



Defending free expression and your right to know

Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday June 27th – Sunday July 3rd 2011
Weekly Media Review 2011-26

State media steps up the propaganda war

MMPZ has observed a sustained propaganda crusade, especially by the ZANU PF arm of government and the state media it controls, on various important developments in the country.

In the week, this was evident in the public media's coverage of the acquittal of MDC-T Energy Minister Elton Mangoma by High Court judge Chinembiri Bhunu on charges of illegally directing the purchase of fuel from a South African company; civil servants' pay rises; and the ongoing debate on political violence and security sector reforms.

These media presented these issues from an exclusively ZANU PF perspective, ignoring not only professional journalistic standards, but badly short-changing their audiences by failing to provide them with useful, impartial information they need to participate fully as citizens in a free society.

And as this report was being compiled ZTV again provided a graphic illustration of its propagandist instincts with a gratuitous and unsubstantiated attack on the respected media interests organization, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). In its main evening news bulletin on Tuesday (5/7) its reporter described MISA's elective annual general meeting as being ***"marred by serious vote buying and rigging..."*** without providing a shred of evidence to support this claim. MMPZ condemns this shamelessly unprofessional conduct.

Mangoma acquitted, but police undermine justice

THE government media rushed to exploit the acquittal of Energy Minister Elton Mangoma - whose prosecution raised fresh questions about the neutrality of the police and the Attorney-General's Office – by claiming his acquittal illustrated the independence of Zimbabwe's justice delivery system.

However, these media studiously avoided providing an informed analysis of the controversial circumstances surrounding the minister's arrest and prosecution. This was particularly so as the ruling vindicated what the private media and Mangoma's lawyers had been arguing all along – that the Energy Minister had no case to answer and that his arrest and prosecution was politically motivated.

Although *The Herald* (29/9) gave detailed, balanced and front-page lead status to Mangoma's acquittal, its follow-up story (1/7) downplayed and distorted its implications.

The Herald (1/7) reported Mangoma's acquittal as ***"evidence that Zimbabwe has rule of law with a thriving independent judiciary"***, citing ***"political analysts"*** such as ZANU PF Politburo member Jonathan Moyo, Alexander Kanengoni and Godwine Mureriwa. The paper stayed away from analyzing why the minister had been prosecuted at all following the judge's damning decision that Mangoma had no case to answer.

The official media also failed to reconcile Mangoma's acquittal with the latest exchange of harsh words between the MDC-T and the ZRP over the police's alleged selective application of the law (ZTV, 28/6, 7am and Studio 7, *Zimbabwe Independent* and Radio VoP, 29 & 30 and 1 & 4/7).

They merely promoted the police portrayal of the MDC-T as being violent and unruly without questioning the truth of these claims or balancing them with factual evidence from impartial monitors. Missing too, was the right of the MDC-T to respond to the allegations.

In one such report, *The Herald* (28/6) quoted ZRP spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena warning that the police would ***"invoke all necessary measures against MDC-T activists who invade police stations, harassing and threatening officers whenever their members are arrested"***.

This followed police claims that some MDC-T supporters had invaded Rhodesville and Matapi police stations looking for Jameson Timba, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, whose whereabouts were unknown after he was illegally arrested and detained on allegations that he had undermined the office of the President.

And while the country's laws demand that suspects are presumed innocent until proven guilty, the paper passively quoted Bvudzijena commenting on a case still before the courts: ***"We are also sensitive to the behaviour displayed by MDC hooligans when they murdered Inspector (Petros) Mutedza while he was on duty"***.

Were those responsible for the death of Insp. Mutedza all members of the MDC? And was there any intention to kill him? The courts must resolve these issues – not the police. And the paper is complicit in undermining the possibility of a fair trial by disseminating these dangerous preconceptions.

Security sector reforms

TRUTH was another casualty in the official media's follow-up coverage of renewed calls for security sector reforms by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his MDC-T after the military's latest public show of allegiance to President Mugabe and ZANU PF by Brigadier-General Douglas Nyikayaramba.

All their four stories on the matter dismissed the need for such reforms as unfounded, maintaining that Zimbabwe's uniformed forces were professional, even as the issue resurfaced in the week with reports of fresh conflict between the MDC-T and the police over allegations of bias (ZTV, 28/6, 7am, *The Herald*, Studio 7, *Zimbabwe Independent* and Radio VoP 28, 29 & 30/6 and 1 & 4/7).

