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Promoting Non-Violent Principles to Achieve Democracy in Zimbabwe

“What happened on Thursday night” :
An account of how ZANU PF rigged the Parliamentary Elections
 Sokwanele Special Report: 5 April 2005

Counting at most stations stopped
 Presiding officers at most polling stations instructed that they should not begin the count and to await specific authorisation from their superiors within the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) before proceeding with the count.

In at least one instance, instruction to continue came as late as 2.00 am the following morning.

Results not publicised
 Once the instruction came, results were conveyed by radio or phone to constituency offices, and from there to the National Logistics Committee in Harare for a final number crunch. The results were not posted publicly at the polling stations in accordance with the law.

7.00 pm
 Presiding officers required to verify the number of ballots cast, and the total voters turned away.

7.30 pm
 Presiding officers ready to start counting votes.

Counting continues in a handful of polling stations. Exclusion of MDC election agents from the polling stations which were counted first was rigorously enforced. Every effort was made to prevent MDC election agents at these stations from communicating with the outside world.

8.30 pm
 "Sample survey" completed.

ZANU-PF's Blunder
 Zimbabwe Electoral Commission officials start to announce the number of votes cast and the number turned away on State television and radio. These results, they claim, represent the position at 7.30pm.

approx. 9.00 pm
 ZEC official suddenly, inexplicably, stops announcing results when he has reached 72 of the 120 constituencies.

It becomes clear that the

took place in Zimbabwe. Stolen from the citizens of this land was their constitutional right to elect their own representatives to Parliament. So great was the scale of the national heist that effectively it took from the people the government of their choice and foisted upon them a government they did not want and had not voted for.

The Mugabe regime had been planning to rig the elections from the moment the date was announced – indeed from long before that, for this regime knows well enough it would be trounced by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition party in any free and fair contest. So the preparations to rig the poll had to begin early. Without the months of careful preparation and total manipulation of the electoral process ZANU-PF knew it would face extinction in the poll.

But the purpose of this short piece is not to describe the months of cynical scheming, including the manipulation of the entire food delivery system and the cunning re-writing of the country's electoral laws, effectively to put Mugabe appointees in command, with the military to control it. That story has been told elsewhere (see our own "SADC Checklist" which reviewed the electoral and security legislation, and our weekly feature "Mauritius Watch" which chronicled events on the ground). Nor is it our purpose here to review the widespread and systematic abuses of the SADC election guidelines which occurred on the day of voting - such as the use of a supposedly indelible ink to mark the fingers of those who had voted, which it transpired could be easily removed by the application of a mild detergent. These abuses will no doubt be documented by others before too long.

No, our purpose here is to take our readers through the events of the evening and night following the poll, specifically between 7.00 pm when voting ended and 11.00 pm, for it was during these few hours that ZANU-PF's central rigging strategy was carried out. The plot was so cunning and audacious that the likes of John le Carre and P.D. James would have been proud to have written the script themselves.

It went something like this.

At 7.00 p.m. the polls closed and the presiding officers of each polling station were required to advise the total numbers of people who voted and of would-be voters turned away. A simple matter, and this information was conveyed by radio or telephone to the constituency office. By 7.30 p.m. most presiding officers around the

