliament, lost his Kwekwe seat to Blessing Chebundo of the MDC. Jonathan Moyo's victory in the elections was a loss for the MDC. Another significant loss was the Chimanimani constituency, contested by Heather Bennett, wife of Roy Bennett, the former MDC MP jailed for assaulting two Cabinet members in Parliament in May 2004. (Bennett was released from prison on 28 June 2005 after serving eight months of a one-year sentence.) The 16 seats lost by the opposition party were all in rural areas. In the 2000 elections, the MDC had won all 15 seats in Matebeleland and the majority of urban seats, with the ruling party winning the majority of rural seats. The two main cities – Harare, with a majority Shona population, and Bulawayo, with a majority Ndebele population – voted overwhelmingly for the MDC.

---

1 The MDC's claims are disputed and rejected by Munyaradzi Gwisai, a former MDC Member of Parliament. See Gwisai 2005, p 8.

This pattern suggests that ethnicity is becoming less important in Zimbabwean politics and that policies, not ethnicity, drive political contest in the country, with the main dividing line being rural-urban. The ruling party has failed to win support from the urban working class and middle class. The MDC, supported by developed countries and white Zimbabweans, has failed to win support in the rural areas. It has also failed to provide shrewd political leadership and viable theoretical and practical alternatives to the ruling party. It is viewed as the organisational means of reversing the improvements made since political independence, including the land redistribution programme. While the ruling party supports the active role of the state in the management and direction of the economy, the MDC defends neo-liberal socio-economic policies.

Zimbabwe's adoption and implementation of the structural adjustment programme in the 1990s which substantially reversed the socio-economic improvements achieved since political independence and the socio-economic problems the country faced in the 1990s not only led to mass strikes and demonstrations but also to an alliance of various social forces and organisations, which led to the formation of the MDC (Dansereau 2003, pp 181-85; Andreasson 2003, pp 393-97; Sachikonye 2000-2001, p 7).

The MDC became the beneficiary of demands by popular social forces and organisations that the state solve these problems and of the state's failure to do so. These are some of the key reasons for the party's achievements in the 2000 and 2002 elections – achievements which have now been substantially reversed. Since 2003 the MDC has failed to prove that it is politically capable of solving Zimbabwe's socio-economic problems.

### EVIDENCE THAT THE MDC WOULD LOSE THE 2005 ELECTIONS

The economic problems, corruption and mismanagement which plagued Zimbabwe in 2004 were no indication that the MDC would win the 2005 parliamentary elections. In early 2004 its four Harare councillors, including the acting mayor, Sekayi Makavara, left the party, citing leadership problems as the key reason behind their decision. The ruling party defeated the MDC in a key by-election in Zengeza, the township near Harare, in the Chitungwiza area, stronghold of the MDC. The MDC's supporters and loyalists maintained that poor organisation, a weak candidate and infighting within the leadership were key reasons why Christopher Chigumba of Zanu-PF won 8 744 votes to the 6 706 for James Makore of the MDC in the 27-28 March by-election. In the 2002 elections, Chigumba had been defeated by Tafadzwa Musekiwa of the MDC by 14 814 votes to 5 330. Musekiwa left for London after several alleged threats on his life. This led to a by-election in Zengeza. Local MDC supporters maintained that they were betrayed by Musekiwa's decision to leave and were not happy about the imposition of Makore as the party's candidate in the election. It was reported that voters were questioning the MDC's failure seriously to challenge the ruling party and that morale was so low that the majority of them

concluded that it would be pointless to contest elections under the prevailing electoral rules (*Africa Confidential* 2004a, p 2).

*Africa Confidential* provided overwhelming evidence immediately before the 2005 elections that the ruling party would win, suggesting that the political situation in Zimbabwe had changed in favour of the ruling party in 2004. While in 2000 people wanted Zanu-PF out because of the deteriorating economy and they still wanted 'Mugabe and his allies' out in 2004, 'many' people 'hope that Zanu-PF with a new leader would be less destabilising than a switch to the opposition' party. There had been economic improvements since 2004, with products which were scarce becoming available. The MDC launched its 2005 election campaign late, having earlier insisted that it would boycott the elections. Many of its supporters failed to register and, as the economic problems intensified, voters showed a preference for candidates who claimed they were able to improve their material conditions. MDC Members of Parliament had done little for their constituents since winning the 2000 parliamentary elections (*Africa Confidential* 2005, p 1).

Before the 2005 elections, *Africa Confidential* forecast that the MDC might win 49 seats and that should it win fewer than 49, the ruling party would have the two-thirds majority it was seeking (2005, p 2). It believed the MDC would win all seven Bulawayo seats, all the seats in Matebeleland North except Tsholotsho and all 18 Harare seats. It might face problems in Zengeza and it was possible that it would win six of the seven Matebeleland South seats, three urban Manicaland East and Central seats, one Chimanimani seat, two or three seats in Mashonaland West, one or two urban seats in Mavingo and three seats in the Midlands (2005, pp 1-2). This forecast was borne out by the results of the elections, with the MDC winning 41 seats and Zanu-PF 78 (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Results of 31 March 2005 Parliamentary Elections**

