

Zaire, Zambia: IMF moves in for the kill

by Dana S. Scanlon

It is a much repeated phrase that a wind of democratic change is blowing through Africa. But behind the laudable goal of enabling African citizens to take part in shaping their own future, lurks another agenda. The cases of Zaire and Zambia illustrate the point. Both countries, in which radically different paths toward "democracy" have been pursued, are on the brink of impending and tightened dictatorship by the International Monetary Fund.

As many opposition movements in Africa have noted, coopting the opposition into government to enforce severe and unpalatable austerity shock therapies is a well-known tactic. When Zaire's longtime President, Mobutu Sese Seko, first named opposition member Etienne Tshisekedi as prime minister in July, his house was surrounded by angry mobs threatening to kill him if he took the post. This co-habitation agreement was originally mediated between the two parties by U.S. Ambassador in Kinshasa Melissa Wells. It wasn't until the Sept. 23-24 looting spree by soldiers that Mobutu reappointed Tshisekedi, who accepted. Shortly thereafter, he was dumped by Mobutu. He now claims to be the "people's" chosen one—although a more realistic claim is that the U.S., French, and Belgium ambassadors in Zaire's capital chose him. The September looting spree that unleashed the chaos and potential civil war that threatens to engulf Zaire was carried out by a special military unit that comes under direct French government supervision and pay. According to the Paris daily *Le Quotidien de Paris*, it was the French government's actions (or, lack of action in paying the soldiers) that sparked the riots and looting.

Despite some apparent differences, France, Belgium (the former colonial power), and the United States agree on one thing: With or without Mobutu in a "transitional" government arrangement, whatever government finally emerges must accept an IMF dictatorship.

On Nov. 6, speaking before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Africa, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen pulled the rug out from under U.S. ally Mobutu, saying he "has lost the legitimacy to govern." He ridiculed the current situation, claiming that there were "three governments and none of them is governing" (meaning President Mobutu, his new cabinet, and a shadow cabinet formed by Tshisekedi). Cohen, like the French and Belgians, demanded the formation of a transitional government, adding: "Such a government will have to act immediately to place

Zaire's financial institutions under independent, transparent control acceptable to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund." Within moments of the speech's delivery, thousands of copies of Cohen's remarks appeared in leaflets in the streets of Kinshasa. Were there protests against this arrogant demand by the U.S. government? No. Tshisekedi immediately announced a campaign of strikes and civil disobedience to back up Cohen's demands.

What are Tshisekedi's credentials as an opposition leader? He helped form and run the Popular Movement for the Revolution, the single party with which Mobutu has ruled Zaire for 26 years. While castigating his former ally Mobutu for getting rich at the expense of the country's poor, he himself drives a Jaguar.

Mobutu's biggest crime, according to the European and American powers that run the world's financial system, is not that he oppressed his people and kept them poor, but that he would not put the screws on them enough (what Cohen called "economic indiscipline") on behalf of the IMF's structural adjustment programs.

Zambia gets the message

Longtime Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda got the message that Mobutu stubbornly refuses to hear. Rather than let himself be strung up from a lamp-post, Kaunda organized the elections that the IMF and other "donor" countries have been demanding. After struggling for years to keep up with the IMF's structural adjustment program, on Sept. 13, Zambia announced it just could not suck another ounce of blood out of its people to make a \$20 million debt payment. The IMF and international donors announced they were cutting Kaunda off, weeks before the country's first multi-party elections in nearly 20 years.

Kaunda's opponent, Frederick Chiluba, won by an apparent landslide. Chiluba, a trade union leader who campaigned on a platform of free enterprise and human rights, has sworn to sell off 80% of the public sector (mines, etc.) to private hands. After being sworn in, he sent police to raid the executive offices of the national copper company, looking for evidence of corruption.

Chiluba has pledged hard times and hard work ahead. Immediately, prices on food staples such as maize are going to be raised. It was riots and deep discontent over such IMF-dictated measures that prompted Kaunda last year to call for the elections in the first place. The Zambian elections saw teams of international human rights observers, and experts on vote fraud such as former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, swarming the country.

Not one voice was raised in the name of the fundamental right of Africans to development, beginning with the need to cancel Africa's nearly \$300 billion foreign debt. Nearly 50% of its export earnings go to pay debt service alone. What kind of democracy can Africa have as long as this question is not addressed?