

The Zimbabwe Communist League FOR SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM AND PAN-AFRICANISM

GUKURAHUNDI

AN ATROCITY CARRIED OUT BY THE MUGABE GOVERNMENT ON BEHALF OF APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA AND BRITAIN

THE YEARS 1982 to 1988 in Zimbabwe were characterized by the atrocities centred in Matabeleland known as Gukurahundi (Shona: The early rain which washes away the chaff). Gukurahundi was a direct attack on the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in general and on the Ndebele and Kalanga speaking people of Matabeleland in particular. Thousands were killed, 20 000 being the number most frequently quoted. The lowest estimate based on verified killings is 7 000. Many tens of thousands more were raped, tortured or otherwise brutalized.

Contrary to popular opinion, some Shona speaking people belonging to ZAPU were also affected: in particular in Hurungwe District in the northern part of Mashonaland West and in Manicaland. Many ZAPU leaders at local level were killed throughout the country. However, the main concentration was in Matabeleland and the adjacent Ndebele speaking areas of Midlands Province. To understand the problem and its origins, we can quote Andrew Young, former US Ambassador to the United Nations and a supporter of ZANU in an essay called *The United States and Africa: Victory for Diplomacy* (1980):

Despite widespread doubts outside Zimbabwe about the strength of Mugabe's political constituency, he had achieved a solid electoral victory over both Bishop Abel Muzorewa, on whom both Britain and South Africa had placed their hopes, and Joshua Nkomo, who enjoyed military support from the Soviet bloc. The unexpected size of his majority gave Mugabe an unequivocal mandate which greatly simplified the task of the British in handing over power.

The Zimbabwe settlement must also be recorded as a victory of the Western alliance in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It signalled a renewal of the cooperation in de-colonization which came under Western leadership and via the United Nations during the 1950s and 1960s. And it curtailed at least temporarily the trend toward growing dependence on Soviet military aid to bring about African liberation.

Andrew Young, *The United States and Africa: Victory for Diplomacy* (1980)

Clearly, ZAPU, an organization backed by the USSR and a close ally of the ANC of South Africa was a danger both to the imperialists and to the Apartheid South African Government.

A great deal of information has recently been compiled in the well researched document, *Rationalizing Gukurahundi: Cold War and South African Foreign Relations with Zimbabwe, 1981-1983* by Timothy Scarnecchia, Associate Professor, Kent State University, Ohio, USA. This document uses recently released diplomatic papers the South African Department of Foreign Affairs files for 1983. In the Abstract at the beginning of the document, it says:

Cold War relations between Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom helped to provide cover for the Zimbabwean National Army's Fifth Brigade's campaign of terror. Similarly, American support for Mugabe's claims to be a pro-Western leader committed to non-racialism helped

provide international cover for the atrocities. At the same time, evidence shows high-ranking ZANU-PF officials negotiated with the South African Defence Forces in 1983 to co-operate in their efforts to keep ZAPU from supporting South African ANC operations in Zimbabwe.

The document continues:

Mugabe's often repeated claim that the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) are the enemies of ZANU-PF and hence of Zimbabwe does not stand up well to historical scrutiny.

There are at least four periods in the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe during which the US and the UK offered opportunities to Robert Mugabe and his allies to attain power and then consolidate it.

The first was in 1963 with the formation of ZANU in Tanzania.

The second was during Henry Kissinger's 1976 shuttle diplomacy and the subsequent removal of radical forces from ZIPA [Zimbabwe People's Army] following the talks.

The third period was during the elections after the Lancaster House agreement when the British, under American pressure, rushed an election and peace settlement in order to pre-empt further Soviet and Cuban involvement in Zimbabwe, which resulted in a victory for Robert Mugabe. Mugabe received extensive support from the UK and US governments, while simultaneously portraying his government as a leading Frontline state in the anti-apartheid struggle.