Party/Independents	No of Votes	% of Votes	No of Seats	% of Seats
Zanu-PF	1 569 867	59, 59	78	60
MDC	1 041 292	39, 52	41	40
Zanu-NDONGA	6 608	0,25	0	0
INDEPENDENTS				
(Jonathan Moyo)	16 878	0,64	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2 634 645</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>101</b>

Source: Zimbabwe Election Commission

## THE 2005 ELECTIONS AS A LESSON FOR THE MDC

The 2005 elections served as an important lesson for the MDC in its struggle for political power, compelling it to reassess its strategies and tactics critically and objectively and to change them in response to the dynamics of the Zimbabwean national situation. One of the key reasons for its poor performance is that it has become a moderate political party with conservative socio-economic policies, abandoning the direct programmes of action which had played a leading role in its formation and enabled it to pose a serious challenge to the ruling party in 2000 and 2002. It replaced forms of direct action such as demonstrations and strikes with international fund-raising, providing obvious ammunition for the ruling party's contention that it is a tool of the imperialist powers, particularly Britain,<sup>2</sup> and of Zimbabwe's white farmers. It replaced the struggle against neo-liberalism with its commitment to privatisation and the cost recovery policies articulated by Eddie Cross in March 2000. Pointing out that the MDC in power will not support government interference in the way in which people manage their lives and that it will fast-track privatisation, he maintained that it will privatise all parastatals within two years, privatise the Central Statistical Office and virtually the entire school delivery system, and decrease 'government employment from about 300,000 at the present time to about 75,000 in five years' (Cross, in Bond 2001, p 15; Cross in Alexander 2000, p 394).

These policies were articulated and defended when the ruling party attempted to increase social spending and price controls and condemned privatisation.<sup>3</sup>

The Bulawayo town council, led by the MDC, implemented unpopular cut-offs of basic services. Its neo-liberal policies reflect a fundamental structural problem which made it difficult to advance in theory and practice the interests of the masses of the people and to go beyond criticising the violent and repressive policies of the ruling party. Even staunch critics of the ruling party acknowledge that the MDC does not provide viable theoretical and practical options and that, enmeshed as it is in neo-liberal socio-political and economic policies, it has failed to address itself adequately to the land question, which has a decisive impact on politics in former settler colonies. It has succeeded in winning the support of peasants, the youth, women, intellectuals and other social groups and it has made it possible for the ruling party to consolidate its position (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2003, pp 127-8).

Gwisai (2005, p 8) maintains that leaders of the International Socialist Organisation told MDC leaders in 2001 that 'unless they immediately changed their strategy of opposing the land reform programme and hanging on the aprons of

---

2 Richard Dowden of *The Independent* (United Kingdom) maintains that British support for the MDC and regime change and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq contributed to the success of the ruling party in the 2005 elections. On this see Gwisai 2005, p 8.

3 Patrick Bond (2002, p 2) maintains that by August 2001 the MDC's Economic Stabilisation and Recovery Programme had codified these policies.

white farmers', national 'capitalists, the West and the International Monetary Fund and instead adopt an anti-neo-liberal anti-imperialist stance they would be buried in future elections even without violence'.

The MDC has failed to embark on the sustained programmes of mass action which are essential for the creation and consolidation of the socio-political, legal and economic conditions conducive to free and fair elections and which are also demanded by civil society organisations. These programmes would help to compel the ruling party to accede to the scrapping of the constitutional clause which guarantees the president 30 seats before the elections, to the establishment of an independent body which regulates the media, and to the abolition of laws giving police the power to authorise meetings.

Lovemore Madhuku, leader of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), a coalition of civil society organisations fighting for constitutional reform, believes that neither the MDC nor civil society organisations has struggled 'enough' for change and that there has not been a 'united popular mass pressure' upon the ruling party to respond affirmatively to their demands (Madhuku, in Tabane 2005, p 11).

Responding to the question of whether, after the defeat of the opposition party in the 2005 elections, the people will still look to it to 'deliver them from Mugabe' Madhuku concludes that this will depend on the MDC's programme of action. 'If it is still obsessed by minute details such as results being tabulated late or figures that it does not like, people will lose interest in the MDC,' he says, adding that 'Tsvangirai must do less talking and start focusing on the bigger picture' and the party should no longer try to 'create the impression' that Zanu-PF has no support (Madhuku 2005, p 11).

The MDC must embark upon programmes of demonstrations, protests and strikes against the violent and repressive policies of the state and the ruling party and the socio-economic problems affecting the masses of Zimbabwe. It must have viable strategies and tactics for confronting the ruling party and sustaining itself and programmes of action under its leadership. It must adopt and implement means which will enable it to survive the ruling party's onslaughts and retaliation.

It must have a viable programme of action which will inspire the masses of Zimbabwe. It must promote and advance popular national demands such as job security, social welfare, and land reform. Its economic policies do not constitute a qualitative move towards solving Zimbabwe's socio-economic problems, rather<sup>4</sup> they are bound to intensify these problems.<sup>5</sup> It has adopted the same neo-liberal policies that have 'brought the Zimbabwean economy to its knees and devastated the lives of the masses'. It opposes 'the land invasions' and stands instead for an 'orderly' resolution of the land question although it has 'not spelled out what exactly that means'. It will be 'incapable of solving any of the fundamental problems of the masses' on 'the basis' of its economic policies and programmes (Hamilton 2000, p 2).

