

July 14, 2019

ZAMBIA RESEARCH NOTE

The Patriotic Front devours its own

Although tomorrow's headlines are likely to be dominated by the finance minister's summary dismissal over the week-end, this development is no more than a sideshow to the real story – the increasing alienation of the Patriotic Front leadership from the party's rank and file.

1) Given the central bank's repeated efforts to encourage fiscal restraint, replacing the long-discredited Mrs. Mwanakatwe with Dr. Bwalya Ng'andu, a deputy governor at the Bank of Zambia, is in principle, a positive development. In practice, however, **we are unlikely to see any meaningful change in the administration's propensity to spend**¹ – as can be inferred from the drama that unfolded at Kabwata market at the end of last week.

2) On Thursday, while touring the suburban Lusaka constituency that he has represented since 2001, **justice minister Given Lubinda was physically assaulted by a mob of PF "youths"**. In view of the ruling party's routine deployment of vigilante mobs against its political opponents, the shocking episode was not devoid of irony².

As remarkable as the attack itself was the communiqué which the minister's assailants proceeded to issue. Identifying themselves as the **'VIP Special Slap Squad (VISSS)'**, they proudly claim responsibility for the attack, **accusing their elected representative of not sharing the spoils of office**³.

3) The statement goes on to announce *"a new operation to sort out arrogant Ministers and other PF officials."*⁴ In other words, the **PF rank and file are insisting on a more generous cut of the ill-gotten gains being enjoyed by the party's leaders.**

The demarche is backed up by an explicit threat: **"Remember you hired us to beat up people. We haven't forgotten our skills. You are next. You will taste your own bitter pill. [...] This time we mean serious business, we will not spare you."**⁵

4) To placate its resentful foot-soldiers - so as to keep them onside in preparation for the 2021 race - **ruling party officials are now likely to attack the public purse with even greater rapaciousness than hitherto.** So much for the prospects of any fiscal consolidation.

But this should not overshadow the gravity of **the accelerating break-down in the rule of law in Zambia**⁶. Indeed, the Kabwata police officers who took a statement from the battered justice minister have since been quoted to the effect that he deserved the beating, having failed to 'donate' to the local station⁷.

All in all, **a most unedifying investment proposition.**

¹ However, Dr. Ng'andu's appointment looks more like a tactical move than a statement of new-found conviction on Mr. Lungu's part. Significantly, it followed social media calls for a cabinet reshuffle.

² Nor indeed was President Lungu's pious declaration that, **"We took over government without using violence. We are a peaceful party. No one...none of our youths must be allowed to commit violence."** Remarks quoted in statement by PF Secretary-General Davis Mwila on Jul. 13, 2019.

³ **"You are eating alone with your children and concubines. Your posh homes are littered with brand new four by four vehicles and your kids go to most expensive schools."** See statement by Commander VISS **"We will clobber you too, Davis Mwila warned"**, Facebook post by **Zambia Watchdog**, Jul. 13, 2019.

⁴ The PF officials targeted include: Davis Mwila (Secretary-General); Dora Siliya (Information minister), Nkandu Luo (Minister for Higher Education), Paul Moonga (interim chairman for Lusaka province); and Kennedy Kamba (former chairman for Lusaka province).⁵ Statement by Commander VISS, *Ibid*.

⁶ The phenomenon has been on full display in the government's *de facto* nationalization of Vedanta's 79.1% stake in Konkola Copper Mines and its determination to sell the stake to fresh investors.

⁷ See **"Beating of minister Lubinda received well"**, by **Zambia Watchdog**, Jul. 13, 2019.