<p style="text-align: center;">MDC agents held hostage</p> <p>Presiding officers held hostage all the MDC representatives present, to ensure that they did not interrupt the smooth flow of the ZANU PF master-plan. In very many instances MDC agents were locked up after the count for several hours, and their cell phones and all means of communication were removed from them.</p>	<p style="color: red;">totals being read out, do not include the ballots stuffed/rigged to reach the figures zanu pf claims it has won.</p> <p style="color: red;">In fact, the ZEC's announced totals reveal the deception and show that the MDC won a <i>minimum</i> of 62 seats, and not the 41 that zanu says they did.</p> <p>ZANU-PF's Final Rigged Results</p> <p>When zanu pf finally announced all its rigged results, into the next day, it claimed that the zanu pf had won 78 seats; the MDC 41; and Independent (Jonathan Moyo) 1. To this Mugabe will add 30 seats to his zanu pf total, securing him a stolen 'victory' with a majority significant enough to change Zimbabwe's constitution.</p>	<p>country were ready and waiting to begin the count.</p> <p>Then comes a</p>
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mysterious intervention which interrupted the process. All presiding officers were instructed in very clear terms that they should not begin the count. They were to await specific authorisation from their superiors within the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) before proceeding with the count. Here was a clear signal that some skulduggery was being planned, though exactly what it was difficult for those outside the ZANU PF mafia to see immediately. Presiding officers in the majority of polling stations across the country, and those waiting with them to confirm the count, had to cool their heels awaiting further instructions. In some cases that further instruction from the command centre only came many hours later – in at least one instance as late as 2.00 am the following morning. The presiding officers became very impatient at the delays – which incidentally were in breach of the Electoral law. Remember, most of them had been on duty from 3.00 a.m. on the Thursday morning. Altogether they were not a happy lot. Whilst some were hand-picked by the regime from the military and the civil service for their known loyalty to and compliance with ZANU-PF, many of them it seems were not in on the full plot. Why the interminable delay?

The Mugabe regime had a very good reason for delaying the count in most stations. During this time they were conducting a sample survey of the voting patterns from a few selected polling stations. In these stations the count went ahead early (starting at 7.30 p.m.) and immediately the results were known they were conveyed by the presiding officers concerned to the constituency offices. Constituency offices manned by loyal ZANU PF cadres thereby afforded themselves a golden opportunity to consider voting trends – and respond. Where the sample results indicated a deficiency of ZANU PF votes – which, it transpired, was the case in the great majority of constituencies, the matter could be easily remedied. A simple calculation would indicate how many additional ballots were required for the losing ZANU-PF candidate. From that a decision how many additional ballots to be cast in each polling station, and the appropriate instructions were soon on their way to the compliant presiding officers – one phone call or radio message sufficient.

To understand how ZANU-PF could get away with this fraud one must appreciate how much of a disadvantage MDC election agents were at. At every polling station they were in a tiny minority compared to the police, the army, the presiding officer and his minions – all of whom were batting for the ruling party. Added to which their means of communication from the polling stations was poor at best and, as we shall see later, there were times when they were effectively cut off from the outside world altogether. The problems were grave enough for the MDC agents in urban constituencies: one can imagine how many times over the problems were compounded in remote rural areas.

Reports from around the country indicate that time and again the opposition representatives were hassled, restricted and frequently shut out of the polling stations altogether for significant periods of time. Quite enough time for the ZANU-PF team to take instructions from central command, write out additional ballots and slip them into the box. And at no time was the exclusion of MDC election agents from the polling stations more rigorously enforced than when the early “sample surveys” were being done. Some candidates themselves were excluded from participating in the count!

By 8.30 p.m. or thereabouts the sample survey had been completed – and one can imagine the alarm bells it set ringing for ZANU-PF! The MDC was set for a comprehensive victory. ZANU-PF was not slow to respond. They had the figures and knew roughly how many additional ballots were required to turn each defeat into victory for their candidates – except in those urban constituencies in which the MDC had such a massive lead and ability to prevent ballot stuffing that it would have been impossible to stage a ZANU-PF win without stretching credibility well beyond breaking point.

If one asks where the additional ZANU-PF ballots appeared from the answer is quite simple. Presiding officers had access to spare ballot papers. The voters' roll has over a million “ghost” voters on it so there were plenty of names left that could be crossed off. A ballot could be completed, a “ghost” name struck off the register, and when the MDC polling agent was either looking the other way or physically removed from the station, a whole bunch of ZANU-PF ballots dropped in the box.