---

4 For the MDC's economic policies see Movement for Democratic Change 2004.

5 For an analysis of the MDC's economic policies see, among others, Dansereau 2005, pp 22-24.

The MDC's close working relationships with conservative and moderate political parties and civil society organisations which support it politically, morally and financially have prevented it from forging working relationships with progressive political parties and civil society organisations throughout the Southern African region, the African continent and beyond and from adopting and implementing viable or progressive strategies and tactics as well as direct programmes of mass action. Its socio-economic policies, its views of democracy and political good governance and its political platform are not fundamentally different from those of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – multilateral organisations whose primary task is to advance the interests of neocolonialism and imperialism (Dansereau 2005, p 24).

The MDC lacks viable progressive strategies and tactics and a programme of action that promotes and advances popular national demands and differs on these issues with its allies, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and the NCA. Trade unionists were allocated about a dozen of the 57 parliamentary seats the MDC won in 2000 (most of which went to academics and civil society activists) and many are demanding more militancy and more representation within the MDC. Trade unions have criticised the MDC for concentrating on court actions and international sanctions, issues they maintain do not benefit the masses, particularly the workers (*Africa Confidential* 2004a, pp 2-3).

Pointing out that the 'sharpest weapon in the struggle' against what he refers to as 'the outpost of tyranny' is 'internal opposition', Tim Hughes maintains that 'despite its political dominance in the cities and overwhelming support in Matebeleland', the MDC 'shows no signs of effectively challenging the Mugabe regime at any level' and that it 'has failed to maximise its comparative advantage and mobilise unions, workers and the urban youth in a concerted campaign of rolling mass action' (Hughes 2005, p 2).

Party militants maintain that the MDC must intensify the struggle by going beyond 'parliamentary opposition tactics and legal challenges to the election'; that ruling party militants went to jail and were killed in the struggle and that the MDC should demonstrate to the ruling party that its members will 'do the same for a second liberation' (*Africa Confidential* 2002, p 2).

Thus far the MDC has failed to transform itself so as to challenge the ruling party decisively. Political activists and writers such as Brian Kagoro, the former coordinator of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, have been calling upon it since the 2002 presidential election to adapt in order to meet the challenges of Zimbabwe after that election. Kagoro maintains that the presidential election and the events before and subsequent to it have presented the opposition party with new challenges and severe tests. The first challenge is the issue of cohesion. The MDC, formed as an organisation consisting of social forces with different and antagonistic interests united by the need to defeat Mugabe through an electoral process, has not been able to adopt and implement the 'inspirational and strategic' positions essential to an effective opposition party striving for political power. While some of its members

have called for mass uprising, others advocate the continued use of negotiations and international intervention and it is the latter who have won the day. The position of the leadership on key issues is not only contradictory but also antagonistic or irreconcilable.

The issue of leadership is one of the key challenges for the MDC. Most of its leaders occupy their positions because of the urgent need to defeat Mugabe in the elections. The negative consequence of this factor is that their democratic credentials, integrity and capacity have never been interrogated. They do not meet the requirements of the post-presidential 2002 election period, which are 'greater clarity, immense integrity and commitment to the ideals of building a truly democratic Zimbabwe' (Kagoro 2003, p 24).

The MDC's lack of shrewd leadership is evident in its relations with the masses of the people, a challenge referred to by Kagoro as a lack of 'street credibility'. It was expected that if Mugabe 'stole' the elections there would be a mass uprising. The party's 'leaders seem to have expected the masses to initiate this uprising, whereas the masses looked to' its leadership to initiate and lead it. Related to this issue is the fact that the MDC 'has also not been as effective in demonstrating its continuing relevance to the people's strongly felt needs in the present situation'.

The party has failed to respond adequately to the ruling party's view of Zimbabwe's problems as a pan-African struggle against imperialist domination and exploitation. It has so far not recognised the fundamental need to 'rethink its regional strategy', which has not been successful and to articulate clearly 'its position on the contentious issues of race relations, North-South relations, resource redistribution and the broader pan-African agenda'. Kagoro (2003, p 24) concludes that the MDC 'has missed many good opportunities to regain the upper hand in the political contest in Zimbabwe'.

The theoretical and practical weaknesses of the MDC have led some organisations and individuals to conclude that even if Zimbabwe were to comply fully with all the Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections adopted by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Summit in Mauritius in August 2004 (Zimbabwe Election Support Network 2005, pp 301-31), the ruling party would win the 2005 elections. The MDC's absence of vision and strategy and its lack of capacity to lead Zimbabwe's reconstruction and development process have led many, among them South Africa's African National Congress, to believe that the resolution to the country's problems lies within the ruling party, not the MDC (Dawes 2005, p 10).

This position is captured in Godfrey Kanyenze's contention that people should focus on Mugabe and the ruling party, not Tsvangirai and the MDC and that the 'greatest threat to Zanu-PF right now is Zanu-PF itself, not the MDC' (Kanyenze, in Rukuni 2005, p 2).

