

# Land reform in Zimbabwe

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**ABSTRACT** *The paper begins with an ethical case for land redistribution in Zimbabwe, based on principles of social justice and equity, drawing from a brief history of land in Zimbabwe from the first European expulsions up to independence. Both the moral and economic arguments for land redistribution are widely and fiercely contested. The paper considers and rejects two specific criticisms of the economic arguments: that farming in the commercial sector is more efficient than in the peasant sector; and that land redistribution will not benefit the land-poor, but rather transfer land to an alternative privileged group. These arguments are explored through an examination of previous land resettlement programmes in Zimbabwe in these two respects. The paper also evaluates the objections to land reform related to issues of compensation and legality. It is concluded that radical redistribution is desirable and feasible, and urges the British government to finance land development and, if necessary, compensate commercial farmers.*

Conflict over land in Zimbabwe is one of the big news stories of today. But the media tend to exaggerate the extent to which events there are historically contingent and driven by the happenstance of President Mugabe's rule. Instead the situation should be seen as structurally embedded in the historical processes of colonial rule and subsequent international diplomacy and intervention. In fact similar processes are unfolding in neighbouring Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. The future of Zimbabwe, like the present, will be intimately paralleled by events in the rest of Southern Africa.

The similarities between Zimbabwe and South Africa are indeed striking. They suffer comparable land inequalities: 13% of the population of South Africa (whites) own 87% of the land (Ankomah, 2001: 8). As in Zimbabwe land redistribution has been very slow: less than 2% has been transferred from white to black ownership since the ANC came to power in 1994 (McGreal, 2001). Here too, only those wishing to sell their land need do so—the so-called 'willing seller, willing buyer' principle—with the state providing financial support (Palmer, 1998: 2).

Again perceptions of injustice have elicited similar responses from the dispossessed. Many of the seven million black workers on white farms in South Africa are being expelled, while 'hundreds of white landowners and their workers die each year' through violence on the farms (McGreal, 2001; see also Palmer, 1998).

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The war veterans of Zimbabwe also have their counterparts in South Africa, where several popular militant land-rights groups are co-operating under an umbrella organisation called the National Landless People's Grouping (McGreal, 2001), and the Minister of Lands has warned that the slowness of redistribution in South Africa may lead to 'a Mugabe-style land grab' (Palmer, 1998).

It is worrying that the systematic failure of the media, Western governments and international agencies to grasp the structural basis of Zimbabwe's conflict will leave them ill-prepared to react constructively to similar and imminent conflicts elsewhere, especially in South Africa, with potentially tragic consequences.

This paper will argue that the land conflict in Zimbabwe should be understood primarily as a legacy of colonialism, and of emergent neo-colonial relations between Zimbabwe and a coalition of rich countries and the international institutions that they dominate—especially the World Bank and the IMF.

In presenting an overview of the land situation in Zimbabwe, an argument will be made for the desirability of fundamental land reform, for both ethical and economic reasons. Not only is it right to redistribute land to the dispossessed, but experience of earlier programmes in Zimbabwe and countless others around the world demonstrate the potential for major agricultural improvements through such reforms.

The paper begins with an ethical case for land redistribution, following from a brief outline of the history of land in Zimbabwe from the first European expulsions up to independence. Some general economic justifications for land reform are outlined next, followed by a detailed examination of the experience of land resettlement programmes in Zimbabwe and of the arguments levelled against them by their critics—especially the alleged inefficiency of African farmers, and the corruptness of land allocation. Other opponents of land redistribution cite the complex questions of compensation and of legality. Their objections are explored next.

Finally, it is argued that radical land reform is not only desirable and feasible, but also necessary to prevent serious unrest. The paper concludes that the British government has a central role to play in averting further disaster, by financing land development and, if necessary, by compensating dispossessed commercial farmers.

### **An ethical case for land redistribution**

It will be argued first that there is a strong moral case for a radical redistribution of land in Zimbabwe. Such a case will depend on an appreciation of the origins of the country's land ownership. So there follows an historical outline of land acquisition and expropriation from the initial European settlement in the 19th century to independence from British rule in 1980.

#### *How the land came to be British*

As recently as 1879 only a small proportion of the African continent was under colonial rule (Oliver & Fage, 1988: 158). Africa was still dominated by African

governments. But in the 1880s there ensued a 'hasty and haphazard process of enclosure' by European powers (Davidson, 1984: 270), driven by suspicion of the ambitions of rivals.

The Berlin conference of 1884 defined the broad limits of expansion of each of the European powers. As part of this exercise 'the British government in 1888 declared the existence of a British sphere of interest between Botswana and the Zambesi' (Oliver & Fage, 1988: 164). Thus Mashonaland and Matabeleland were allocated by the European powers to the British sphere of influence (Douglas, 1984: 184).

In that year the Ndebele king, Lobengula, was misled into signing a mining 'concession' which effectively granted Cecil Rhodes the right to occupy Mashonaland (Douglas, 1984: 182–184). The British government was thereby persuaded to grant a Royal Charter, which delegated the functions of government in this region to Rhodes's British South Africa (BSA) Company (Oliver & Fage, 1988: 164).

The area of present-day Zimbabwe and Zambia (and more) was ceded to the Company in 1891, and named 'Rhodesia' in 1895. Settlers, many of whom had been urban South Africans in search of gold, demanded land and the labour to work it. This sparked wars with the Shona and the Matabele, with enormous casualties (Oliver & Fage 1988: 193; Palmer & Birch 1992). Conflict between white-ruled Mashonaland and the independent black state of Matabeleland culminated in the Anglo-Ndebele War of 1893–94, which added Matabeleland to the BSA Company's territories (Douglas, 1984: 184).

The settlers helped themselves to the best land, enserfed the original inhabitants, or else pushed them out into less fertile areas (Douglas, 1984: 137). The indigenous population had to pay rents and taxes on what remained of their land and property to the BSA Company. A loose policy of setting aside reserves for Africans—following the South African policy—began in the 1890s, but became regularised and intensified in the 1920s. In 1922 the settlers voted to run the country (now Southern Rhodesia) themselves with only limited supervision by the British government. It became a self-governing British colony the following year (Douglas, 1984: 184).

The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 'allocated fixed Reserves—generally poor, remote and inadequate—to the people' (Douglas, 1984: 137). The alienated lands of Africans became 'European areas' (Elich, 2002). The new government concentrated all its policies during the next 30 years on the promotion of further white settlement, and built up its power and economic predominance (Oliver & Fage, 1988: 189). Through immigration the number of white settlers increased from 80 000 to 220 000 between 1945 and 1960 (Palmer & Birch, 1992).

