

THE NEW ZIMBABWE CABINET - FOR WHOM AND FOR WHAT?

An opinion by McDonald Lewanika

Reading the Cabinet Wrong

On the 10th of September 2013, 40 days after romping to victory in the disputed July 31 Election, President Robert Mugabe finally announced his team to drive government policy and program implementation for the next 5 years. By the end of the announcement, my initial impressions were that this Cabinet was as new as the President appointing it, with a lot of continuity on the front line (The Ministers) and just a little bit of change on the backline (Deputy Ministers). My initial thoughts were that this was clear madness. Madness here, being used to refer to doing the same thing over and over again expecting to get different results. I made the argument to myself that there was hardly anything new about the cabinet, that only one person was dropped from the ZANU PF contingent from the last government and that a number of people have returned to their pre-2009 ministries. My initial thoughts were that this is bad for the country and its economy because these were the people who presided over the demise of the same prior to 2009.

I however immediately checked myself, after remembering that there are many things that ZANU PF has done in the past that have closely resembled madness at first sight, but that almost always there was some method to the madness. I am convinced that generally there was nothing wrong with my initial thoughts, except that the reason why most right thinking Zimbabweans are not imbued with confidence by this cabinet and are afraid that it will fail, is because they are using lenses and standards of success, and key performance indicators that are different from President Mugabe's lenses.

A Cabinet for Mugabe and ZANU PF not for Zimbabwe

Where people expected a Cabinet to service the country, what they have got is cabinet to service ZANU PF. Where people expected a Cabinet to enhance the Country's Economic fortunes, what they got was a cabinet adept at improving their own and ZANU PF's balance sheet.

No one could have put it any better than incoming Government presumptive Spokesperson, Professor Jonathan Moyo, who said:

I am coming in to do any assignment given to me by my boss. I am coming in as Team ZANU PF, and Team ZANU PF has a Captain"



Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo

Ordinarily there would be nothing wrong, and no factual errors with this statement had Jonathan Moyo been reacting to an appointment to the ZANU PF Central Committee. It puts clearly at whose service Jonathan Moyo, and those he now speaks for in Government, will be. He is in the service of ZANU PF not Zimbabwe; he is coming in to serve the person not the people.

The Minister of Information, in his first pronouncements in that capacity betrayed the fact that we are poised to return to those “good old days” where the party was the state and the state was party, where ZANU PF was the people and the people were ZANU PF.



Part of the New Cabinet

If there ever was room for doubting Jonathan Moyo, the Principal himself, President Mugabe, spoke on Inauguration of the Ministers saying;

The decision (to appoint) was based on how much of ZANU PF you are, how long you have been with us, and how educated you are."

It is apparent from the foregoing that the Cabinet has also been used as part of a reward system that only entrenches ZANU PF's patronage system, and dares those who have remained outside to be more daring in their service of ZANU PF, than those who have been rewarded.

Stagnation of the Democratic reform Agenda

One of the reasons why this cabinet was anticipated was also based on the fact that, whom Mugabe would surround himself with would give clear indicators of which direction he would take the country. Our organizational view was that, depending on who would be chosen it would indicate whether the President and his government, would, in terms of the transition, regress, stagnate or move towards further reform and consolidation of some of the positive gains from the GNU period.

The Cabinet as announced by President Mugabe is symbolic of the oxymoronic situation where the way forward is stated as being backwards. The new Cabinet's resemblance to the retrogressive, economy wrecking, freedom arresting war cabinet of 2002 is striking, both in terms of Key actors and the politics represented.

In essence, the Cabinet that the country has been saddled with leaves very little hope that this government can take us forward in terms of consolidating our democracy. If anything, the Cabinet is a loud warning shot that the only consolidation that it is intent on is ZANU PF's power through authoritarian consolidation. This is not a matter of conjecture but can be read from the strategic deployments that seem to have been made to stifle reform.

As things stand in Zimbabwe, given the new constitutional dispensation that this Government is supposed to preside over, having a “Hardliner” like Cde Emmerson “Ngwenwa” Mnangagwa standing guard at the Justice Ministry, is a sure sign that not only will justice not be done, but also that any legislative reform that may have been hoped for will die a quick death. Mr. Mnangagwa himself, is on record as saying that contrary to popular opinion, he is “as soft as wool”, but this ministry of Justice (which he is not a new to having presided over it in the past) and the new circumstances that he leads it under, present an opportunity for him to show whether he really is ‘as soft as wool’ or he is as ruthless as the crocodile that is his totem.