Critics of the ruling party, including some MDC members, maintain that Morgan Tsvangirai does not have the intellectual capacity to lead an effective opposition party, particularly one that is challenging a hegemonic party which has

been in power since 1980 and whose leaders have provided it with enormous intellectual capacity and resources in its quest for the continued exercise of state power. Tsvangirai, they aver, is not a shrewd leader. He lacks 'a degree of political imagination and ruthlessness' (*Africa Confidential* 2001, p 4). In 2000 Tsvangirai made a crucial political mistake when he allowed international media to record white farmers, many of them soldiers in the Rhodesian army that had fought against the forces of national liberation, handing cheques to him. The film made him appear either to be hungry for money or 'naïve'. Mugabe's advisors used the incident in a propaganda war that presented the MDC as the servant of the white minority and of Britain (*Africa Confidential* 2003, pp 4-5). Tsvangirai's association with the farmers isolated him from progressive people nationally and internationally (Kanhema 2003, p 5).

Jonathan Moyo, who some people thought might join the MDC upon his expulsion from the Cabinet and the ruling party, declared that he would not join it because it was 'immature and ideologically shallow' (Moyo, in Rukani 2005, p 1).

Trevor Ncube, the Zimbabwean chief executive officer and owner of South Africa's M&G Media Ltd, wrote immediately before the 2005 elections that Tsvangirai was no match for Mugabe and that the MDC was divided, 'paralysed' and 'ineffective', lacking vision and strategy. There was, he wrote, a popular position 'in and outside the party' that it had 'long lost the passion and drive for a people's revolution'. He also maintained that Zimbabwe 'faces an acute leadership crisis that only Mugabe has the capacity to resolve, if he so decides' and that if the ruling party won the elections Mugabe could 'undo some of the damage he has inflicted on Zimbabwe and lay the foundation for a stable political dispensation that would deliver economic development and growth' (Ncube 2005, p 29).

Pointing out that the possibility of an MDC victory in the 2005 elections 'cannot be totally discounted' or 'completely ruled out', provided the MDC mobilised the people's anger against the ruling party to deliver its victory, Ncube concluded that an MDC victory would be 'a frightening prospect for Zimbabwe', which would find itself faced with the prospect of 'a hugely divided and inexperienced group' trying to solve problems of 'more than two decades of misrule' (Ncube 2005, p 29).

Newton Kanhema, a Zimbabwean journalist, maintains a similar position, contending that Tsvangirai and his advisers do not constitute leadership material for Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai's position on the land question is not clear and he has not articulated a feasible plan for solving the country's economic problems. His contribution to the debate about how best to solve Zimbabwe's economic problems has been his position that the economic situation will improve once Mugabe is no longer in power. Instead of building alliances or working relationships with Southern African leaders he has 'elected to insult them and, at the same time, court favour with Western leaders'. This, says Kanhema (2003, p 5), is not the best way to 'win friends and influence people, let alone get support' in the struggle for political power.

If it is to be taken seriously the MDC must change its regional strategy and articulate its position on key issues such as the race question, North-South relations,

redistribution of resources such as land and the pan-African agenda. The International Crisis Group supported this reality in its report on Zimbabwe after the 2005 elections and in its recommendations of what should be done by internal and external interested parties to resolve its problems. It recommended that the MDC develop a clear position on the best and most effective way to exert pressure on the government, revitalise tactical and strategic alliances and working relations with civil society and other social forces, renew its leadership and structures by holding elections, develop viable alternative programmes for the socio-political and economic issues affecting the people of the country and rebuild external relations, especially with Southern African governments and the African Union (International Crisis Group 2005, p 3).

Blade Nzimande, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, maintains (2003, p 7) that the 'mission' of 'the conservative forces' who support the MDC is to 'roll back the national liberation movement, and might be positioning themselves to implement the World Bank programme better than Zanu-PF' and that this is 'partly illustrated by the fact that the MDC has no clear programme on the key issues facing the Zimbabwean revolution'. Academic Patrick Bond (2001, p 46) maintains that the MDC shifted rapidly and dramatically to the right before the June 2000 parliamentary elections by endorsing neo-liberal policies in order to attract about US\$2-million in campaign funds from white businesses and conservative international allies and that Zimbabwe's post-1997 crisis is a direct result of the context of the early 1990s in which the government's power and Mugabe's decisions were repeatedly limited, conditioned and ultimately reversed by the USA (Bond 2001, p 73). If these positions are correct, they raise the fundamental question of why the progressive forces of Africa and the rest of the world should support the MDC in its quest for political power. To the extent that these forces support imperialism it raises the question of whether the ruling party's position that the MDC is a front for the interests of national and external 'white businesses' and of imperialism has a validity and enjoys support among progressive forces of Africa.

### THE MDC 'S THREAT TO BOYCOTT THE 2005 ELECTIONS

In August 2004 the MDC decided it would not participate in the 2005 elections until the electoral playing field had been levelled. Its Secretary General, Welshman Ncube, told *Africa Confidential* (2004a, p 2) that there was 'no sense in legitimising a process whose result is already predetermined' and that the MDC would expose electoral fraud and pursue court actions to correct it. He said that the decision was taken unanimously by the party's national executive committee, which was 'not prepared to dignify a flawed electoral process'. Pointing out that the 'fundamental principle is whether the people of Zimbabwe have their freedom or not', he concluded that if 'they [Zanu-PF] want to have the 150 seats, they can have them' and they 'will definitely know the people of Zimbabwe did not elect them' (Ncube, in Gandu 2004, p 17).