There was 'wholesale forced removal of African people to make room for white farming up to the 1950s' (Cliffe, 2000: 36). Indeed, black people continued to be forced from their land right up to the 1970s (McGreal, 2002); and while labour was thereby 'reproduced' in the African reserves, now re-labelled 'communal areas' (CAs), competition in the market from African smallholders was prohibited (Cliffe, 2000: 36; Jayne & Jones, 1997).

Special designated areas for 'emergent' black farmers were first established in 1930 (Munslow, 1985). Here successful ('master') farmers were granted portions

of land up to 100 hectares with the intention of developing a black yeoman class (Moyo, 1986). These are now called ‘small-scale commercial farmers’ (SSCFs).

Meanwhile in the CAS enormous land pressure was building up: between 1961 and 1977 the area under cultivation increased by 91% at the expense of grazing, although cattle numbers still increased by 70% (Moyo, 1986: 170). In these areas no credit or financial institutions supported the farmers. Not until 1978 was a small farm credit scheme established (Mumbengegwi, 1986: 206).

### *Distribution of land at Independence*

Through this process of systematic eviction about 5000 large-scale commercial farms (LSCFs) came to occupy 15.5 million ha out of 33.2 million ha of farm land by Independence (Kinsey, 2000; Potts & Mutambirwa, 1997). SSC farms took up about 1.6 million ha, and the remainder was occupied by 750 000 families in CAS (Stoneman, 2000; Moyo, 1986). The average farm size in LSCF areas was about 3000 ha (12 square miles), that of CA farms about 20 ha.

The expropriation of fertile land from African farmers and their settlement in marginal areas ensured there was an enormous difference in the quality of farmland in LSCF (white) and CA (black) areas. Land in the best agro-ecological zones, classified as ‘Natural Region 1’ (NR I) in the Eastern Highlands, occupies only 2% of the total area. The highly fertile NR II occupies 15%, most of which is in the ‘highveld’ (Weiner, 1988: 64). NR III, occupying 19%, is best suited to semi-intensive crop and livestock production, and maize cropping is unreliable because of high temperatures. NRS IV and V are suitable only for extensive livestock production in the absence of irrigation (Weiner, 1988: 66; Moyo, 1986: 182).

The land in NRS I and II was dominated by the commercial farmers at Independence. While in 1983/4 only 23.5% of the 6.58 million hectares of this land was occupied by communal farmers, fully 66.9% was in the large-scale commercial farm sector (Moyo, 1986: 184–185, table 11; GoZ, 1991: 95). So the best areas were, and until 2001–03 remained, dominated by LSCFs, as shown in Figure 1.

The map shows clearly that the only land suited to intensive cropping in Zimbabwe was dominated by LSCF farmers at Independence.

### *Ethical implications*

The moral arguments in media and political circles for and against land redistribution in Zimbabwe often fail to distinguish between a number of separate issues. Here is an attempt to identify those with the greatest moral force.

The first moral argument for land reform is that, regardless of how it came about, land ownership is highly unequal, and redistribution would increase equality and hence social justice. This would apply in any population, irrespective of the origins of existing land tenure.

A second justification for land redistribution which emerges vividly from the above sketch of Zimbabwe’s history is the imperative to right past wrongs. It is uncontested that land was simply stolen from its owners throughout the century before independence. Redistribution would reverse this process, and return land

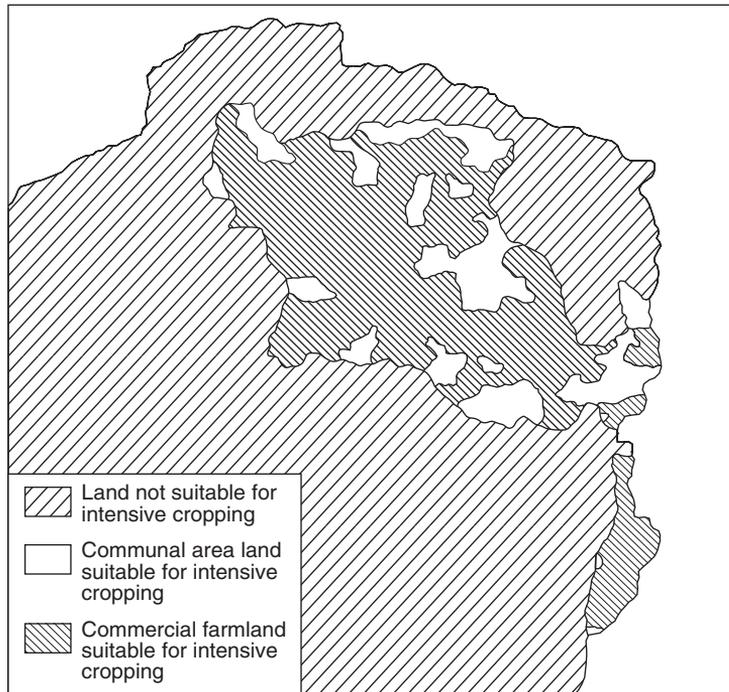


FIGURE 1. Distribution of agricultural land up to 2001.

*Source:* Adapted from Stoneman (2000: 49); Potter *et al* (1999: 257).

to the dispossessed. A common counter-argument is that these events were too long ago to have moral relevance today. But land theft occurred right up to the 1970s, and many expropriated landowners still claim their rights over specific landholdings that they had previously farmed. The question of how old a crime must be before its consequences become the accepted status quo and retributive justice becomes inappropriate is, however, strongly contested, often along lines of self-interest.

Finally, the racial basis of land inequality needs to be specifically acknowledged. Redistribution is justified at least in part through the need to redress racial imbalance in land ownership, for a number of reasons. The extreme racial inequality manifested by the stratification of landholding is ethically unacceptable in itself: even more so when the privilege of the dominant group (Europeans) has resulted from violence towards, and exploitation of, the underprivileged (African) group. Further, political instability is inevitable when the subordination of Africans is perpetuated by the inactivity, through collusion or impotence, of an essentially African government. The eradication of this nexus of privilege and humiliation is essential to the re-establishment of confidence among a demoralised black population.

### **An economic case for land redistribution**

In addition to the moral arguments for a fundamental redistribution of land in

Zimbabwe, there are also good *economic* arguments. Below is a brief outline of the role of redistribution in the promotion of increased production; the fulfilment of basic human needs; and, more broadly, in the stimulation of the economy.

To maximise agricultural production under-utilised or barren commercial farm land must be made to fulfil its productive potential. Further, land allocation should maximise its efficiency of use. Numerous data from around the world confirm the inverse relationship between landholding size and the following: land utilisation, proportion of land cropped, and of crops that are food crops, and productivity per hectare. This is so despite the relatively under-capitalised nature of small landholdings (Murdoch, 1980). In Kenya in the mid-1970s, for example, output per hectare was almost 20 times as high on farms of under 0.5 ha than on those over 8 ha (Hunt, 1984).

In a situation where, according to the government's Poverty Assessment Study Survey (SAPRIN, 1999: 5) 61% of households in Zimbabwe live in poverty, and 45% in extreme poverty, we must also mention the implications of land redistribution for human needs. As Chattopadhyay (2000) points out, poverty in the late 1990s occurred in the midst of record harvests. There has, he says, been a 'break in the relationship between production and consumption'. Sen (1981) showed that aggregate food availability at the national level is not a sufficient predictor of a properly fed population. Instead he emphasised 'the social relations through which people gain command, or entitlement, over food' (Crow, 2000: 60). Such entitlement derives from direct 'endowments'—such as labour power or access to land—or more indirectly from exchange and trade. In the context of high unemployment in Zimbabwe rapidly escalating levels of under-nutrition can therefore be best tackled through the direct provision of land.

Finally, in the words of Oxfam's Senior Policy Advisor, 'a properly-financed and well managed land reform programme could unleash the productive potential of peasant farmers [in Zimbabwe], much as it did in South Asian countries such as South Korea, Taiwan and Japan' (Watkins, 1995: 133). The increased equality resulting from redistribution would raise demand and promote economic growth in all sectors.

### **Land resettlement and its critics**

Both the moral and economic arguments for land redistribution are of course widely and fiercely contested. Here we will just look at two specific criticisms of the economic arguments: first that farming in the LSCF sector is more efficient than in the peasant sector; second that land redistribution will not benefit the landless and land-poor, but instead an alternative privileged group.

In order to contextualise these arguments an historical outline of land resettlement policies and programmes from Independence up to the present time will first be presented.

#### *Land resettlement after Independence*

In 1979 the post-UDI government of Prime Minister Muzorewa was persuaded, together with the Patriotic Front (PF), to join the negotiation table at Lancaster

House in London (Oliver & Fage, 1988: 232). The conference laid down British terms for the legal independence of Southern Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe.

The most significant of these terms was the right of all white farmers to retain their land, at least for 10 years. British aid was only available to purchase lands of white farmers who chose to sell (Palmer & Birch, 1992: 24). Only 'under-utilised' land could be compulsorily purchased, and that at the full market price, which the owners could convert into foreign currency (Palmer & Birch 1992). In exchange the UK agreed to fund half the cost of a resettlement scheme for black farmers.

In the years immediately before Independence, Western governments had 'attempted to reassure whites by proposing a trust fund, which among other things would guarantee compensation abroad if property rights were abused. At one stage this fund was to be as much as \$2 billion' (Holman, 2000).

The anxiety of the white farmers was shared by Mugabe and Nkomo, co-leaders of the PF, who asked at the conference for reassurances that land redistribution would not be made impossible by entrenched clauses and lack of funds. According to the liberation delegation these assurances were forthcoming in private, and they went 'a long way in allaying the great concern we have over the whole land question arising from the great need our people have for land and our commitment to satisfy that need when in government' (McGreal, 2002).

These promises are 'now downplayed by British officials', and by 1996 just £44 million of the promised hundreds of millions had been forthcoming for land reform (McGreal, 2002; Holman, 2000). McGreal (2000) believes that Mugabe would have gone back to war had he known they would gain so little. It may legitimately be asked whether this alleged deception is the root cause of the subsequent failure to implement the kind of land reform which could have satisfied both new settlers and dispossessed commercial farmers.

Nevertheless the new government of Zimbabwe in 1980 set out to acquire 8.3 million ha of land on which to resettle 162 000 families under Phase One of its Land Reform and Resettlement Programme (LRRP). But between 1980 and 1989 it acquired only 2.6 million ha and resettled 52 000 households, 70% of these by 1983 (Alexander, 1994: 335; Christiansen, 1993: 1552; Potts & Mutambirwa 1997: 550–551). The 'willing seller' principle ensured that whites only sold the land that had been abandoned during the War of Liberation, or else was of poor quality, thereby denying new settlers the opportunity to establish a successful economic sector (Alexander, 1994: 343–344; Cliffe, 2000: 37; Munslow, 1985).

While the purpose of the resettlement programme was to alleviate land poverty, it was also designed to ensure that aggregate production would not be endangered. It was heavily regulated over what was to be produced, how much, and by what methods. Leases could be revoked unless new settlers carried out efficient commercial farming (Potts & Mutambirwa, 1997: 551, 560; Kinsey, 1999). Well over 90% of the families resettled were in so-called Model A schemes, in which farmers receive small plots of around 6–7 hectares to cultivate, and some grazing land, often held in common with other families (Kinsey, 1999: 175; see also Potts & Mutambirwa 1997: 551). Most of the rest (Model B) were collective co-operatives.

Along with the resettlement programme the government gave assistance to the 60% of people who remained in agro-ecological zones IV and V in the poor CAS. They received a combination of marketing, credit, extension services and agricultural inputs. Nevertheless diversity of natural resource endowment within the CAS themselves meant that these services tended to favour the richer areas and groups. Such policies of support to CA farmers were thus not sufficient to solve the problem of poverty, and resettlement remained essential (Cliffe, 1988b: 8).

### *Stalling of the resettlement programme*

The reasons for the stall in land redistribution in the mid-1980s are complex. Pressures to retain the Lancaster House principle of voluntarism came from the predominantly white Commercial Farmers Union (CFU), the civil service and foreign donors, including the British government and the World Bank (Alexander, 1994). Such pressures took different forms. The government was persuaded that the loss of experienced commercial farmers would drain the economy of vital export earnings, but it was also subjected to implicit threats of the withdrawal of aid. At the same time recurrent if limited balance of payments deficits, and the burgeoning price of land, persuaded them to hold back on compulsory acquisition (Kinsey, 1999; Potts & Mutambirwa, 1997).

### *Structural adjustment and agriculture*

Despite these setbacks the 1980s were encouraging years for Zimbabwe. Heavy military spending to stave off South African destabilisation did not prevent the economy from growing at 4% a year, exports diversified, debts were paid without rescheduling, education and health expanded, and food security was maintained (Gibbons, 1996: 349). This record contrasted with the stagnation or decline of other African countries blighted by 'structural adjustment' imposed by the international financial institutions (IFIs).

The suspension of an IMF stand-by programme to Zimbabwe in 1984 led to an eight-year stand-off, which in turn affected the support of other donors. Thus in 1988 Margaret Thatcher explained that the UK government's failure to offer development-orientated finance to Zimbabwe was because it 'did not have an IMF programme' (Stoneman, 1993: 90). Further pressures for wide-ranging liberalisations of the economy came from the World Bank and other donors. Finally, a small balance of payments deficit proved enough for the government to introduce a 'home-grown' economic structural adjustment programme (called ESAP), including the removal of direct import controls (Gibbons, 1996; Stoneman, 1992). The World Bank was approached for a supporting loan.

This capitulation to neoliberalism has been described as 'a successful coup in which Robert Mugabe was not deposed, but marginalised' (Stoneman, 1992: 94). Predictably a huge increase in imports followed, and a trade surplus abruptly turned into a deficit (Gibbons, 1996).

But the World Bank was only partially assuaged. In early 1991 neoliberal measures were intensified, and debt worsened. Still no funds arrived. In September 1991 Zimbabwe was forced to devalue by 25%, dramatically

increasing debt. The World Bank and IMF conferred. In 1992 Zimbabwe devalued again, and desperately cut back on spending. It was not until March 1992 that a World Bank loan finally arrived, and now the IFIs called the tune. From here on Zimbabwe's economy would be their property.

These events had serious consequences for Zimbabwe's agriculture. In the 1980s Zimbabwe's agricultural success had been legendary (Moyo, 1986). The parastatal Grain Marketing Board (GMB) collected and stored grain through a country-wide network of depots and collection points, mostly built after Independence (Stoneman, 1992: 93; Sachikonye, 1992; Gibbons, 1996: 345). Bumper maize harvests in 1989 and 1990 resulted in the GMB storing more than a whole year's harvest in April 1990 (Sachikonye, 1992; Stoneman, 1992).

A wonderful achievement you might think. But the IFIs were more concerned with the GMB's deficit, which Stoneman (1993: 95) denies is evidence of its inefficiency, but rather a result of 'paying decent prices to farmers and the costs of storing surplus maize that could not be sold profitably on the world market because of the dumping of similarly surplus maize by the EC and the US'.

ESAP required the GMB to eliminate its deficit, by closing the less 'economic' grain depots in rural areas (Sachikonye, 1992: 93; Stoneman, 1992: 95; SAPRIN, 1999). Nearly all the crop collection points were closed by late 1991 (Gibbons, 1996). The marketing and storage network, which had successfully ensured the availability of food, was dismantled so that the GMB should become profitable. Marketing was taken over by middlemen, described by SAPRIN (1999) as 'exploitative'.

Huge surpluses of maize were immediately replaced by import dependency. And while the economy began to crumble Zimbabwe was hit by an appalling drought in 1992 (Sachikonye, 1992; Stoneman, 1992). Consumption of food was hit particularly hard: between 1990 and 1994, while the general price index increased by 168%, for food it increased by 225%. This had a greater impact on the poor, as food represents a higher proportion of their expenditure (Gibbons, 1996: 380).

The problems which ESAP posed for farmers in Zimbabwe have been summed up by SAPRIN (1999: 5) as 'continued lack of access to land ... the availability and price of farm inputs, the loss of ... information previously provided by the marketing boards, high interest rates, and insufficient technical services'.

### *Second phase of the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme*

After the expiration of the Lancaster House agreement in 1990 the government amended its constitution to allow for compulsory acquisition of land with 'little compensation and limited rights of appeal to the courts' (Palmer & Birch, 1992: 25). There followed in 1991 a Land Acquisition Act to facilitate the purchase of farms. Mugabe said that perhaps 50% of remaining commercial farming areas would be purchased for resettlement (Potts & Mutambirwa, 1997: 552). But donor pressure ensured that the Lancaster House 'willing seller' condition persisted and, with escalating land prices, this meant that very little land redistribution actually occurred.

Finally in 1997 the government decided to act. It launched the second phase of

the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme (LRRP2), based on compulsory acquisition, but with compensation (Cliffe, 2000: 43; Mugabe, 1998a). It identified a number of farms for acquisition based on criteria spelt out in the 1990 Land Policy Statement. These were: where farmers own more than one farm; the farmer is absentee; the farm is derelict or under-utilised; or borders on a communal area.

On the question of compensation, at the 1997 Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, President Mugabe urged the UK to compensate white farmers for the land they were to lose (Potter *et al*, 1999: 274). In November 1997 the government published a notice of intention to compulsorily acquire 926 commercial farms. This notice was valid for 12 months (Van den Brink, 2000; Stoneman, 2000: 52). All but 85 were legally contested, on a variety of grounds. In September 1998 the government convened an International Donors Conference to mobilise support for the programme, and Mugabe again asked donors to compensate dispossessed white farmers (Mugabe, 1998b: 2).

In November 1998—12 months after the preliminary notice—the government issued acquisition orders for all 926 farms (Van den Brink, 2000). Although this did not lead to actual dispossession, donors were upset, as this was thought to conflict with the ‘spirit’ of the conference. Although the compulsory acquisition of land was not specifically proscribed by donors it had clearly been hoped that their promise of financial support would slow the process down.

### *The referendum and the war veterans*

The rate of land transfer under LRRP2 was painfully slow, and led to 15 major land invasions in 1997 and 1998 (Moyo *et al*, 2000). Occupations by war veterans began on a small scale in 1999, but lessened after government assurances that resettlement would be speeded up (Van den Brink, 2000). But in February 2000 a draft constitution, which included a clause to make compulsory acquisition easier, was rejected in a national referendum (Moyo *et al*, 2000).

The referendum defeat and the withdrawal of several contested farms from the legal process angered the war veterans still further. But the fact that between the Donors Conference in 1998 and March 2000 a mere 90 000 ha of land were resettled, a rate just 7% of the planned one million ha a year, was the real motivation behind the massive occupations from February 2000 (Van den Brink, 2000).

### *The Fast Track Land Resettlement Programme*

Donors had made their support for LRRP2 conditional on ‘continuous consultation, transparency and adherence to the law’ (Van den Brink, 2000). But on the crucial question of whether they would tolerate the compulsory acquisition of land their language was arcane and their position impenetrable. Throughout 1999 the government, constrained by IMF threats to withhold loans, vacillated and contradicted itself over this question. At the same time the process of judging the legality of land acquisitions was interminable, and ensured once again that very little was redistributed (Van den Brink, 2000).

However, despite the referendum defeat, the government still amended its

constitution on 6 April 2000, giving it the right to acquire commercial farms (Meldrum & MacAskill, 2000; La Guardia, 2000). A few weeks later the government sent three ministers to London, to request British funding. They were unsuccessful, and in May 2000 a change to the law was announced to allow the confiscation of land. This was the start of the government's 'Fast Track Land Resettlement (FTLR) Programme'.

The following month ZANU-PF narrowly won the parliamentary elections, with its support concentrated in the rural areas, where its land policy would be expected to have most appeal. The government decided it was time to act. 'Having realised that donors and some stakeholders such as the CFU were not genuinely interested in assisting government undertake a successful land reform and resettlement programme ... government is determined to go it alone using its own, limited resources to settle people' (Msika, 15 July 2000).

On 31 July 2000 they announced that 2237 farms would be added to the 804 originally planned, without compensation, to be distributed 'to the landless' (Reuters, 2000). According to Lupiya and Hakata (2001) 80 000 families were resettled on 2.5 million ha of compulsorily acquired land between June and December 2000. A further 2.5 million ha were planned to be resettled by the end of 2001. Mugabe's press secretary, George Charamba, argued that legal hurdles and the explosion in land prices ruled out any other approach to land reform.

An input loan scheme of US\$16 million was established for the farmers before the start of the rainy season in November 2000. After a number of European governments had suspended aid Mugabe allocated a further US\$21 million at the end of 2000 to finance resettlement (Lupiya & Hakata, 2001). According to Maisokwadzo (2001) a new list of 2030 farms was gazetted for acquisition without compensation on 29 June 2001.

Applications for resettlement in 2001 were so great that the authorities had to take over more white-owned farms and cut down on the size of the plots (Shoko, 2003). And according to the World Food Programme (WFP) the area planted to maize increased by 14% in 2001 'mainly due to expansion in the communal and resettled areas' (WFP, in Elich, 2002).

In January 2002, 4874 commercial farms, covering 9.23 million ha, were listed for acquisition (IRIN, 2003a). But from January through April there followed the worst drought for 20 years (Elich, 2002). In late January the first consignment of WFP food arrived (IRIN, 2003a). Nevertheless, despite suspicions that the programme was merely an electoral ploy, Mugabe immediately pledged the acceleration of land reform on his re-election as president in March 2002 (IRIN, 2003a).

In August Mugabe declared that 'the fast track resettlement programme is now over and the government is now concentrating on making the new farmers productive' (Astill & Palmer, 2002). White farmers would continue to own land but not large properties or multiple farms (Shaw, 2002). Resettled black commercial farmers were expected to take up land immediately, in time for the rains.

In his 2003 national budget statement in November 2002 Finance Minister Herbert Murerwa announced a series of tax incentives for lending to new farmers. The government also introduced soft financing schemes for inputs like seed and fertiliser (Shoko, 2003). But it was hampered by growing international

sanctions. Ankomah (2003a) cites government sources as saying that ‘all but one of the international credit lines of the country have been cut, resulting in severe difficulties in sourcing foreign exchange’.

According to Ankomah (2003a: 14) the resettlement scheme based on model A ‘is now virtually completed with a 100% uptake in all ten provinces’. Government figures show 210 520 families have been resettled on 3159 farms totalling 7.43 million ha. However, a parallel resettlement programme to stimulate competition within the commercial farming sector has ‘triggered the fiercest resistance from organised white landed interest’.

So, as of April 2003, the FTLR programme is clearly very advanced, although reliable and consistent data seem to be unavailable. Large-scale commercial farming has been disrupted, while small-scale farming is impeded by the relative absence of support, thanks to a combination of sanctions and a domestic economy in crisis. This critical situation is compounded by a long-lasting and terrible drought.

The above outline provides the necessary historical background to a discussion of the two major objections to land redistribution posed by its critics.

### *Efficient whites versus inefficient blacks*

In colonial times Africans were seen as unproductive and lacking in enterprise. Sadly such Rhodesian attitudes spilled over into post-Independence thinking. The designation of African lands as ‘communal’ and European lands as ‘commercial’ speaks volumes for such prejudices (Alexander, 1994: 331–332).

Even the government’s own Chavanduka Commission in 1982 put the blame for low productivity in the CAS on ‘traditional tenure, poor farming practices and labour migration’ (Alexander, 1994: 332), rather than on soil erosion induced by enforced concentration onto poor land. Again the Ministry of Lands, in its 1985 Communal Lands Development Plan, was preoccupied with the unproductive conservatism of ‘traditional’ culture, as embodied in the indigenous political leadership of chiefs, headmen and village heads (Alexander, 1994: 332–333).

Such views were echoed by the World Bank, the Whitsun Foundation and some notable academics (Weiner, 1988: 67). Peasant sloth is assumed in more recent times in the warnings against further land resettlement. The *Guardian* opines that the economy ‘is facing ruin if the government hands over most of the productive land to subsistence farmers’ (McGreal, 2000). Likewise the CFU’s deputy director, Jerry Grant, opposed the plan to seize additional farms, as it would ruin agriculture, the main source of Zimbabwe’s foreign earnings (McGreal & Wintour, 2000). Peter Hain, the British Minister for Africa, predicted certain disaster.

Assumptions about the low productivity of peasant farming are central to arguments against land redistribution. But how well founded are they? We have seen that after Independence government support was given to communal farmers for the first time. As a result the share of marketed grains and cotton in the CAS increased from less than 10% before Independence to about 50% in 1985/6 (Cliffe, 1988b: 5). By 1988–90 they produced half of the marketed maize, and most of the marketed cotton (Gibbons, 1996: 365). Detailed research reveals

that in the 1980s yields of maize per hectare were similar in CAS and LSCFS within the same NRS (Weiner, 1988: 68), despite inferior inputs in the former.

Evidence concerning the agricultural productivity of black farmers is also derived from the record of resettlement schemes. There was an evaluation of the LRRP in 1988, carried out with the assistance of the UK government and other donors, drawing heavily on an annual sample household survey (Cusworth, 2000: 25). This evaluation, using a standard economic cost–benefit analysis, established the economic worth of the programme beyond doubt. The report concluded that improvements were essentially the result of growing crops on previously idle or extensively farmed land (Cusworth, 2000: 27). World Bank reports in 1991 and 1993 were likewise positive, if with reservations (Cusworth, 2000: 29).

The conclusions are all the more encouraging when it is remembered that a disproportionately small amount of the land chosen for resettlement—around 10%—was in NRS I and II (Moyo, 1986: 185): resettlement ‘effectively closed off the highveld (NR II) to small-scale black farmers’ (Weiner, 1988: 80). Nonetheless the resettled farmers have still benefited. Kinsey (2000) used survey data to show that resettled households earn more than three times as much as the families in the CAS from which they originated (Kinsey, 1999: 194). And this is not entirely because of the superiority of land in resettled areas: according to Deininger *et al* (2000) the incomes of households in resettled areas in NR II is over five times as high as for those in communal areas in the same NR.

A paper co-authored by two World Bank staff concludes that land redistribution in Zimbabwe has been good for productivity (Deininger *et al*, 2000). But what of the consequences of resettlement for surplus production, and hence the economy? Resettlement greatly increased the marketing of agricultural products: by 1997 the value of crop and livestock sales of resettled households was seven and three times, respectively, as high as in the CAS from where they came (Kinsey, 1999: 186). Although only comprising 5% of the peasant farmer population the 70 000 resettled households now produce 15%–20% of the country’s marketed maize and cotton (Deininger *et al*, 2000: 2).

The prejudice, for prejudice it is, that black farmers are inefficient is all the more absurd when it is remembered that many ‘white’ farms are actually managed by blacks, for absentee white farmers. This is a potent argument against the view that dispossession of such farmers would have negative effects on productivity (Moyo, 2000: 79).

Many arguments against redistribution are also based on the presumed efficiency of the LSCF sector. Thus the *Observer* laments that ‘the highly productive large-scale farms that are the envy of Africa appear to be doomed’ (Meldrum, 2000). In earlier years the CFU, the World Bank and the Shell-financed Whitsun Foundation expressed comparable sentiments (Cliffe, 1988a: 315–316).

There is of course great diversity in the sizes of LSCFS. Sixty-six per cent of the LSCF area consists of just 222 farms of between 3000 and 350 000 ha (Moyo, 2000). The largest are bigger than the British county of Berkshire, and these latter farms are grossly under-utilised: their high productivity is ‘limited to small portions of their large estates’ (Weiner, 1988: 75). Moyo (2000) estimates that the LSCF system holds on to about six million hectares of idle land. In Mashonaland, which contains the fertile highveld and where rainfall is plentiful, the LSCFS

cropped only 11% of their four million hectares. Elsewhere it was barely 1% (Weiner, 1988). Further, LSCF farmers use much of their maize to feed cattle (Moyo, 2000: 75). Weiner (1988: 76) points out that each cow in Mashonaland 'is allocated 3 to 5 ha of land. This is double what the average peasant household has, without even considering quality differences'.

All evidence supports the simple but powerful conclusion that 'Zimbabwe's high-potential land is under-utilised, while much of the low-potential land is over-utilised' (Weiner, 1988: 84).

### *Corruption*

Critics of the FTLR programme, including donors, the foreign media, and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), contend that redistribution will only benefit ZANU-PF supporters, government officials and their friends. They claim that past resettlement has been corrupt, and call for transparency in future land allocation exercises. It is therefore important to be clear about who exactly have been the beneficiaries of previous land redistribution efforts in Zimbabwe.

The first such effort was undertaken by the colonial regime in the 1950s. In an attempt to tackle agrarian and social problems in the deteriorating native reserves the government created 'African Purchase Areas' in which successful ('master') farmers were granted portions of land of up to around 100 ha (Moyo, 1986: 169). These SSCFs came to occupy 4% of the land, as they still do today.

Then after Independence the early stages of the resettlement programme exclusively benefited the poor. By 1984, by which time most of the redistribution was completed 'slightly over 60% of those resettled were from communal lands, the rest being refugees, the landless and unemployed persons' (Moyo, 1986: 193). But from 1982 'successful farmers' were included in the LRRP in an attempt, as the government saw it, to raise productivity (Alexander, 1994: 333; Munslow, 1985: 47).

From the middle of the 1980s quite a large amount of LSCF land made available to the government was not taken up because of the stalling of the land resettlement programme. Instead over a million hectares of land were traded on the private market (Palmer, 1990: 170). In consequence 7% of LSCF farmers were black by 1986 (Alexander, 1994: 337).

Eight estates were, however, bought by the government and managed by the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA), which had since Independence run the State Farms established in the 1960s (Moyo, 1986). The estates were split into several farm units, advertised, and leased to relatively wealthy members of the new black elite (Van den Brink, 2000). Many of these farms were to be reallocated by the Commercial Farmer Support Scheme (CFSS) in 1998. Of these 149 farms the government stated that only two were to be allocated to ministers and seven to government officials.

It is presumably at the privatisation of LSCF land sales, and CSFF redistribution, that accusations of corruption are directed. While it is difficult to know the exact extent of this, it is pertinent that J Msika, the minister co-ordinating the land reform programme, explained to donors in August 1999 that the government did not intend to exclude the rich, nor even government officials from the application

process, as the objective of the commercial scheme was to address racial imbalance among the rich (Van den Brink, 2000)! But why, we may ask, has the government come to value such a goal, when at Independence radical land redistribution was seen as the basis for social justice after the liberation struggle?

We have seen that both the British government and the World Bank produced complimentary evaluations of the LRRP (Cusworth, 2000). But its success has been ideologically subverted by foreign donors, the Zimbabwean civil service, the CFU and the SSCFS into failure, and this vast lobby has persuaded the government of the need to make master farmers and agricultural graduates the beneficiaries of the new resettlement programme, rather than the poor and dispossessed (Cliffe, 2000: 41). Despite positive evaluations neither the government nor the UK's Overseas Development Agency (ODA) tried to re-energise the programme through the use of the reports' findings (Cusworth, 2000: 29). Because of this shift in emphasis the 1200 black commercial farmers, like their white equivalents, own more land than they can fully utilise. It has resulted in the serious indebtedness of 80% of their number (Cliffe, 2000: 42).

This lesson has not been learned, and the MDC, despite its radical origins, stated in its 2000 election manifesto that the beneficiaries of land resettlement in commercial areas will be 'master farmers, proven farmers, agricultural graduates, and those with proven capabilities in small scale commercial farming areas'. The only mention of the poor is in the context of resettlement within the CAS (MDC website).

Finally, there have been accusations of corruption made against the current FTLR programme. In response to such criticisms the government commissioned an audit in 2002. The UK-based newsletter *Africa Confidential* has obtained a copy of the interim report and alleges that there was 'evidence of corrupt allocations and the use of violence by senior politicians and military officers to evict small landless farmers' (IRIN, 2003b).