While the above can easily be put aside as conjecture, a sure fire sign that the democratic reform agenda is likely to be stalled during the life of this government can be found in the short but loaded statement, again by the presumptive spokesperson of Government, Professor Jonathan Moyo, who on being asked whether there would be media reforms he simply quipped;

“You do not reform anything that is not deformed.”

This statement, while telling, and while uttered by the new Minister of Information is reflective of a standing ZANU PF belief that, contrary to all indications everything is alright in Zimbabwe and its body Politic. Whether this narrative prevails or not depends on how people respond to this clear statement of intent by the new government.

The rise of the Ideologues with an Eye on legacy

One of the things that seem to be clear from this cabinet is that Jonathan Moyo, because of his extraction from the political burial ground after being rejected in the elections by the people of Tsholotsho, is going to be a central character and figure. The question is why? The professor's extraction and appointment seem to signal that ZANU PF is preparing to amplify its propaganda and ideological war. It betrays a clear agenda of a return or resumption of destructive, ruthless and unproductive propaganda. Jonathan Moyo appears as representative of a set of ideologues brought in to stem the tide of the propaganda war that ZANU PF was beginning to lose especially in the region. In this it seems clear that Ambassador Christopher Mutsvangwa another ideologue, is brought in for the same reasons in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to aid Samuel Mumbengegwi, who seemed to be out his depth as he is more of a diplomatic practitioner rather than a political operator and purveyor of ideology, which his deputy clearly is. The Deputy Minister will lead the propaganda charge on the foreign front, while Professor Moyo will ensure that local state media digs in in the ideological war, but on an intellectual basis.



Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa signs his letter of appointment as President Robert Mugabe looks on

Rather than any real victories on the ideological battlefield, this approach by President Mugabe is entirely selfish, meant to buttress his status as the great African who fought imperialism and neo-liberalism at home and abroad, and won. This move by the President is made with an eye on his legacy and the fact that he will be taking over the reigns of SADC in August 2014, which everyone generally agrees will be a good way to go out for him - on top of the region backed up by a fire spitting propaganda artillery led by Professor Moyo and Ambassador Mutsvangwa. The battle lines are drawn and they seem clear enough. The new Cabinet will be unrelenting in its attacks on the West, and will not want rapprochement on any issues of difference that may exist now because that will mess with the legacy that the President wants to have.

Both sides have already set up this epic match up, Mugabe through his actions, utterances and appointments including the recent censure of the European Union Delegation Head and his “tit for tat” speech with regards to sanctions. The West, through their reaction and judgment on the elections that just passed, and their role in colonial history has concluded the preparations for the battle.

The Cabinet as a Balancing Act

The Cabinet's frontline is clearly made up of Political Heads in large part, whose ability to manage the country's affairs is doubtful, but there is a clear attempt to balance them with the “Young Turks” who in outlook are largely technocratic and have some idea of how to go about the real tasks in the Ministries they have been seconded to. This back row is likely to be leading the rear guard action on the real work of running the country - doing the leg work- while their Primaries do the politics.

From a delivery perspective, these Deputies, are largely a more impressive bunch than their Primaries, which itself presents challenges because the first rule of power is that you should never outshine your master.

As such, though the balance is attempted - between the ideologues and technocrats, the hardliners and the moderates, the tried and tested as well as the new - it is a balance that will not hold and deliver for the country because it is not weighted evenly. The priorities for the government are Mugabe, ZANU PF and then Zimbabwe in that order.

The Balancing Act and Its Impact on the Economy

My thinking on looking at the Cabinet is that the Economy is clearly not priority number one. But there is an attempt, as part of the balance to put in key Economic Ministries moderates, whom potential investors can have some confidence in dealing with. Minister Chinamasa, despite all the fire and brimstone he can breath in Politics, showed that he can be a liberal in terms of his approach to the economics. We know that he has already attempted to woo the Banking sector through consultations and promising them greater influence on what happens on that front. His counter-parts in industry and commerce, indigenization, tourism, agriculture, mines and other ministries that have a bearing on the economy, will also take a very practical approach, in spite of the hard lines that the Political Heads and ideologues in the government will be pushing.

It is generally agreed that had economic sustenance of the country, reform and development been what the President wanted, he might have gone with a different team. What the Cabinet composition makes clear is that this is not the case, and it puts a nail into the coffin of reconciliation and the conciliatory approach that the president made on his inauguration.

To have expected change from ZANU PF was a bit of wishful thinking on the part of those who did. It is akin to going to water well and expecting to draw oil, or going to the Chinhoyi Caves and expecting find diesel.

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