It was difficult to see how the MDC could survive as a serious, leading opposition party if it boycotted the elections. In fact, it would seem that the key reason for the party to contemplate a boycott is that it was reluctant to organise mass action outside of its urban strongholds and to compel the government to reform the electoral rules and appoint an independent electoral commission (*Africa Confidential* 2004a, p 2).

Another reason was an attempt to exert pressure on the ruling party to accede to the MDC's demands that it postpone the 2005 elections and adopt and implement electoral reforms. It was also intended to pressurise SADC leaders to coerce President Mugabe to adopt and implement electoral reforms, a fact acknowledged by Tsvangirai when he maintained that: 'We have suspended [participation in elections] to give SADC leaders time to rectify problems so we may have a legitimate outcome' (Tsvangirai, in Katzenellenbogen and Muleya 2004, p 1). It was clear that any boycott would be temporary as, indeed, it proved to be.

#### DIVISION OVER THE MDC'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SENATE ELECTIONS OF 26 NOVEMBER 2005

Elections for the re-established Senate, created in terms of a constitutional amendment enacted on 30 August 2005, were held on 26 November 2005. The upper house has 50 senators elected by ballot to five-year terms. In addition, six members and ten chiefs are appointed by the president.

The divisions within the MDC over its participation in the Senate elections highlighted its theoretical and practical weaknesses. Its failure to make an early announcement about its participation demonstrated its lack of a clear political strategy and tactics. It was evident that the delay in taking a decision on the issue would cost it a number of seats should it decide to participate and it had failed to learn from past experience – it had lost a number of seats during the March 2005 parliamentary elections because of its late announcement that it would contest them.

The very fact that the party had participated in the parliamentary elections made nonsense of Tsvangirai's opposition to the party's National Council's decision to take part in the Senate elections. In a secret ballot of the National Council 33 members voted in favour of participation, and 31 against.

Less than 15 per cent of the electorate voted in the Senate election. Public confusion about the purpose of the upper house of Parliament, the inability of many people to reach the polling stations because of the national petrol shortage and the differences within the MDC over participation in the election are some of the factors responsible for the low turnout. Of the 50 provincial constituencies 31 were contested and 19 ruling party candidates were not opposed. Only 26 members of the MDC registered their candidacy. The results gave the ruling party control of 43 of the 50 elected seats, with The MDC winning 7. Given the fact that 16 members of the Senate are appointed by the president, the ruling party has 59 senators.

**Table 2**  
**Results of the Senate Elections**

Province	Zanu-PF	MDC	Total
Bulawayo Metro	0	5	5
Harare Metro	5	0	5
Manicaland	5	0	5
Mashonaland Central	5	0	5
Mashonaland East	5	0	5
Mashonaland West	5	0	5
Masvingo	5	0	5
Matebeleland South	5	0	5
Matebeleland North	3	2	5
Midlands	5	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>50</b>

Source: Zimbabwe Election Commission

A key consequence of the divisiveness within the MDC over its participation is the possibility that that party may split – an event which will seriously damage the prospects of the opposition and further entrench the ruling party's hegemony.

### THE MDC'S 'MUGABE MUST GO' STRATEGY

The developed countries, which are responsible for the MDC's 'Mugabe must go' strategy, regarded the resolution of the land question as the means by which the ruling party and its leader won elections and consolidated power. Experts on the Zimbabwean socio-historical situation contest this position (Moyo, in Chirambo & McCullum 2000; Thompson 2000; Thompson 2003). The MDC criticises the land policy on the grounds that it is not popular with the masses of the African people of Zimbabwe. The reality is that the state's land reform policy is more popular with older Zimbabweans than the MDC's accusations of government mismanagement and corruption and the promise of new land may win more votes than criticism. While Zimbabweans born after the achievement of political independence are not as interested in land, the reality is that it is more difficult to mobilise them behind the MDC (*Africa Confidential* 2004a, p 3).

Again, the developed countries and their supporters saw political reform as a solution to what they regarded as the problem and President Mugabe represented the problem. They hoped that Tsvangirai would defeat Mugabe in the 2002 presidential election and when this failed to materialise they declared the election

not to be free and fair and the Zimbabwean government to be illegitimate. They embarked upon various programmes of action to isolate the Zimbabwean government.

Mugabe is regarded by his opponents as authoritarian, corrupt and a dictator who has been stealing elections since the MDC posed a challenge to his rule in the 2000 elections. He is seen as a threat to the socio-political and economic development and progress not only of his country and the Southern African region, but of the whole African continent as well as of Africa's initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Leaders of developed countries have exerted pressure on the leaders of Southern African countries to join them in condemning Mugabe, demanding that South Africa play a leading role in acting against Mugabe because of what they regard as his violations of human rights (Rotberg 2004, p 9). One of the issues central to this view is the profound failure to view the Zimbabwean situation beyond Mugabe.

The MDC's position is that the responsibility to exert pressure on Mugabe to step down lies with the leaders of African countries, a position that is maintained by its supporters both within and outside Zimbabwe. It is interesting to note that the opposition party does not maintain that this responsibility lies also with leaders of developed countries. This reality supports those who believe that this is a means by leaders of developed countries to use African countries, particularly South Africa, to play a leading role in achieving their objective in Zimbabwe and has bolstered the contention of the ruling party that the MDC is a tool of the imperialist powers (Phimister & Raftopoulos 2004, pp 385-400).

