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The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday April 25th – Sunday May 1st 2011
Weekly Media Review 2011-17

State media abuse Workers' Day to vilify ZCTU, MDC-T

AS Zimbabwean workers gathered at several venues across the country to commemorate International Workers' Day last Sunday, their activities received low-key publicity as the media appeared preoccupied with the MDC-T national congress, held on the same weekend.

The official media devoted their 12 stories on the occasion to blaming the MDC-T and its allies for workers' plight, while presenting ZANU PF as the only party interested in the workers' welfare.

They reported workers as having **"snubbed"** celebrations organized by the country's main labour body and a key ally of the MDC-T, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) but provided no information on the activities of the smaller Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU), affiliated to ZANU PF (ZBC 1 & 2/5, 8pm). In the past, the ZFTU used to receive widespread favourable publicity in the state media, including live coverage of its May Day celebrations on national television.

No attendance figures were given to support assertions by the government media that the ZCTU's functions were poorly attended.

In one of the reports, ZTV (1/5, 8pm) reported Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai as having **"surprised"** a **"small crowd"** gathered at White City Stadium by attributing Zimbabwe's current economic problems to ZANU PF's indigenization programme. Instead of providing detail and context of Tsvangirai's speech, the station reported "analysts" dismissing his remarks as public posturing meant to please donors.

The station quoted ZANU PF Senator for Chimanimani, Monica Mutsvangwa, accusing the ZCTU of **"ditching its mandate of representing workers"** in favour of **"pursuing (the West's) illegal regime change agenda"**.

The ZTV report then editorialised: ***“The ZCTU gave birth to the MDC political movement that has worked in collaboration with external elements to destabilize Zimbabwe’s economy through the imposition of illegal sanctions. The ordinary worker in Zimbabwe has suffered immensely with hundreds of thousands rendered jobless due to illegal sanctions. This year’s May Day marks yet another moment that reminds Zimbabweans that their livelihoods have been destroyed by organizations like the ZCTU and the MDC”***.

ZTV (1/5, 8pm) also selectively quoted workers ***“blasting”*** MDC-T arm of government for its alleged reluctance to increase civil servants’ salaries and campaign for the removal of Western sanctions, which they blamed for workers’ suffering. The workers ***“advocated for the acceleration of the indigenization programme for the empowerment of the black majority”*** (ZTV, 1/5, 8pm).

The Sunday Mail (1/5)’s editorial comment marketed ZANU PF’s controversial indigenization policy as the panacea to workers’ woes.

The government media did not widely report on labour leaders’ messages to workers during the celebrations.

They only found space in the private media.

Although these media also subordinated the Workers’ Day celebrations to the MDC-T congress, the six stories they carried reported on labour leaders’ calls for pay rises for workers that match the poverty datum line, noting the ***“serious salary disparities”*** between executives and general employees, and urging both groups to ***“share the burden of economic recovery”*** (*Daily News*, 2/5).

NewsDay (2/5) reported workers and civil society groups warning against police brutality during a ***“well-attended”*** rally at Gwanzura Stadium in Harare. They were reported threatening to mobilize Zimbabweans to engage in Egypt-style uprisings if government continued to suppress their rights.

Like the government media, the private media did not say whether the ZFTU had celebrated Workers’ Day.

Earlier, the private media reported the police as having attempted to ban some ZCTU meetings and public marches to commemorate the day (*ZimOnline*, 27/4).

Reportedly, the ban was overturned by the High Court following an application by the ZCTU (SW Radio Africa, 29/4).

ZANU PF makes dramatic election U-turn

THIS week, ZANU PF and the government media it controls finally acknowledged what the private media, the MDC formations and other independent analysts have always been saying – that conditions in Zimbabwe were not yet conducive for the holding of credible elections this year.

The Herald (29/4) quoted ZANU PF's chief negotiator and Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa saying it was highly unlikely Zimbabwe would be able to hold elections this year as there was need for more time to implement “**a bundle of activities**” that were agreed upon by negotiators to the Global Political Agreement (GPA). He said the national plebiscite could now only be held next year, or “**even 2013**”. But this sudden U-turn was not linked to the tough stance taken by SADC at its recent Troika meeting in Zambia.

ZANU PF and the two MDC formations last month endorsed a SADC-sponsored “election roadmap” identifying areas that needed to be addressed before Zimbabweans vote. Chinamasa's surprising pronouncement was a stark contrast to President Mugabe's widely publicized desire to have the elections this year.

Mugabe's declaration last October sparked a flood of endorsements by members of his party and the state controlled media, who – until Chinamasa's comments – had indignantly insisted Zimbabwe had the capacity to do so.

The private media viewed Chinamasa's remarks as not only representing a U-turn by ZANU PF, but also a result of growing regional and international pressure for genuine reforms in the country.

MDC-T congress attracts negative state media coverage

THE MDC-T congress in Bulawayo at the weekend remained a major media attraction in the week.

While the official media covered it widely, 37 of their 39 reports portrayed the party negatively. Thirty-five of these were news stories and four were editorials.

These media discredited the congress on the basis of intra-party violence and factionalism ahead of the congress, the party's decision to invite Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga as guest of honour, and allegations of vote buying against some senior party officials who included re-elected chairperson of the party's Women's Assembly Theresa Makone (ZTV, 27 & 29/4).

The official media also attacked MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai's criticism of ZANU PF for allegedly perpetrating violence against its critics, mostly MDC-T supporters and civil society members.

The official media did not provide sensible analysis of the outcome of the congress, whose only major surprise was the defeat of MDC-T national organizing secretary Elias Mudzuri by party spokesman Nelson Chamisa.

In one display of intolerance, the *Chronicle* (30/3) discredited Odinga as a violent leader under its front-page lead: *MDC-T celebrates Odinga's violent history*. It reported the party's national chairman Lovemore Moyo as having commended Odinga for masterminding a failed coup that left hundreds of Kenyans dead in 1982. The paper made these claims on the strength of Moyo's praise for Odinga for his bravery in the struggle for democracy in Kenya. Earlier, *The Herald* (28/4) published an editorial that described Odinga as **"a merchant of violence"**, who played a key role in the 2007 bloodshed in his country, and published an even more offensive "hate" letter from one of their regular contributors.

The private media's coverage was wide-ranging.

They presented the election of new members into the party's leadership as having reinvigorated the party ahead of national elections and viewed concerns by Tsvangirai about President Mugabe's reluctance to honour his obligations under the Global Political Agreement (GPA) as credible.

These media also criticized the party for failing to stem factionalism, violence, and tribalism during the run-up to the Congress, which, they argued, made the MDC-T similar to ZANU PF (*The Standard*, *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, *Daily News* and *NewsDay*, 30/3 and 1/5).

ZANU PF, MDC-T BATTLE FOR MUNICIPALITIES

THE battle for the control of council operations between ZANU PF and the MDC-T, which has featured widely in the media in recent weeks, continued to attract attention.

Their debates have mainly centred on power struggles between Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo and his deputy Sesel Zvidzai over the running of Harare City Council and the minister's acrimonious relations with several other MDC-led councils over administrative issues.

The official media mostly defended Chombo's actions, which included the sacking of several MDC-T councillors on a variety of misconduct charges, and his alleged failure to consult his deputy on key decisions.

ZTV (21/4, 8pm), for example, accepted Chombo's unilateral dismissal of Bindura Mayor Tinashe Madamombe on charges of **"corruption"** and Harare councillors, Warship Dumba and Casper Takura, on allegations of **"dishonest conduct"** without question. It passively reported Bindura Town Council as supporting Chombo's action, and as having **"castigated"** Zvidzai for attempting to reinstate Madamombe. Reportedly, the Bindura council viewed Zvidzai as a stumbling block to effective service delivery and had allegedly written to Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai demanding his sacking.

No comment was sought from Zvidzai and his party on the issue.

The following week, ZTV (26/4, 8pm) reported **"experts"** as having **"added their voice in condemning the behaviour"** of the deputy minister, accusing him of **"overstepping his boundaries in the administration of local authorities"**, saying his behaviour **"is causing unnecessary chaos"**. The experts contested that Zvidzai had no powers to overturn Chombo's decisions, which they said was aimed at **"retaining sanity"** in most MDC-T led councils.

The official media did not investigate the prudence and repercussions of Chombo's decision to cut new water and health fees charged by councils, simply viewing it as aimed at bringing **"relief to many"** Zimbabweans (*The Herald*, 21/4).

The private media quoted analysts and victims of Chombo's actions accusing him of unilateralism, interference and undermining their authority.

And while the official media passively reported Chombo's interference in new service charges by municipalities, the private media subjected this to critical analysis.

The Standard (24/4), for instance, reported Harare Mayor Muchadeyi Masunda dismissing Chombo's move, describing it as politically motivated and **"unwarranted interference"**, and having the potential to severely compromise service delivery.

The Daily News (27/4) reported the Harare Residents Trust urging government to amend the urban Councils Act on the grounds that it gave **"too much power"** to Chombo.

Did you notice?

THE government media have chosen to selectively blame the MDC-T arm of government for wasting state resources through foreign trips, while ignoring the fact that President Mugabe's trips have reportedly been costing much more.

The Sunday Mail (1/4) accused Finance Minister Tendai Biti and some officials from his ministry of ***“operating from plane to plane”*** by ***“globe-trotting from one continent to the other”*** between January and April this year, ***“blowing over US\$500 000 in travel and accommodation expenses and allowances”***. The story, which appeared under a sensational front-page lead: *Biti's gravy plane chews US\$500 000*, was based on a schedule the paper claimed showed most of the meetings Biti attended ***“had nothing to do with his ministry directly”***.

The Sunday Mail (1/7) used the opportunity to quote an unnamed ***“top official”*** in Biti's ministry, vilifying his boss for abusing state resources for personal gain, and discrediting his alleged calls for Mugabe to reduce the number of his trips and size of his entourage.

Private media reports exposed Mugabe, who has reportedly travelled about six times alone to Singapore this year, as the worst culprit in drying up state coffers (*The Standard*, *The Zimbabwean* and SW Radio Africa, 24, 26 & 28/4).

The Standard (24/4) reported that Mugabe ***“demands”*** at least US\$3million from Treasury each time he leaves the country, a move “sources” in Biti's ministry argued was ***“crippling government operations”***.

The private media also highlighted the irony of Mugabe's recent trip to Rome to attend the beatification of the late Pope John Paul II as it came just days after he attacked the leadership of the Catholic Church for its alleged fixation with criticising his government (*New Zimbabwe*, *The Zimbabwean On Sunday* and *NewsDay*, 1, 2 & 3/5).

POLITICAL VIOLENCE FLARES UP

AS this report went to print, *NewsDay* (5/4) reported a fresh campaign of violence across the country, apparently mostly targeting ZANU PF's opponents.

It reported ZANU PF supporters as having embarked on a rampage, beating up MDC-T supporters and destroying property in Harare, Bulawayo, Manicaland, Mashonaland East and West.

NewsDay quoted the MDC-T saying four of its supporters had been kidnapped in Harare's Mbare suburb and their whereabouts were still unknown, while five others were reportedly beaten up in the same suburb.

These incidents were among the 13 incidents the media reported. All of them appeared in the private media.

They included:

- The arrest of four Harare International Festival of the Arts (Hifa) organisers in connection with the opening play at the festival. They were later released without charge (*NewsDay*, 29/4).
- Alleged harassment of villagers in Seke by ZANU PF youths. The youths also reportedly imposed a curfew in the area (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 1/5).
- The raid on *NewsDay* offices by unknown criminals who stole who stole the hard drives from journalists' computers, and the assault of a newspaper vendor working for *The Daily News* in Kuwadzana by ZANU PF youths (*Daily News*, SW Radio Africa and *NewsDay*, 27 & 29/4), and
- The abduction of five MDC-T members in Chipinge by suspected state security agents (*Daily News*, 29/4).

THANKS FOR YOUR COMMENTS

The election roadmap must be broadly dealt with - *Anonymous*.

Thank you very much for the update – *Diana, Masvingo*.

We are grateful for your critical analysis of Zimbabwe news - *Munyaradzi, Chiredzi*.

Is Chombo really untouchable? The media has been reporting on a lot of misconduct by him but no action has been taken against the minister – *Anonymous*.

TWO YEARS LATER, STILL NO INDEPENDENT BROADCASTERS...



SPEAK no independent
broadcasting...



SEE no independent
broadcasting...



HEAR no independent
broadcasting...

REMEMBERING WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

WHAT THEY SAID...

“Raila Odinga’s party in Kenya and Morgan Tsvangirai’s party in Zimbabwe have one thing in common - violence...Violence...is a cup of tea for the two parties. They thrive on it to get power. The other thing is they are puppets of the West...Inviting a character with a violent disposition like Odinga does not augur well for our culture of peace...” – The Herald’s regular contributor, Campion Mereki, disparaging the MDC-T for inviting Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga to attend its congress (21/4).

“What difference is there between \$5 and \$7? Our government should wake up and smell the coffee in terms of the real costs of providing a world-class service to expectant mothers at our polyclinics as well as supplying potable water to a hub of four million people in Greater Harare... It is regrettable that, with elections looming on the horizon, all the members of our government of national unity will be using service delivery issues to score Brownie points against each other to the detriment of (residents)...” – Harare Mayor Muchadeyi Masunda (24/4, 6pm).

“The situation is out of hand. It’s alarming. It’s frightening. It’s criminal that you can spend \$12,5 million on travelling and you can’t put that money either into health or education” - Finance Minister Tendai Biti criticizing President Mugabe for wasting money on foreign trips (*Daily News*, 27/4).

Ends/

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