...a fourth period, which took place during 1981-1983 ...offered Mugabe and ZANU-PF the international 'cover' to carry out atrocities against Zimbabwean civilians.

Bi-annual meetings between the intelligence staff of Zimbabwe's Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) and their counterparts in the South African Defence Force (SADF) were held in 1982 and 1983. The SADF notes of the 7 and 8 February 1983 meeting in Harare are in the DFA [Department of Foreign Affairs] files. The minutes of this meeting, which took place one month after the Fifth Brigade had been deployed in Matabeleland North, indicate a much less strident tone concerning South Africa's role in supporting dissidents than that heard in the Zimbabwean media.

According to the SADF report, Minister Mhangagwa took personal credit for obtaining "permission from the Prime Minister [Mugabe] for the SADF visit to Harare and for future intelligence meetings of a similar nature." He claimed that he [Mhangagwa] "initiated the RSA/Angola and RSA/Mozambique dialogue." Mhangagwa also stated that "there were no matters in the Zimbabwe/RSA relations that were so serious that it required meetings at ministerial level."

Timothy Scarnecchia, *Rationalizing Gukurahundi: Cold War and South African Foreign Relations with Zimbabwe, 1981-1983* (2011)

Here we need to add a little political analysis.

During the 1950's French colonialism was forced to fight a major war in Algeria, and in Kenya, the killing of a handful of white farmers led to the British Army massacring thousands of Kenyans and torturing thousands more: by 1965, the British were putting sanctions on the white settler government of Rhodesia, demanding "No Independence Before Majority Rule".

Clearly something had changed.

The term 'neo-colonialism' was first used in a document produced by the All-Africa People's

Conference in Tunisia in 1960. Kwame Nkrumah gave a full analysis of neo-colonialism in his book *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). In simple terms, being unable to stop the tide of African nationalism and being in fear of the influence communism and the Soviet Union, the imperialist decided to divert the tide rather than try to stop it. Thus they wanted black governments with their own flag and national anthem to come to power – so long as those governments worked for the interests of Western monopoly capital.

In southern Africa, there was a problem with the white settlers whose reason for existence in terms of imperialist interest was coming to a close. As the settlers were willing to fight to the bitter end to protect their interests, the problem was how to remove them from power without giving it to nationalist movements aligned to the USSR and the socialist world.

Thus on some occasions, the interests of US/UK imperialism were opposed to those of the Apartheid governments. In the case of stopping ZAPU, they were in agreement.

At the centre of operations was British intelligence, MI.6, personified by Ken Flower, the head of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) right through the UDI period. On 8

th January 2011, Lord Owen, who as David Owen had been British Foreign Secretary from 1977-1979, speaking on the BBC Radio 4 programme *Documents*, confirmed that Ken Flower had been an MI.6 mole for Britain during his tenure as head of both the Rhodesian CIO and then of the Zimbabwean CIO until 1982. Flower remained an advisor to the ZANU(PF) government of Robert Mugabe until his death in 1987.

There is no available comprehensive study of Gukurahundi. However, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) produced the most carefully documented study in 1997 entitled *On the 1980's Disturbances in Matabeleland & the Midlands*. This document makes detailed case studies of two of the worst affected areas, Nyamandlovu in Matabeleland North and Matobo in Matabeleland South.

In looking at how the government justified its brutality, the report has this to say:

...there were sporadic outbreaks of violence emanating from the guerrilla assembly points (APs) countrywide. Such outbreaks began before Independence and continued throughout the early 1980s. This violence was committed by both ZANLA and ZIPRA ex-combatants, sometimes against civilians and quite often against each other: the causes of this were complex.

The Government responded with a massive security clampdown on Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands. What is apparent in retrospect and will be shown in this report is that there were two overlapping "conflicts" going on in Matabeleland. The first conflict was between the dissidents and Government defence units, which included 4 Brigade, 6 Brigade, the Paratroopers, the CIO and the Police Support Unit.

