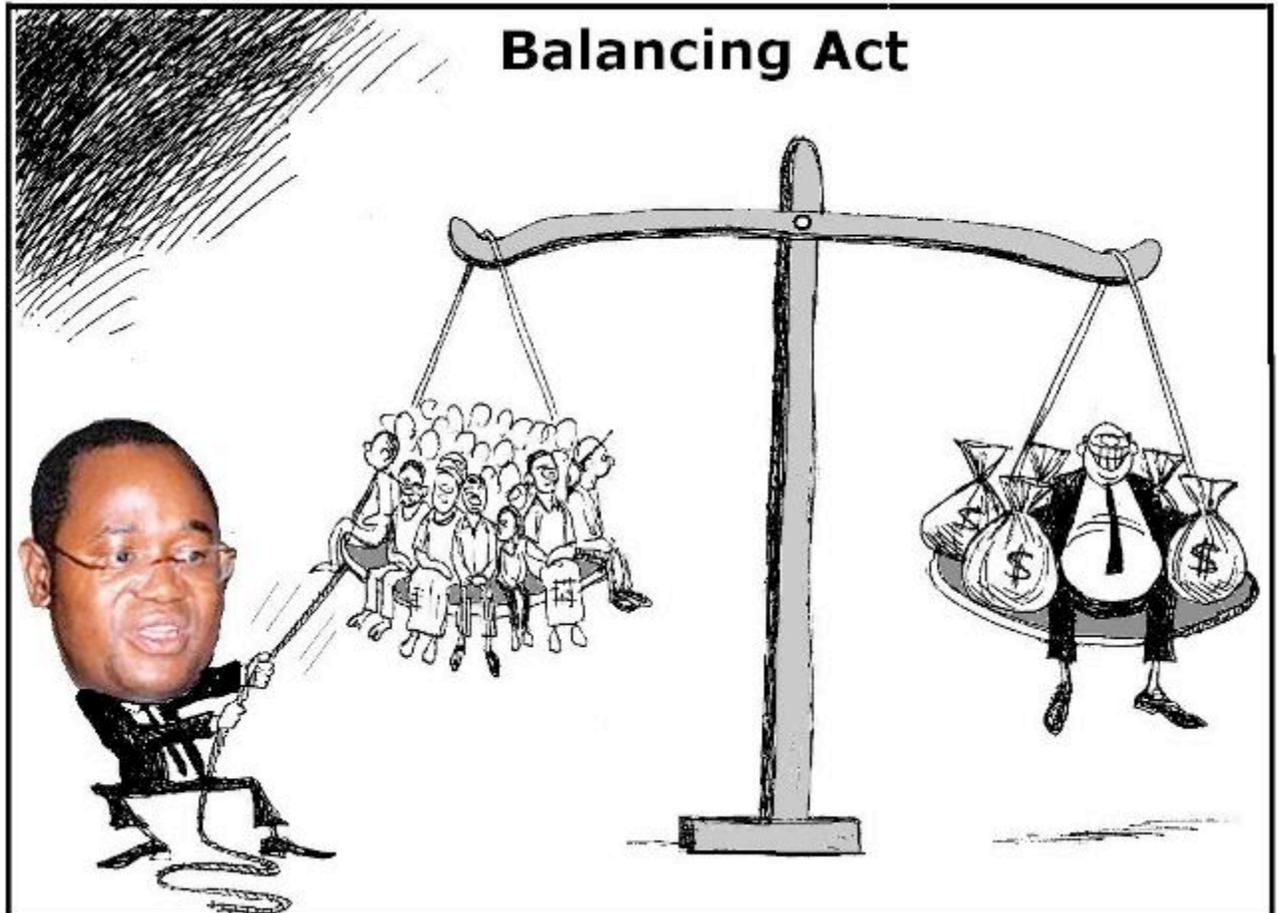


Zanu steals from the poor says Tsvangirai. The Zimbabwean 13 August 2006

BY GIFT PHIRI

HARARE - President Robert Mugabe has unilaterally invoked his presidential powers and signed into law a statutory instrument whose provisions give immunity to green bombers, police officers, Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe and immigration officials, tasked to confiscate money from ordinary people as part of a new black market blitz.



Zimbabwean security forces this week stepped up their crackdown on ordinary people and innocent cross border traders, triggering fierce clashes with passengers who flatly refused to be searched at Roadport, where buses from the region arrive and depart. Heavily armed police were later deployed at the terminus, clobbering defiant passengers and seizing currency and merchandise.

Gun-toting police officers mounted roadblocks to search long-distance buses and vehicles. The raid has so far netted more than 2 500 impoverished city residents who have had billions of dollars taken by the State agents.

MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai told a rally attended by more than 8 000 people at Rimuka Stadium in Kadoma on Saturday that "the Zanu (PF) regime is now stealing money from the poor under the guise of new monetary policy measures."

"The MDC condemns the Zanu (PF) regime's decision to employ its merchants of violence to implement poor policy measures that will not address the fundamental challenges of this economy," Tsvangirai said. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights executive director Arnold Tsunga said the statutory instrument was "a document of impunity." He said the new law meant there was no legal recourse for anyone who loses money in foreign and local currency to the green bombers, police or RBZ and immigration officials enforcing the monetary policy.

"It's unlawful, it's very ugly, irresponsible and criminal," Tsunga said. "What Mugabe has essentially done is to institutionalise criminality."

Tsvangirai said the new measures were meant to divert public attention away from the government's failures

and deter looming protests as economic catastrophe sets in.

"This is also going to affect millions of Zimbabweans in the diaspora who are sending money to their suffering parents and relatives back home."

He said the major culprits in currency hoarding were senior Zanu (PF) officials but none of them have had money confiscated from them

"Instead the regime is targeting ordinary people who continue to have their hard-earned money confiscated at roadblocks and at the country's border posts," he said.

"The only solution is for baba Chatunga to go and enable sweeping political reforms that would usher in a new era of prosperity and freedom," Tsvangirai told the cheering throng.