Pointing out that Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Bakili Muluzi of Malawi 'failed to persuade Mugabe' when they 'visited' him on 5 May 2004 in Harare to 'say whether, or when, he intends to step down', *Africa Confidential* (2003, p 3) concludes that this 'puts the responsibility back where it belongs, with Zimbabwe's own leaders'.

The MDC's belief that the responsibility to exert pressure upon Mugabe lies with the leaders of African countries, not with the people of Zimbabwe, is defended by Tsvangirai. After the efforts of Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo to promote dialogue between the ruling party and the MDC, he pointed out (*Africa Confidential* 2003, p 3) that their attempts to 'legitimise Mugabe' enabled Mugabe to consolidate his power and position.

Weizmann Hamilton maintains that the MDC 'gave Mugabe' and the ruling party political 'space to consolidate' their 'position'. The fact that the MDC is supported by 'big business and white farmers at home and imperialism and its institutions' has 'undermined its support among the masses in Zimbabwe and throughout Southern Africa'. Its support from white farmers 'who continue to oppress and exploit farm labourers' has helped to undermine its rural support. It has refrained from mobilising mass action against the government and has concentrated on appealing to external forces to exert pressure upon Mugabe and the ruling party. This has enabled Mugabe to maintain that the survival of his

administration is a struggle against external interference in defence of 'white minority business and farming interests' and to present the MDC as the organisational agent of imperialism (Hamilton 2002, p 2).

The 'real threat' to Mugabe and his party is 'the desperate state of the economy and its effects on Zimbabwe's long-suffering people' (Hamilton 2002, p 2). 'Economic failure confronts Mugabe more sharply than opposition parties and foreign critics and the 'government's main foe is the shrinking economy, an everyday reminder of mismanagement and corruption which makes most Zimbabweans long for political change – even those who could never vote for Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC, damned by British Prime Minister Tony Blair's claim to be working closely with it' (*Africa Confidential* 2004b, p 3).

Tsvangirai, on the other hand, sees his strategy (articulated to Joseph Winter of the BBC) as 'to wait while Mr Mugabe mismanaged the economy to such an extent that he was forced out of office'. This 'long-term, passive view has, so far, steered the country away from civil war, but has not seriously perturbed the authorities' (Winter 2003, p 2).

The MDC's strategy of unseating Mugabe does not do justice to its 'immediate objective' which 'has been to dislodge Zanu-PF from power' (Sachikonye 2002, p 17) – it would be quite possible for Mugabe to be removed from power while his party remains on. Mugabe should not be confused with the ruling party, which might still overwhelmingly win free and fair elections under a new leader.

## STRUCTURAL WEAKNESSES OF THE MDC

The MDC has not addressed itself seriously and effectively to the issue of power relations in Zimbabwe and the fundamental need to change them in favour of the interests of the vast majority of the people of the country. It has not seriously, in theory or in practice, recognised the importance of organising or mobilising the people to achieve political, economic and ideological hegemony as a prerequisite not only for removal from political power of those controlling the state, but also for establishing an alternative socio-political and economic order.

For these key reasons the MDC has not seriously and effectively challenged the ruling party in its struggle to 'legitimately exercise power and authority over the control and management of the country's affairs in the interest of the people and in accordance with the principles of justice, equity, accountability and transparency' (Moyo 1997, p 61).

It is on the strategic issue of the fundamental need for political, economic and ideological organisation for transformation of power relations in the interests of the masses of the people that the content of policies and the programme of action of the progressive opposition party are tested (Cheru 2000, p 128).

The MDC should fundamentally transform itself to serve as the social agent for change in Zimbabwe. It should no longer personalise the socio-political and economic problems or continue to regard President Robert Mugabe as the problem.

The cases of Malawi, Zambia and some other African countries have proved that the removal of the leader of the ruling party from power is not, in itself, the solution to socio-political and economic problems.

The MDC has focused more and more on personalities, elections, the Constitution and Parliament and less and less on the form and content, role and future of the state in the democratisation struggle. At issue is the fundamental and structural need for it to provide reasons why the state should be transformed fundamentally so as to direct and underwrite the achievement and consolidation of the process of meaningful socio-political and economic change.

Central to this need is credible policies providing options to those of the ruling party and of international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It must develop programmes of action capable of responding to the socio-political and economic challenges in Zimbabwe. It should also have a concrete understanding of socio-political and economic developments and debates in other countries, particularly those in the Southern African region and the African continent and view them progressively within the context of a pan-African agenda for resolving Africa's problems.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has analysed the theoretical and practical weaknesses of the MDC and the fact that it has not waged a decisive war against these weaknesses in its quest for state political power. These two key issues were used to analyse the socio-political situation in Zimbabwe in 2004, which indicated that the ruling party was going to win the 2005 elections; the opposition party's threat to boycott the 2005 elections; its 'Mugabe must go' strategy and its failure to understand and recognise the importance of internal factors over external in the resolution of Zimbabwe's problems.

The MDC has not substantiated in practice its leader's position, articulated in an interview with Netsai Mlilo, that the 'solution' to Zimbabwe's 'national crisis is not just elections', that it is 'about the traditional mechanism of resolving the power contestations and structure of power beyond the elections', that 'removing Mugabe without transforming the institutional base is not going to solve the problem' and that MDC leaders 'know it is not just a change of personality that is required. It is a deeper transformation of the political culture in the country' (Tsvangirai, in Mlilo 2004, p 9). Mlilo had pointed out that the MDC had failed to rally or mobilise people; that it was widely regarded as an urban-based party which seemed unable to win support in the rural areas; that it did not appear to have 'the smartest advisers' and that its leaders did not seem able to 'shrug off' their 'tag as Tony Blair's messengers'. Answering the question 'Other than opposing Mugabe, does the MDC have policy on land and the economy?', Tsvangirai pointed out that its 'solution lies with' its 'policy programme called Restart, which is a reconstruction programme to ensure that there is sufficient confidence in rehabilitating industry, tourism, the mining

sector, manufacturing of basic goods, including food' (Tsvangirai, in Mlilo 2004, p 9).

The MDC, by concentrating its efforts on parliamentary opposition tactics or electoral, legalistic strategy in its struggle for power, is overestimating the importance of elections. While elections are important to the achievement or consolidation of democracy, democracy is not simply the electoral victory over one party by another or about holding periodic free and fair elections. Democracy as a project is the struggle either to achieve or to consolidate socio-economic development in the interests of the masses of the people.

Eghosa E. Osaghae (2004, pp 1-2) articulates the organic relationship between democracy and socio-economic development. The democratic project is 'about and for citizens who have stakes in and expect dividends from it'. The masses of the people, who queue for long hours to vote or who take part in 'riots and demonstrations' to defeat oppressive governments, and those who lead and join progressive social movements and political parties expect 'immediate and long-term dividends'.

The MDC has not recognised, in theory or in practice, the strategic importance of mobilising for political, economic and ideological hegemony as a prerequisite to the seizure and exercise of political power through elections and the establishment of an alternative socio-political and economic order. As a result it is in danger of being reduced to the practice of exerting pressure upon the state of Zimbabwe and other Southern African countries for policy changes and victories which will not be sufficient for it either to achieve political power or to consolidate or expand these changes and victories.

#### — REFERENCE —

- Africa Confidential* 42(2). 2001. 'Zimbabwe: the road to ruin', 12 October.  
 ——— 43(11). 2002. 'Zimbabwe: Hungry for change', 16 May.  
 ——— 44(10). 2003. 'Zimbabwe: Who is next?', 16 May.  
 ——— 45(8). 2004a. 'Zimbabwe: Losing Zengeza', 16 April.  
 ——— 45(15). 2004b. 'Zimbabwe: On and on and on', 23 July.  
 ——— 46(6). 2005. 'Zimbabwe: Matebeleland moves on', 18 March.  
 Andreasson, S. 2003. 'Economic Reform and "Virtual Democracy" in South Africa and Zimbabwe: The Incompatibility of Liberalisation, Inclusion and Development'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 21(3), September.  
 Bayart, J. 2000. 'Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion'. *African Affairs* 395(99).  
 Bond, P. 2001. *Against Global Apartheid: South Africa Meets the World Bank, IMF and International Finance*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.  
 ———. 2002. 'Zimbabwe, South Africa, and the Power Politics of Bourgeois Democracy'. *Monthly Review*, May. <http://www.monthlyreview.org/0502bond.htm>.

- Bratton, M. 2005. 'Reply to a Critic: Don't Shoot the Messenger'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23(1), January.
- Cheru, F. 2000. 'The Local Dimensions of Global Reform'. In J N Pieterse (ed) *Global Futures: Shaping Globalization*. London: Zed Books.
- Cross, E. 2000. Quoted in Peter Alexander, 'Zimbabwean Workers, the MDC and the 2000 Election'. *Review of African Political Economy* 85.
- . 2001. Quoted in Patrick Bond, 'Radical Rhetoric and the Working Class during Zimbabwean Nationalism's Dying Days'. *Journal of World System Research*. 7(1), Spring.
- Dansereau, S. 2003. 'Liberation and Opposition in Zimbabwe'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 21(2), May.
- . 2005. 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Zimbabwe's Development Impasse'. In Henning Melber (ed). *Zimbabwe – The Political Economy of Decline*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Dashwood, H S. 1996. 'The Relevance of Class to the Evolution of Zimbabwe's Development Strategy, 1980-1991'. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22(1), March.
- Dawes, N. 2005. 'Zimbabwe: African National Congress concerns mount'. *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), 18 to 23 March.
- Dowden, R. 2005. Quoted in M Gwisai. 2005. Interviewed in Alternative Information and Development Centre. 'Zimbabwe after the 2005 Parliamentary Elections'. *Alternatives* 3(14), April-May.
- Gwisai, M. 2005. Interviewed in Alternative Information and Development Centre. 'Zimbabwe after the 2005 Parliamentary Elections'. *Alternatives* 3(14), April-May.
- Hamilton, W. 2000. 'Mugabe's "Marxism", Zimbabwe's "Red 1990s": The Character of the Opposition'. *Socialism Today: the monthly journal of the Socialist Party* 47, May.
- . 2002. 'Cling to Power in Zimbabwe'. *Socialism Today: the monthly journal of the Socialist Party* 63, March.
- Hendricks, C and E Mandala. 2002. 'Beggars Can't Be Choosers: Reflections on the Zimbabwe Quagmire'. *CODESRIA Bulletin* 1 and 2.
- Hughes, T. 2005. 'Plotting the decline of a tyrant'. *Business Day* (Johannesburg), 25 April.
- Ihonvbere, J O. 1997. 'On the Threshold of Another False Start? A Critical Evaluation of Pro-Democracy Movements in Africa'. In E Ike Udogo (ed) *Democracy and Democratization in Africa: Toward the 21st Century*. Leiden: E J Brill.
- International Crisis Group. 2005. 'Post-Election Zimbabwe: What Next?' *Africa Report* 93, 7 June. This report is available on the International Crisis Group website: <http://www.crisisgroup.org>
- Kagoro, B. 2003. 'The Opposition and Civil Society'. In Richard Cornwell (ed). *Zimbabwe's Turmoil: Problems and Prospects* 87. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, September.

