

The Ugandan elections pose a challenge to London's Museveni

by Linda de Hoyos

Although London's *Financial Times* contributed a four-page paean to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni on April 25, for his election campaign, the word from Uganda is that the incumbent President will have a difficult time in national elections scheduled for May 9. The *Financial Times* lauds Museveni as follows, in the opening paragraph of its four-page spread: "The highest economic growth rate in Africa is turning a country once associated with disaster into an inspiration for the continent."

Despite such enthusiastic support from London's financial community, polls published by the Ugandan government-controlled *New Vision* newspaper predict that Museveni's opponent Paul Ssemogerere will win 71.4% of the vote, and that Museveni will only win 22.1%!

Whether or not Museveni is actually defeated in the Presidential election, the credibility of Britain's top dictator in Africa has been called into question among his own people. Under Museveni's dictatorial rule since 1986, Uganda has been virtually recolonized by British finance—a reality the *Financial Times* does not attempt to hide. On the one hand, the *Times* admits that Uganda's life expectancy rates have dropped to 42 years from 49 years, and may even drop to 32 years by the year 2010. But, under the headline "Exciting Opportunities Abound," the *Times* extolls Uganda's virtues as an investment haven, including "political stability; freely convertible currency; no restrictions on the employment of expatriates; cuts in corporate tax rate from 40-30%; and investment incentives that include tax holidays of up to six years and duty-free imports of capital goods and machinery." In short, whatever the unfortunate plight of its population, Uganda is a paradise for neo-colonialist free-traders.

Lack of enthusiasm for Museveni's tax haven, however, may be one reason why Museveni has postponed the Presidential elections so many times. Even so, while permitting elections, he has managed to ban all political parties, with acquiescence from the Western powers.

Opposing Museveni is Paul Ssemogerere of the Democratic Party, who is heading a coalition with the Uganda People's Congress of former President Milton Obote, and smaller parties, called the Inter-Party Cooperation.

Museveni's main base of support, aside from the Western financial community, is located in the Asian business commu-

nity which he restored in Uganda; his home base in southwestern Uganda near the Rwandan border; and his National Resistance Army. According to numerous accounts, Museveni has deployed military goon squads against his opposition throughout the election campaign, attacking Ssemogerere's headquarters and busting up opposition rallies.

Museveni is hated by the tribes in northern Uganda, where the guerrilla Lord's Resistance Army, mostly from Obote's Acholi tribe, is now scoring victories against Museveni's army. The LRA has also attacked supply convoys coming from Kampala heading for Sudan, to outfit the Sudanese People's Liberation Army of John Garang, a long-standing ally of Museveni who also enjoys British support.

Museveni also has problems with the Buganda tribe in the center of the country, Uganda's largest tribe, and the one from which Ssemogerere hails.

Election scramble

There are indications that Museveni is feverishly working to forestall an electoral defeat. According to knowledgeable sources, the Ugandan government has printed up a total of 17 million ballots for the May 9 elections—for a population of no more than 20 million. Museveni's regime is also claiming that there are 8.4 million registered voters, when it is believed that there are significantly fewer, since the AIDS epidemic has hit the adult population hard.

Aside from vote fraud, Museveni may try the option of canceling the elections for reasons of "national security." On April 23, the Ugandan Defense Ministry reported that Zaire-based "bandits" from Rwanda's Hutu tribe had attacked a military border post in southwest Uganda, killing six people. Hutu leaders say the report is false. A Ugandan Defense Ministry official said the attack was aimed at stopping the elections!

And in an attempt to intimidate the voters, Museveni campaign advertisements are warning that if the British warlord is not elected, then Uganda will inevitably return to the violent chaos of 1972-86. This is one way of saying that if he loses, Museveni has no intention of abiding by the election result, but will attempt to take his army into war against the elected government. However, any dent in Museveni's dictatorship will change the correlation of forces in East Africa in a way that prompts complaints in the *Financial Times*.