

FORUM INTERVIEW

Guerilla War in Zimbabwe: A Talk with Eddison Zvobgo

FORUM. In March of 1978 nationalist leaders Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole and Bishop Abel Muzorewa joined with the white Rhodesian Front party in an "internal settlement" which ZANU has claimed will only entrench minority control over the country. Yet these are men you have worked with for years. How do you explain this split in the movement?

ZVOBGO. Well, you have to go back to the period between 1957 and 1962, when we had the ANC, NDP, ZAPU — each party being banned in turn. That was really what you might call the Nationalist Phase, where the major demand was "now look: this is an African country. We want to rule our country." It was the same cry which was heard in Northern Rhodesia, which is now Zambia, in Nyasaland, which is now Malawi, in Tanzania, which was Tanganyika. It was enough that African nationalists got together, organized, and then went to the metropolitan country to say "we demand independence." And in the case of all other African countries the colonial power said "sure — come to a conference." In London, or Paris, or wherever it was, they would write a new constitution and say "here you are, you are going to hold elections on such and such a day, and you will take over power." That was essentially what happened. In the Nationalist Phase, Africa saw the emergence of a whole different breed of leaders ranging from Nkrumah in Ghana to Banda in Malawi. These people campaigned in the elections against the colonial power. That was all you had to do. Whoever shouted loudest

*The interview was conducted on August 25, 1978 in Notre Dame, Indiana. Zvobgo, a longtime leader in the Rhodesian nationalist movement, is now Publicity Secretary of the Mozambique-based Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), the post once held by Robert Mugabe before he became President of the party. Together with ZAPU, its partner in the uneasy alliance called the Patriotic Front, ZANU is fighting a guerrilla war aimed at toppling the Salisbury regime in Rhodesia. Zvobgo received his Ph.D. from The Fletcher School in 1977. He was interviewed by Timothy Holly, a candidate for the MALD degree at The Fletcher School.

against the imperialists wound up as leader. Who demonstrated and organized the people most to cause fracas and chaos in the demand for independence was the victor. But it was really only a negative campaign against the colonial power.

We in southern Africa remained as the sole exceptions. We discovered that there was no colonial power to go to in reality; that in the case of Rhodesia the settlers had been given independence (or self-government, as they called it), to run their own army, and manage their own economy. The settlers said "no, we're not going to give you the country, because it's *our* country." Now the nationalists did not know how to handle that. We were all nationalists then. We rioted, we stoned cars, we launched demonstrations, and we got arrested and locked up. They just came and arrested us. We found that we were not tried in any courts. They just rounded us up. The British did nothing about it.

So the real problem became whether you transformed from being simply a nationalist who wanted independence, to a socialist, who was opposed not just to white rule, but was opposed to the whole political and economic structure in the country. This was where we parted ways with many people. Muzorewa is nothing but a bare nationalist. Sithole, despite the fact that he was leader of ZANU for years, never grew ideologically. He remained static and still doesn't see that the enemy is not Ian Smith but the system in the country which needs to be overthrown. That's why we expelled him. We made our position clear: what we are opposed to is the system. We want to abolish the capitalist system. Sithole couldn't deal with that. Sithole at one time said he wanted socialism. It was no problem saying it as long as he didn't have to act on it. He said he wanted armed struggle. We replied "here here, we'll make you our president, because that's what we want too." But to actually wage armed struggle, that was something else.

In the long term, some people we have even now will quit. That's the purifying process of the revolution. It's going to get tough; it's been getting tougher every day. You will see a friend today — tomorrow he will be dead. You will meet a friend today, and tomorrow he has no legs. The suffering is terrible. I don't think I have ever seen anything like it in my life.

FORUM. Although both ZANU and ZAPU are formally joined together in the Patriotic Front, unity appears fragile. How would you describe the differences between the two groups?

ZVOBGO. The differences are mainly ideological. Secondly there are organizational differences. ZAPU does not stress ideology. It simply has straight forward military training just like the Western soldier who is simply taught to shoot. There is no political stress. For our fellows, the position is that before you can handle a gun you must undergo strict political training. We have a prescribed set of 42 lectures which every recruit must go through. They

are taught in every camp and organized by the Political Commissariat. It's been very effective. We emphasize Zimbabwe history — people must know where they're coming from if they are to know where they're going. We emphasize studies in aspects of colonialism, and then the party line in great detail. And party discipline. We aim to create a culture of discipline in the camps.