- Kanhema, N. 2003. 'Who is going to succeed Mugabe?'. *Sunday Times* (South Africa), 11 May.
- Kanyenze, G. 2005. Quoted in Charles Rukuni, 'Tsvangirai still all the MDC has got'. *Financial Gazette* (Harare), 31 May. [allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com). 'Zimbabwe: Tsvangirai still all the MDC has got' and *The Insider* (Harare), May. <http://www.insiderzim.com/may05tsvangirai.html>.
- Madhku, L. 2005. Interviewed in Rapule Tabane, 'Flawed system must go'. *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg) 8 to 14 April.
- Mkapa, B. 2005. Quoted in Jonathan Katzenellenbogen, 'Tanzania's president defends Mugabe'. *Business Day* (Johannesburg), 3 June.
- Movement for Democratic Change. 2004. *Restart: Our Path to Social Justice*. Harare: Movement for Democratic Change, January.
- Moyo, J. 2005. Quoted in Charles Rukuni, 'Tsvangirai still all the MDC has got'. *Financial Gazette* (Harare), 31 May. ([allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com): 'Zimbabwe: Tsvangirai Still All the MDC Has Got').
- Moyo, S. 1997. 'Policy Dialogue, Improved Governance, and the New Partnerships: Experiences from Southern Africa'. In Hennock Kifle, Adebayo Olukushi and Lennart Wohlgemuth (eds). *A New Partnership for African Development: Issues and Parameters*. Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- . 2000. Quoted in Kondwani Chirambo and Hugh McCullum, 'Zimbabwe's land issue more than mere electioneering'. 20 June. <http://www.sardc.net/sd/elections2000/zimbabwe/zim-land.html>.
- Ncube, T. 2005. 'Only Mugabe can save Zimbabwe'. *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), 18 to 23 March.
- Ncube, W. 2004. Quoted in *Africa Confidential* 45(18), 'Zimbabwe 11: Losing Zengeza', 16 April.
- . 2004. Quoted in Godwin Gandu, 'South Africa back on Zimbabwe beat'. *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), 29 to 30 September.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S J. 2003. 'Dynamics of the Zimbabwe Crisis in the 21st Century'. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 3(1).
- Nzimande, B. 2003. Interviewed by International Correspondence, 15 February. <http://www.ospaal.org/corint/numero-5/eng-6/af-sud.htm>.
- Osaghae, E E. 2004. 'Making Democracy Work in Africa: From the Institutional to the Substantive'. *Journal of African Elections* 3(1), June.
- Phimister, I and B Raftopoulos. 2004. 'Mugabe, Mbeki and the Politics of Anti-Imperialism'. *Review of African Political Economy* 101.
- Rotberg, R. 2004. 'Dictatorship and Decay: Only Mbeki can rescue Zimbabwe'. *Business Day* (Johannesburg), 8 December.
- Sachikonye, L M. 2000-2001. 'The Year of Zimbabwe's political watershed'. *Southern Africa Political & Economic Monthly* 14(3), December/January.
- . 2002. 'Whither Zimbabwe? Crisis and Zimbabwe's Tragedy'. *Review of African Political Economy* 29(91), March.

- Thompson, C. 2000. 'Zimbabwe: Intersection of Human Rights, Land Reform, and Regional Security'. *Foreign Policy in Focus*, November. <http://www.fpif.org/commentary/zimbabwe-body.html>.
- . 2003. 'Globalizing Land and Food in Zimbabwe: Implications for Southern Africa'. *African Studies Quarterly*. 7(2 and 3): [Online] <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asp/v7/v7i2a10.htm>.
- Tsvangirai, M. 2004. Quoted in Jonathan Katzenellenbogen and Dumisani Muleya, 'Tsvangirai changes tune on Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy"'. *Business Day* (Johannesburg), 29 October.
- . 2004. Quoted in Netsai Mlilo, 'Tsvangirai's push for Africa'. *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), 29 October to 4 November.
- Winter, J. 2003. 'The main political parties in Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front and Movement for Democratic Change'. *BBC News Online* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/africa/1870283.stm>, 6 June. For this source of information, see also, <http://www.sokwanele.com/articles/homepage/mainpoliticalparties.htm>.
- Zimbabwe Election Support Network. 2005. 'The SADC Election Principles and Guidelines, and Zimbabwe's New Electoral Legislation – An Evaluation', January. <http://www.kubatana.net/htm/archive/elec050128zesm.asp?sector-ELEC&range-start-301-31>.