The national heist was proceeding smoothly and according to plan. There were, it is true, a number of irate MDC polling agents, and complaints of irregularities were sure to follow – but these could be dealt with in the partisan electoral courts in due course. All but the most conscientious foreign election observers were already tucked up in bed in their comfortable hotel bedrooms. It seemed that ZANU-PF could not lose - literally. Except for one unforeseen glitch, which, unfortunately for them, gave the whole game away.

On state television and radio the not-very-bright agents of the Electoral Commission had started to read out the initial results coming in from the constituencies. For each constituency the number of votes cast and the number turned away, was announced. Not yet the final tally for the parties, but just the total of votes cast. At one point the senior ZEC representative said that the results given represented the position at 7.30 p.m. – that is 30 minutes after the close of the polls. He got as far as reading out the results for 72 of the 120 constituencies when, inexplicably, he stopped – almost in mid sentence. No further results were ever again announced of votes cast.

It is known that a message was relayed nationally over police radio ordering the announcement of the voting figures be stopped, immediately.

Someone in ZEC / ZANU-PF had realized the fatal damage they were doing to their own elaborate plan to rig the vote. They had already given out too much information. All the MDC had to do for those 72 constituencies for which the total number of votes had been announced was a very simple calculation to arrive at the truth.

The compromised counting procedures continued across the country once the presiding officers were authorised to proceed. In most cases the count did not take long, because on average there were only a few hundred ballots to count at each polling station. The results were conveyed by radio or phone to constituency offices, and thence to the National Logistics Committee in Harare for a final number crunch by Robert Mugabe's closest allies and partners in crime, headed by Tobias Mudede, the infamous Registrar-General of Voters who had already delivered two stolen elections to his master.

Meanwhile back in the polling stations the presiding officers held hostage all the MDC representatives present, to ensure that they did not interrupt the smooth flow of the ZANU PF master-plan. In very many instances (precise figures will no doubt follow) MDC agents were locked up after the count for several hours, and they were banned from using cell phones and all other means of communication. Unlawful imprisonment to add to the catalogue of crimes committed by and for the ruling party that night. (Not to mention the blatant violation of Section 64 (2) of the Electoral Act committed by all presiding officers who failed to post the results of the count in each polling station on public view).

But back to the one single serious blunder which provided clear and irrefutable evidence of ZANU-PF's perfidy – the announcement of the total of all votes cast in 72 constituencies by 7.30 pm. Once the ZEC had completed their reading of all the results, giving the “official” numbers of votes for both main parties, the MDC could ascertain, by a simple calculation, the true number of votes cast for each candidate and the number of ZANU PF votes stuffed in the ballot boxes in each one of the 72 constituencies.

MDC had the following information for these constituencies (all ZEC's own figures):

- (1) The total number of votes cast
- (2) The number of votes for their candidate (working on the safe assumption that ZEC would not increase the number of ballots cast in favour of the MDC)
- (3) The number of votes said to belong to ZANU-PF.

Accepting (1) and (2) as true figures, subtract (2) from (1) and you have the true number of votes for ZANU-PF – which in most cases was considerably lower than (3). The difference between this (true) ZANU-PF number of votes and (3) represents the number of bogus votes stuffed in the ballot boxes by compliant presiding officers.

The fraud is out, and for all to see. There can be no denying that ZANU-PF have been caught red-handed. To which we can add that, using this windfall information and the results declared for MDC, it is possible to calculate by a simple matter of arithmetic, that the absolute minimum of seats actually won by the opposition is 62. Again we would emphasise that this is the most careful and conservative figure and represents the absolute minimum of seats secured by the MDC. Yet even the figure of 62 seats proves two simple facts of enormous significance:

- (1) ZANU-PF did not obtain the two thirds majority in parliament they crave and worked so hard – and so dishonestly - to obtain, and
- (2) MDC secured the majority of the popular vote which was their target – 62 seats(minimum) out of 120 contested seats.

We await with interest ZANU-PF's response to this exposure and, with almost as much interest, a comment from the SADC and South African government observer teams, which have already pronounced the elections as free and fair.

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