That's why I say there are organizational differences with ZAPU. For example, ZAPU women still kneel before Nkomo.¹ Now that's feudal, that's feudal. Their women do all the cooking, all the sewing, and they serve the men practically as if it were a tribal act. In ZANU camps there is certainly no question of anybody kneeling to anyone. If a woman comrade is coming to tell me that food is ready, she just stands at attention as a soldier and says "excuse me, your table is ready," and that's it. She's a soldier. Now that kind of thing is totally and completely observed. All feudal notions have been thrown out. So how you deal with what is in essence a well-trained ZAPU army, which is really just like that of the Ivory Coast, or Zambia, or the American army — in other words, just taught to shoot — is a problem. It's a matter of ideology. These guys are just in the service: all this kind of soldier wants is to get the hell out of there when he has done his time. Whereas we have benefited from the experience of Mozambique. The Frelimo² soldier is a people's soldier. That is ZANU's ideal.

FORUM. Over the past few years the Rhodesian security forces have attacked ZANU bases in Mozambique far more frequently than they have the ZAPU camps in Zambia. How would you explain that?

ZVOBGO. Well, isn't it apparent? When the enemy hits you worst, you know you are doing the right thing. It's *us* doing the fighting, and the enemy knows it, so the enemy attacks the people who are fighting. That's fine, we're not complaining. We regard it as fair. We only complain about our children being hit.

FORUM. How do you defend against Rhodesian air assaults in Mozambique?

ZVOBGO. No one is sitting in a shack after 7 a.m. The whole forest is full — behind every tree is someone. So the vigilance is excellent. There is no way they can take any of our camps by ground forces. They have to come straight over with Mirages and drop bombs. One plane comes first for a defoliation run, spraying a whole white mess on trees throughout the forest. As soon as the drug touches leaves, they all dry immediately, burn and fall. So you find that in the whole section of the forest where the plane has passed, there is nothing over your head any more. And that's tough. If it sticks onto your skin, the drug burns deep, very deep. It corrodes human flesh.

1. Joshua Nkomo is leader of ZAPU.

2. Frelimo is the sole political party in Mozambique.

But the plane can come too low, because our guys are out there in the forest with submachine guns, and they have shot down quite a few planes. The regime is carrying out these air attacks because it has lost the war on the ground inside the country. The settlers are frustrated, they have no way of demonstrating to the country that they are still a government. So it's much easier to send a plane in and bomb Mozambique, leaving the war where it is — right there at home.

FORUM. Where does ZANU get its arms?

ZVOBGO. One of the problems ZANU has always had has been weapons. This year somehow we are getting more guns than we have ever had. Just over the past three months the Secretary General of the party had discussions with Yassir Arafat and the Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Council in Syria. From there he went to Iraq, Egypt and Libya. The President (Mugabe) went to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and saw Mengistu,³ who said "fuck the Russians, I'll give you the guns." He said "I know they won't give you guns, but all I have to do is pick up the phone and say I want more, and they will give."⁴ From there, which was a very successful visit, Mugabe went to Syria and saw President Assad who also said "well, let's do business." We have a man there now who is supervising the procurement of arms. From there he went straight to North Korea, where Kim Il Sung really went flat out. And from there he went to Hanoi, and came back to Maputo.

FORUM. Are financial and material contributions to the Patriotic Front divided evenly between ZANU and ZAPU?

ZVOBGO. We get a fixed budget from the OAU, in the name of the Patriotic Front. That is then split, half-half, which is unfair since ZAPU doesn't need it. But it is in actual material goods other than money that ZANU is now getting the lion's share. The OAU now recognizes our particular need for guns. ZAPU no longer needs that many, partly because the Soviets have given them so many arms that they need warehouses to keep them in. The Soviets give arms directly to ZAPU, and we have no claim on those. It (the Patriotic Front) is indeed a joint front, but if you go hunting and can get your own things, then they're yours. It's just like the Chinese aiding us directly in terms of arms. We don't share those.

3. Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam is President of the Dergue, Ethiopia's supreme governing body.

4. The Soviet Union has extended the bulk of its material support to Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU.