

The British in Zimbabwe

1890: The Pioneer Column of the British South Africa Company forcibly seizes the territory later to become known as Southern Rhodesia.

1930: The Land Apportionment Act displaces many African families from the richest soils to “tribal reserves” on non-arable lands.

1965: Ian Smith’s apartheid regime declares its Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

1979: The Lancaster House Agreement lays the ground for Zimbabwean independence in 1980. It stipulates that for the first ten years of independence, the Government’s acquisition of land is limited to the “willing buyer, willing seller” principle.

1992: The Land Acquisition Act removes the “willing seller, willing buyer” clause. Land redistribution speeds up. IMF imposes structural adjustment programs, whose conditionalities will come to include the abolishment of free education, health-care and government subsidies for basic commodities.

1997: Clare Short, Britain’s Secretary of State for International Development, writes a letter repudiating Britain’s colonial responsibility for land reform.

1998: International Donors’ Conference on Land Reform and Resettlement is held in Harare.

1999: Movement For Democratic Change (MDC) is founded through landowners and the UK’s Westminster Foundation. White farmers increasingly resist the resettlement, often substantially destroying equipment and other property before leaving farms.

2000: Referendum on a new constitution is defeated by a well-funded campaign of the MDC. A Constitutional amendment is passed in parliament, allowing Government acquisition of farms on condition of compensations for improvements made. There are farm seizures by war veterans, and violence between ZANU-PF and MDC supporters.

2001: George W. Bush signs into law the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (S. 494), which, among other things, imposes sanctions on Zimbabwe, that hit the economy and the people hard.

2005: Operation Murambatsvina receives widespread attention in Western media as shacks in downtown Harare are bulldozed as part of the government strategy against poverty and crime. Operation Garikai, the building of new housing for the poor, gets much less coverage. MDC splits into two factions due to disagreements over parliamentary elections.

2007: Members of the leadership of both competing MDC factions are beaten by the police while they are trying to break in to a police station during an illegal demonstration. MDC supporters retaliate with petrol bombs against private homes of police officers, several of whom are severely injured. Only the first of the incidents is reported by British-controlled media.