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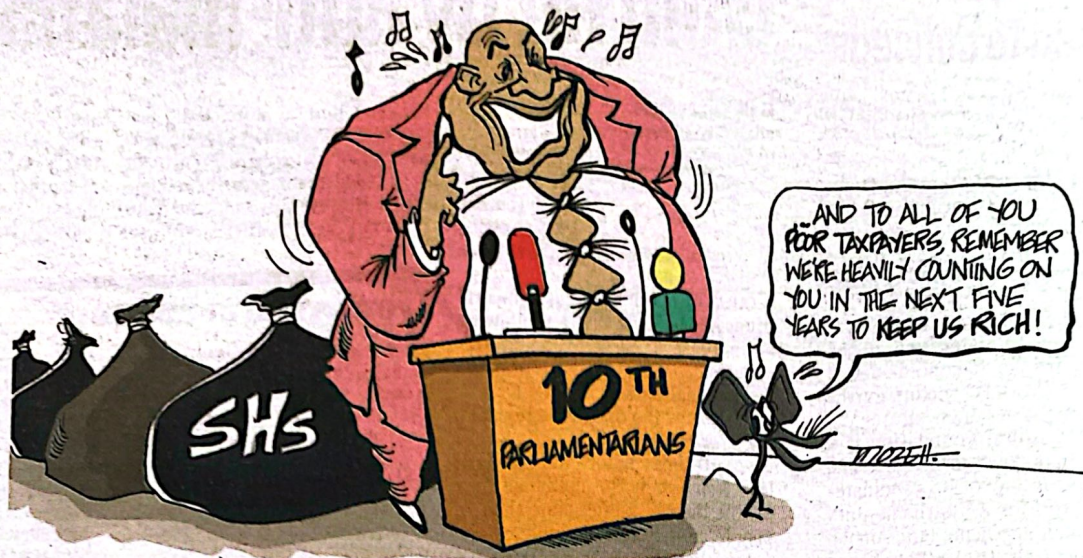
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Why can't the EC organise free and fair elections?

William G. Naggaga Elections

After the 1980 election, which most people believe was won by Dr Paul Kawanga Ssemwogerere of the Democratic Party (DP) but was awarded to Milton Obote of Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC), Yoweri Museveni of Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) went to the bush, citing a rigged election.

Since assuming power in 1986, President Museveni has won five elections (1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016). In the last four, he has battled with his former doctor and Bush War comrade Dr Kizza Besigye. All of the four encounters have had hallmarks of controversy and allegations of massive rigging. In 2001 and 2006, the Supreme Court threw the book at the NRM and Electoral Commission for irregularities, rigging, incompetence, disenfranchising voters, etc.

In both cases, the Supreme Court came short of annulling the results because the rigging did not substantially change the outcome of the polls. Only the Lord knows how substantial the rigging must be to change the outcome! Putting the onus on the complainant to prove substantiality borders on absurdity.

A few weeks to the 2016 elections, celebrated columnist Charles Onyango-Obbo wrote two articles which caught my eye. In one he compared Besigye to the biblical Moses whom God directed to lead his people from bondage in Egypt to the promised land of Israel but he

himself never reached the promised land. In his second article he wrote that out of the four elections held from 1996 to 2011, Museveni probably won only one. Obbo didn't say which but my guess could be 1996 since the others have been contested. Gen David Sejusa openly said that Besigye won the 2006 elections but was cheated of victory.

The present EC under Badru Kiggundu has presided over the last four elections, including the 'mother of disasters', the 2016 election! Kiggundu's 14 years at the helm of the EC have not been stellar. Unfortunately, his last election was the epitome of incompetence and lack of statesmanship. When he said in an interview on NTV that if he had his way, he would not have registered Besigye as a presidential candidate, all right thinking people must have been shocked beyond belief that the EC chairman can make such a statement about a presidential candidate. Kiggundu may have been angered by Besigye's "defiance campaign" but his understanding of defiance and non-compliance was flawed. As has been pointed out by others, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parker, Martin Luther King, all ran campaigns of defiance by refusing to comply with unjust laws and discriminatory practices.

My experience on election day left me in no doubt that the EC was inept. I arrived at my polling station in Bwotansimbi, Buloba, 12 miles on Kampala

It is inconceivable that Kampala and Wakiso, the nearest places to the offices of the Electoral Commission, voted last or did not vote at all. Both are the most populated districts in the country and normally vote for the Opposition.

Mutyana Road, at 9am and found a long line of people who had patiently waited since 6.30am to vote but no materials had arrived. I returned two hours later to find basins and chairs had been delivered but no ballot papers and biometric machines. These came at 1.30pm but the technician to operate the biometric machine was missing and voting could not start. Until he surfaced at 2.30pm!

Other areas suffered worse than us and many people in Wakiso and Kampala were completely disenfranchised. This was undoubtedly the worst election in the history of Uganda and one where the Opposition stood the best chance to unseat the incumbent. It is inconceivable that Kampala and Wakiso, the nearest places to the offices of the Electoral Commission, voted last or did not vote at all. Both are the most populated districts in the country and normally vote for the Opposition.

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