Sam Moyo, director of the Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies, who helped draft the government's original framework for land reform, says that the scale of such corruption has to be seen in the context of the small number of people named in the audit, and that such problems have been openly discussed in government (IRIN, 2003b). Critics, he argues, have seized on such cases of 'opportunism' to dismiss land reform and ignore its undoubted benefits. The greater problem is that the programme cannot realise its full potential under the current economic squeeze, which limits the government's provision of key agricultural inputs.

So the position of the UK government in all this is paradoxical, to say the least. Their own evaluation of LRRP demonstrated that radical land redistribution can be effective. In their negotiations as donors they stress the need for the poor to be the beneficiaries. Yet they give their diplomatic backing to the opposition MDC, whose declared policy on land in its election manifesto in 2000, of fundamental importance to the future of Zimbabwe, puts faith in a technical elite, and sidelines the poor.

### **Preconditions for reform**

Most critics of the economic case for 'land reform' point to the greater efficiency of mostly white commercial farmers, and to the corruption inherent in land redistribution. These two arguments were addressed in the previous section and, on balance, rejected.

But these are not the only objections frequently levelled against land redistribution. The feasibility of such a programme is frequently challenged in terms of the preconditions for the expropriation of the land. The central issues raised by critics are whether the government has the right to acquire land through compulsion, and to what degree expropriated farmers should be compensated. Further objections to redistribution raise legal questions relating to land acquisition and reallocation. These two concerns—compulsion/compensation and the legal system—are considered next.

#### *Compensation*

The feasibility of successful land redistribution is complicated by radically conflicting interests over the issues of compulsion and compensation between what are now fashionably called the various 'stakeholders'. It is primarily for this reason that 10 years after the expiration of the Lancaster House agreement virtually no further land had changed hands. Table 1 is a reiteration of the main events since independence which have a bearing on this issue.

Several important points emerge from this outline of post-independence land redistribution, and related legislation. First, land has not been forthcoming on a voluntary basis, and there is no guarantee that it ever would be, even if full compensation were offered.

Second, the government was unable to pay compensation for loss of land at the market price even in the mid-1980s when the economy was healthy. In 2003 a government crippled with debt could not even contemplate such a policy. Not only are such payments prohibitive, but their opportunity cost would be the loss of funds for infrastructure and inputs to ensure the programme's effective implementation.

Third, donor support for compensation has not been in the form of unconditional grants. This was so even in the 1980s, and from the potentially largest donor, the UK government. It is likely that most future funding would be a mixture of matched funding and loans. Thus the UK government at a Commonwealth meeting in Nigeria in September 2001 offered support on the basis of part-funding (Meldrum, 2001a). The implications are clear. Huge compensatory sums to commercial farmers are demanded by donors, and these must be re-paid by Zimbabwe with interest. The Third World debt crisis was born of similar reasoning. It is simply impossible for a debtor with the desperate economic problems of Zimbabwe to service such a huge package of loans.

Finally, a decision to acquire commercial farms through compulsion and without compensation could expose Zimbabwe to a variety of external threats. Some of these may derive directly from agencies which consider themselves 'stakeholders' in Zimbabwe's future. Thus the IMF suspended a stand-by loan in

TABLE I  
**Land redistribution events since Zimbabwe's independence**

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1979/80	Lancaster House Agreement. Matched funding for voluntary sales only. Compensation: full market price, convertible to foreign currency
1983	Stalling of the land reform programme (LRRP)
1991	Amended constitution, allowing compulsory acquisition of land with little compensation, or right to appeal
1992	Land Acquisition Act. The right of the government to acquire land by compulsion
1997	Decision to implement the 1992 Act and undertake compulsory purchase of land
1998 (Sept)	International Conference. Donor support for voluntary sales only. Various terms of support: loans, grant, etc
1998 (Nov)	Compulsory acquisition orders issued. Dispossessed farmers to be compensated ('fair market-value'). Donor condemnation. IMF responds by delaying loan
2000 (May)	Amendment to the constitution and the 1992 Act, permitting compulsory acquisition of land without compensation
2000 (July)	FTLR programme started: land expropriated without compensation

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November 1998 because of the fiscal crisis caused by Zimbabwe's involvement in the Congo, and 'by its renegeing on guarantees about its land reform policies' (Brown, 1999: 78). Despite the withdrawal of its support it continued to pressurise for 'appropriate economic policies' even in 2002 (IMF, 2002: 4). The so-called 'international community'—the EU, the USA, the Commonwealth—have imposed economic sanctions. Even food aid has become conditional on the extension of neoliberal policies and the abandonment of land reform (Elich, 2002). Other threats are more incidental, but no less serious, including the withholding of credit and investment.

This all leaves the government in a 'multiple bind'. If it allows land to remain in the hands of inefficient white farmers the economy has little prospect of recovery. If instead it accedes to pressure and compensates expropriated farmers, the balance of payments will further deteriorate. And if it refuses to reverse its comprehensive land reform without compensation, its fragile economy will continue to be subjected to external attack.

In addition to the government's inability to ensure full compensation for dispossessed farmers on the basis of donor funding, there are ethical questions to be asked about the right of LSCF farmers to compensation, and about who bears the responsibility for such payments.

Government agreement to pay compensation for land would be seen as an admission of the legitimacy of the expropriation of African land over the century leading up to independence. It would contradict Mugabe's consistent claim that the land was 'stolen'. For this reason the government had, until the launch of the FTLR programme, agreed in principle to compensate for land improvements, but

not for the land itself. Thus in April 2000 the government amended their provisions for land acquisition so that they only paid for improvements to the land (Ankomah, 2003b). While this made little financial difference it was an important point of principle.

There is of course fundamental disagreement over the question of who is responsible for any compensation payments. In an historic letter to Kumbirai Kangai, Minister of Agriculture and Land in 1997, the British Minister for International Development, Clare Short, denied British responsibility: 'we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe. We are a new Government ... without links to former colonial interests' (quoted in Ankomah, 2003b).

Zimbabwe's contrary opinion is expressed, somewhat surprisingly, by David Hasluck, Director of the CFU from 1984 to 2002: 'Because we believe that this land was taken from our forefathers without compensation and it was often violently [sic], and there has been no recognition of this by the colonial power, the British must live with this responsibility' (Ankomah, 2003b).

Hasluck believes further that Short's letter reneges on the historic assurances given at Lancaster House: 'Clare Short knows damn well that there was a land issue at Lancaster House'. 'It was', he says, 'not a sensitive, diplomatic way'. Hasluck 'sincerely believes' that the majority of CFU members share this view.

A reasonable conclusion would be that Zimbabwe's government is neither able to compensate LSCF farmers dispossessed under the FTLR programme, nor does it bear the moral responsibility to do so.

### *Legal constraints on land redistribution*

The ongoing fast-track land reform programme is often condemned on the grounds that it contravenes the rule of law. But the significance of the 'rule of law' in Zimbabwe is rarely examined, and it is often evoked as an alternative to the exercise of reason. As practised in Zimbabwe, the rule of law regarding land reform fails to serve the best interests of its people, and hangs like a death sentence over the future of the country.

In 1997 the government used the 1992 Land Acquisition Act to address the inequities of land distribution (Stoneman, 2000: 52). This was within the 'rule of law'. But acquisition itself was endlessly delayed as each order was scrutinised in turn by the Administrative Court (Van den Brink, 2000). The judgements were made, not on the criteria for listing set by the government, but rather on the written objections of dispossessed farmers, and on whether the land was 'reasonably necessary' for settlement (Van den Brink, 2000). Even when acquisitions were confirmed, if the farmer was not satisfied with the level of compensation, appeal could be made to the Supreme Court, which is the final court of appeal (Van den Brink, 2000). Two serious issues therefore arise: the speed of the legal process, and the legitimacy of the Supreme Court.

It has been alleged that anti-government bias, leading to foot-dragging, has dogged the process of land reform. The vetting process of the Administrative Court, as well as the appellate procedure, ensured that, given the scale of the exercise, nothing much happened (Van den Brink, 2000). If each assessment, and

each appeal, took one day, the redistribution of 4000 farms would have taken a minimum of 30 years!

Again, the Supreme Court is the ultimate arbiter in these matters, and the fairness of its judgements was critical to the success of the land reform programme. Consequently the constitution of that court and its impartiality were of paramount importance.

Several of the white judges were appointed under the Rhodesian regime—the Chief Justice, Anthony Gubbay, who was replaced in March 2001, had been appointed to the bench in 1977—and on many occasions the government has openly questioned High Court judgements relating to land redistribution and accused some judges of being ‘ill qualified to pass judgements on politically sensitive issues’ (Madinah, 2001: 9).

Of the five Supreme Court judges only two are black, while the judiciary comprises 23 judges, 12 of whom are black (Madinah, 2001: 9). The exercise of the ‘rule of law’ could have come down to no more than the bias of just five people. This should make any defender of democracy uneasy.

Mugabe’s appointment of a new chief justice and three judges to the Supreme Court in August 2001 had a rapid effect on the speed of land reform. In October the Court issued an interim ruling, upholding the government’s appeal against its judgement of December 2000 which had ruled that it should halt farm ‘invasions’ (Meldrum, 2001b). In effect the seizures of LSCFs were now legal.

### **Could land reform be reversed?**

As we have seen, the government has declared that the FTLR programme is now complete. The question arises of what would happen if the opposition were to replace the current government, or come to some accommodation with it. Could the expropriation of commercial farmers be reversed?

Of course we can only speculate. To some extent it would depend on what the FTLR programme had accomplished by then. Would it be possible to clear farms of tens of thousands of black farmers, who may be well established? And if this necessitated the use of force, how motivated would the police and army be to undertake such a task against their own countrymen?

Ordinary soldiers may be reluctant to remove people from the land they had awaited for over 20 years. But at the highest level too there may be serious resistance. According to Meldrum (2002) in January 2002 ‘the army high command said it would not recognise any government that did not adhere to the aims of the “revolution”’.

Further, settled farmers’ resistance to any attempts to remove them would probably be joined by the war veterans. An indication of the strength of the latter may be gleaned from a report by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (27 September 2001), which referred to the view of the *Zimbabwe Independent* that foreign funds would only come to Zimbabwe for land reform by, among other things, ‘ending all farm invasions, dismantling all “war veteran bases” set up strategically all over the country’.

Whatever the feasibility of reversing land redistribution in the face of such opposition, it is clear that the international media, as well as the UK government,

have been negligent in their indifference to the forces arraigned against any attempts to put the genie back in the bottle of land reform. Likewise the MDC would be wise to clarify their own position on this, and whether they can afford to ignore the land issue as they have up to now.

### Conclusion

It is difficult to see how the neoliberal 'reforms' urged on the government by the 'international community' and by the opposition MDC could possibly alleviate Zimbabwe's economic crisis. It should be remembered that the roots of this crisis can be traced back to the introduction of neoliberal policies under ESAP in 1991. Instead, whether by accident or design, the government is pursuing the only available route to recovery, the realisation of its enormous agricultural potential through land redistribution. But, as we have seen, this approach has exposed the country to international threats and sanctions.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, in order to achieve land redistribution without external retribution; and to compensate LSCF farmers without crippling the economy, outside action is essential. Quite simply the UK government must provide the necessary compensation by means of grant aid, without preconditions, rather than the paltry and heavily circumscribed funds offered up to now.

Such a course of action would also be morally correct. It may begin to atone for the brutality of the colonial land grab and the subsequent humiliation and impoverishment of black Zimbabweans at the hands of the British colonists. Also, more indirectly, it would compensate for the continuing British exploitation of Zimbabwe through direct rule, and later through neocolonial and highly exploitative policies of trade and investment. It is time that the assistance Zimbabwe has given to the economic development of the UK was acknowledged and repaid.

Of course it is unfashionable to think like this any more, especially in New Labour circles, and such an outcome is hard to imagine. But the British government should ponder the alternative. The more likely future is that Zimbabwe's economy will continue to deteriorate, generating further social unrest and political repression, whoever is in power. The current flow of refugees will become a torrent, and Zimbabwe's 'social capital' will bleed away.

The lessons of Zimbabwe's experience are also vital to neighbouring South Africa, Namibia and elsewhere. The progress of the FTLR programme has been followed with interest and concern in South Africa. Zimbabwe's programme 'has put land reform at centre stage for Southern Africa'. Local organisations there have made it 'the centrepiece of their strategies in 2003' (Roman, 2003: 37–38). In South Africa itself no one believes the existing willing seller approach is adequate. Roman's report urges a properly funded rural transformation, without which time is running out 'to prevent full-blown confrontation and violence in rural South Africa' (Roman, 2003: 37). Surely the correct lessons now need to be learned quickly from the chaos in Zimbabwe resulting from 20 years of failure to realise the true meaning of 'independence'.

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