The second conflict involved Government agencies and all those who were thought to support ZAPU. This was carried out mainly against unarmed civilians in those rural areas which traditionally supported ZAPU; it was also at times carried out against ZAPU supporters in urban areas. The Government agencies which were engaged in this second conflict were primarily 5 Brigade, the CIO, PISI [Police Internal Security Intelligence] and the ZANU-PF Youth Brigades, as shown in this report.

The Government's attitude was that the two conflicts were one and the same, and that to support ZAPU was the same as to support dissidents. Rural civilians, the ZAPU leadership and the dissidents themselves all denied and continue to deny this allegation.

...the dissidents were few, numbering no more than around 400 at their peak, and experiencing large numbers of deaths, captures and desertion. It is also now clear that many dissidents consider themselves to have been driven to lead the lives of fugitives by the partial failure of the Army's integration process, and the persecution of all former ZIPRAs as the conflict escalated.

Major arms caches which were discovered in early 1982, and which caused the final rift between ZANU-PF and ZAPU, were almost certainly engineered by a South African agent, Matt Calloway. Calloway was in fact head of a branch of the Zimbabwean CIO at the time the arms were stockpiled, although he later defected to South Africa. South Africans were also implicated in the timing of the "find", and in the subsequent trial of Dumiso Dabengwa and Lookout Masuku.

CCJP, On the 1980's Disturbances in Matabeleland & the Midlands (1997)

We now know that Calloway, working for South African Intelligence and Flower, working for British Intelligence, were in control of the CIO and worked together with Emmerson Mnangagwa, Minister of State Security to use the dissident problem to destroy ZAPU, an ally of both the ANC and the USSR.

Can we believe that Robert Mugabe was so naïve that he was not aware of the loyalties of these two men?

The kidnapping of 6 foreign tourists in July 1982 was also blamed on ZAPU and Joshua Nkomo: recent confessions by ex-Rhodesian CIO members now indicate that South African agents may have kidnapped and killed these tourists, with the direct aim of fuelling antagonisms between ZANU-PF and ZAPU.

According to these South African agents, the operation took three weeks to plan and involved 8 ex-members of Rhodesia's notorious Selous Scouts, armed with Kalashnikov rifles. From the time of the tourists' disappearance, the Zimbabwean Government referred to the kidnapping as the work of dissidents.

CCJP, On the 1980's Disturbances in Matabeleland & the Midlands (1997)

The brutality of Gukurahundi can be seen from the following reports:

GULAKABILI (approx 20 km SSW of Pumula Mission) 12 FEB 1983: Whole village abducted from nearby to the Pumula Mission area, where they were beaten. Some were then forced to dig a mass grave, made to climb in, and were shot. They were buried while still moving, and villagers were made to dance on the grave and sing songs in praise of ZANU-PF. Number of dead given as 12.

KORODZIBA (west of Pumula Mission, now resettled): FEB 83: 5B came to the school and took about 60 pupils aged over 14 years. They were all beaten and asked about dissidents. 20-30 girls were raped and then ordered to have sex with some of the boys while the soldiers watched. They were beaten for 3 hours.

MKHONYENI (Between Dzimidza-Sihazela, approx 20 km NNE of Pumula Mission): END JAN 1983: the first woman to die in this area was accused of feeding dissidents. She was pregnant and was bayoneted open to kill the baby. She died later. FEB 1983: All the villagers were forced to witness the burning to death of 26 villagers, in the 3 huts of Dhlamini. Women

and children died. There was only one survivor.

The Food Embargo was a major factor in events in Matabeleland South in 1984. Throughout the early months of 1984, residents of Matabeleland South were suffering from starvation caused in the first place, by three consecutive years of drought and in the second place, by government restrictions preventing all movement of food into and around the region. Drought relief was stopped and stores were closed. Almost no people were allowed into and out of the region to buy food, and private food supplies were destroyed. State officials, largely in the form of the 5 Brigade, also actively punished those villagers who shared food with starving neighbours. The speeches of 5 Brigade commanders at rallies repeatedly stated the desire of the government to starve all the Ndebele to death, as punishment for their being dissidents. In the cruellest speeches, people in the region were told they would be starved until they ate each other, including their own wives and children.