The government media also promoted the idea that security reforms are not part of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) despite provisions of Section 13.1: ***"State organs and institutions do not belong to any political party and should be impartial in the discharge of their duties"***.

Three of the official media's reports were editorials by columnists Nathaniel Manheru (believed to be presidential spokesman George Charamba), Caesar Zvayi and ZANU PF Politburo member Jonathan Moyo, all vigorously dismissing proposals for reform. None sought to examine the issue impartially.

Zvayi described ***"the so-called"*** security sector reforms as ***"nothing more than an attempt to effect regime change"*** (*The Herald*, 29/6), while Moyo dismissed them as a ***"threat to our national security"*** (*The Sunday Mail*, 3/7).

Earlier, ZTV (28/6, 7am) accused Tsvangirai and his party of ***"using public platforms"*** to ***"provoke and insult"*** security chiefs, in what ***"observers"*** and ***"military experts"*** such as Retired Brigadier Felix Muchemwa viewed as a ***"very clear sign that Tsvangirai and his Western handlers are panicking that security forces...will not tolerate a puppet government in Zimbabwe"***.

The private media provided more factual analysis. They viewed remarks by Nyikayaramba and police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri as having vindicated concerns that the country's security organs were partisan and unprofessional and in need of reform.

They also viewed the comments as inflammatory and a violation of the Constitution, while insisting that the issue was part of the GPA.

State media politicize civil servants' plight

THE official media used the recent increase in civil servants' salaries (initially estimated to be by an average of US\$31) to bolster the image of President Mugabe while sullyng that of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and Finance Minister Tendai Biti.

Debate on the adequacy and prudence of the salary increase was subordinated to this political grandstanding.

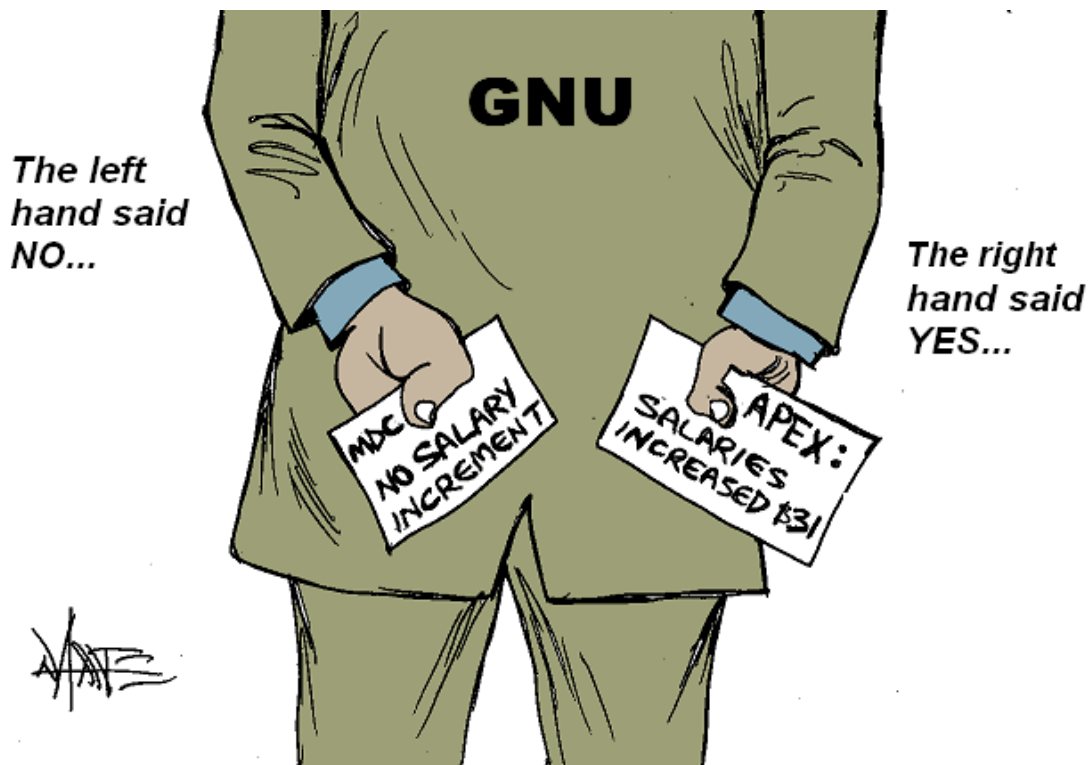
All the state media's six reports on the subject exclusively credited the pay rise to President Mugabe, who in April directed government to do so, and disparaged Tsvangirai and Biti, accusing them of opposing it (ZTV 1/7, 8pm and *The Herald*, 2/6).