Those interviewed recount how they struggled to stay alive during the embargo, by eating the roots and fruits of wild plants. However, in some areas the 5 Brigade tried to prevent even this, and punished people for eating wild marula fruit. Even water was severely rationed. People also talk of risking their lives and breaking the curfew to share food with neighbours after dark, and their disbelief at seeing bags of maize ripped open and destroyed wherever 5 Brigade found them - on buses or in homes.

The most notorious detention centre of all was Bhalagwe Camp, situated just west of Antelope Mine. From interviews, Bhalagwe operated at full capacity throughout the early months of 1984, from the beginning of February until the end of May, a period of 4 months. The ex-ZIPRAs and ZAPU officials were singled out and kept in a separate area, in small buildings with low roofs and no windows, although there were ventilation slats. They were also kept shackled throughout their detentions, unlike the other detainees, and were subjected to the most brutal torture.

Bhalagwe survivors have referred to a wide variety of physical tortures. One pastime for the 5 Brigade was to force large numbers of detained men and women, to climb on to branches of trees, until the weight of human bodies snapped the branch, sending everyone crashing to earth. People broke limbs as a result of this. Several interviewees comment on the way 5 Brigade laughed to see them suffer.

CCJP, *On the 1980's Disturbances in Matabeleland & the Midlands* (1997)

In late 1982, Rhodesians including former CIO operatives Matt Calloway and Kevin Woods formed a small group in Matabeleland called 'Super ZAPU' this was known to be South African backed.

Kevin Woods, admitted in a 2006 interview that he worked with these South African trained Super ZAPU agents and that he was aware at the time that they were responsible for much of the dissident violence, including the murders of white farmers.

Timothy Scarnecchia, *Rationalizing Gukuruhundi: Cold War and South African Foreign Relations with Zimbabwe, 1981-1983* (2011)

In addition, in 1981, Mugabe had a special army unit, 5th Brigade, trained by the Democratic

People's Republic of Korea. 5

th Brigade was directly responsible to Mugabe and was made up

wholly of former ZANLA, Shona speaking soldiers. Thus the British were able to blame 'Communists' for all the atrocities. And others were able to portray the problem as a 'tribal war'.

Most of all this campaign AGAINST the ANC and the liberation of South Africa could be portrayed as its opposite:

The 5th Brigade's campaign therefore served the purposes of South Africa, even as ZANU-PF officials rationalized the Gukurahundi violence in international and anti-apartheid circles as a campaign against South African destabilization.

Timothy Scarnecchia, *Rationalizing Gukurahundi: Cold War and South African Foreign Relations with Zimbabwe, 1981-1983* (2011)

Gukurahundi has been used to divide Zimbabweans into 'Shonas' and 'Ndebeles' – two groups hating each other. It has polarized Zimbabwean politics in a way which is destructive and without direction and drawn people away from the real issue – to build a prosperous, secure and tolerant Zimbabwe in which people are engaged in useful work to build the nation and to abolish poverty.

The revival of ZAPU as the original and authentic liberation movement and mass party of Zimbabwe has brought new hope into a situation in which the people of Zimbabwe could only choose between the hopelessly violent and corrupt ZANU – now completely privatized by the parasitic black bourgeoisie – and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) – the new partner of the British and Americans.

As Communists, we support without reservation the revival of ZAPU as the only hope in restoring the economy of Zimbabwe through a planned economy based on Devolution of Power – Power and planning devolving not only to the Provinces but to Districts and villages, making this a programme for direct popular democracy.

While supporting this Zimbabwean road to a National Democratic state, as Communists we will always uphold the interests of the working class and the peasants as being primary within this process.