Although *The Herald* (2/6) reported the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) denouncing the increase as insufficient, it accused Biti of ***"playing to the whims of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank"*** by refusing to effect the increase. In addition, it ridiculed Tsvangirai for failing to ***"fulfil a promise he made to civil servants two years ago"*** that he would ***"approach his friends around the world to mobilize money for civil servants"***.

The Herald (4/6) also quoted presidential spokesman George Charamba and some civil servants' unions ***"blasting"*** Tsvangirai for complaining that Cabinet was not consulted and that the increase was inadequate. Charamba dismissed Tsvangirai's concerns as ***"mere politicking"*** and an indication that he had ***"lost touch with government programmes"***, while civil servants unions described them as ***"confusing"***, ***"disturbing"*** and ***"nonsense"***.

Although the private media viewed the meagre pay rise as a step in the right direction, they raised concerns about the way the state media and the ZANU PF arm of government had politicized the issue.

They also viewed it as representing headaches for Biti and Tsvangirai, who had for long argued that government had no capacity to do increase civil servants' salaries (*The Standard*, 3/7).



HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

MDC-T, police fight over violence

THE eruption of a war of words between MDC-T secretary-general Tendai Biti and Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri over who was responsible for political violence in Zimbabwe made headlines in the private media this week.

These media reported Biti accusing ZANU PF of perpetrating violence against the MDC-T and the police for selective application of the law in a letter to the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 1/7).

It also reported Chihuri hitting back, accusing the MDC-T of being mainly responsible for the violence and deliberately targeting the police in the process.

The exchange coincided with news that JOMIC had dismissed reports of political violence in Harare and Chitungwiza over the past two months, a move *The Herald* (1/7) claimed had “*put paid to claims by MDC-T that there was politically-motivated violence in Harare*”.

But while JOMIC was giving the impression that there was no violence in Zimbabwe, there were reports in both the government and private media exposing political intolerance, even in JOMIC.

In one of the cases, *NewsDay* (20/6) reported senior ZANU PF and the MDC-T members as having ***“confronted each other”, “traded insults”*** and ***“came close to blows”*** in front of their supporters at a meeting at Nedziwa Business Centre in Chimanimani as they accused each other of inciting violence in the district.

This incident was among the eight fresh incidents of human rights violations the media carried. Of these, seven appeared in the private media, while the remaining one featured in both media.

WHAT THEY SAID...

“The decision on the (Energy Minister Elton) Mangoma case confirms for the umpteenth time that Zimbabwe is a constitutional democracy under the rule of law and exposes the MDC formations, especially the Tsvangirai faction, as a bunch of charlatans who would not recognize the rule of law even if it hits on their ugly faces” - ZANU PF Politburo member Jonathan Moyo (*The Herald*, 1/7).

“Every day they (security chiefs) are dabbling in politics, even seeking to influence the date of the election and the conditions under which that election will be held. When the Police Commissioner-General and the Attorney-General state publicly that they support a particular political party...the rule of law becomes perverted and people lose confidence in the institutions they lead” – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai speaking in Barcelona, Spain (*NewsDay*, 23/6).

“President Mugabe has tried his best and we want to find out what the premier is putting on the table for us. We met him and he sang the same chorus that government is broke. And now there is something, he is saying it’s too little...Mr Tsvangirai must be ashamed...” – Zimbabwe Teachers’ Association chief executive Sifiso Ndlovu (*The Herald*, 4/7).

“Even the outcome of the negotiation has been politicized. That is why there was a stampede to thank President Mugabe as an individual as if the money is coming from an individual’s pocket” – Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe president Raymond Majongwe (*Daily News*, 2/7).

OUR FINAL EDITION

THIS is the final edition in the present series of MMPZ's Weekly Media Review commentaries. But we will be publishing a regular fortnightly commentary on news presentation in the media and matters affecting Zimbabwe's media environment and other topical issues. However, our focus will be on matters affecting constitutional reforms, the referendum and national elections and the conduct of the media in addressing these important issues. We welcome your comments and can always be contacted by email at: monitors@mmpz.org.zw, or by sms on: 0774-432-509.

Ends/

The MEDIA REVIEW was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw For previous MMPZ reports, and more information about the Project, please visit our website at <http://www.mmpz.org/>