

# The Political Economy of Transition in Zimbabwe

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*Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition 1980-86 edited by  
Ibbo Mandaza (Dakar: Codesria) 1986*

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This volume contains thirteen essays on five topics. The topics are: Politics; the economy; the agrarian question; the labour movement and social development. The book is therefore quite wide in scope and reasonably comprehensive in the treatment of each topic. For good measure the book also carries a lengthy bibliography which should be helpful in following up specific points. It is also well designed, carefully produced and easy to read.

The authors of the book are mainly academicians doing research and teaching in their areas but they also include people in government service. In spite of the fact that the authors mostly come from diverse disciplines in the social sciences, their essays are unified by a commonly shared conceptual framework. They are therefore cohesive and mutually supportive. This does not mean however, that the authors are collectively wedded to a particular doctrine; much less is there total consensus on what they discuss.

The effort that went into bringing these essays together is commendable. Compiled under the sponsorship of CODESRIA, the essays attempt to fulfil one of the organization's principal objectives which is tersely stated in the Acting Executive Secretary's foreword: "If Africa (is) to develop, it (is) incumbent upon African scholars that a large part of our understanding of our societies should be generated from within Africa". This injunction need not be overemphasized. The essays seek to depart from the received and largely hackneyed wisdom handed down either by sympathetic but idealistic Africanists or by the doctrinaire neo-Marxists. While the former have tended to confuse advocacy with analysis and thus ended up with disillusionment, the latter have suffered from a proclivity to mis-apply Marx to historically different situations.

The Neo-Marxists have been pre-occupied with a static application of the Marxist system *a la Das Kapital* at the expense of the more creative use of the Marxist method of analysis i.e. historical materialism. In this sense these essays are more true to Marxism (the method) than either of the two other variants.

Isbo Mandaza, the Editor of the volume, opens the discussion with an introduction and the first essay on politics. In the introduction he makes two main points which form the organising core of the book. One point is that the liberation (nationalist) struggle thrust Zimbabwe into a transition but the content and direction of this transition is left largely undefined. Mandaza calls this phase simply 'the post-white settler colonial phase'. He stresses the point that the national liberation phase of the struggle in Zimbabwe did not embody the idea of a socialist revolution. National independence and particularly the overthrow of white settler colonialism was the consuming objective. Consequently, he argues, that Marxism neither informed the leadership nor was it the mobilizing ideology. Thus he criticises those scholars who have evaluated post liberation Zimbabwe from the standpoint of a socialist revolution. He chastises this group for holding mistaken views on the simultaneous process of national independence and a socialist revolution. In brief therefore the first six years of Zimbabwe's independence have been characterised by the consolidation of that independence. During this period however, the state has vacillated between preserving and protecting imperialist and settler colonial interests and serving the demands of the masses. It is this contradiction which explains the lack of progress in transforming society. This is what has created the illusion of stability and prosperity. Mandaza's conclusions are cautious and rather equivocal. He notes that:

Unless there is spillover from the South African conflagration, it is likely that political developments in Zimbabwe will gradually move away from the black-white dichotomy, towards an overall class confrontation between the haves and have nots.

The critical contradiction in the emerging revolutionary process is "between the imperatives of imperialist hegemony and the popular demands of the masses . . ." In this confrontation Mandaza foresees an alliance between the whites and "their black counterparts, the African petty bourgeoisie" on the one hand. On the other he avers that:

"... the progressive section of the African petty bourgeoisie may (sic) one day, realise the futility of trying to balance between such an antagonistic contradiction; and that impelled by the march of the class struggle, and growing consciousness of the working people, it may find itself again at the head of a struggle that will be both anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist".

In this conclusion Mandaza invokes Cabral's notion of the progressive petty bourgeoisie being able to commit class suicide and being reborn as revolutionaries.

The other essays are too many to review individually. We shall only review a few — and very briefly. Sithole's essay on the general elections held bet-

ween 1979 and 1985 adopts a rather narrow structural-functionalist approach which is heavily descriptive. Because of the lack of analysis of the underlying political factors influencing the elections, Sithole emerges with a rather moralistic prescription for Zimbabwe:

"Unless we, as a people, can learn to respect our constitution and the legal rules of seeking and losing power, independence will not have been well worth fighting for and the thirty thousand will have died in vain!" (P. 95)

Chimombe's interesting essay discusses Zimbabwe's ambivalence and probably naivety towards foreign capital. She contends that this has led to a failure to clearly define the position and role of foreign capital in serving Zimbabwe's planned goals. For this reason Zimbabwe has been unable to offer convincing guarantees to attract foreign capital while she has expected foreign capital to support the overall socialist programme!

Although Kadhani's essay is largely a neo-classical sectoral description of Zimbabwe's economy since 1980, it raises some pertinent and critical questions which have to be addressed not only by Zimbabwe but all peripheral economies all of which engage in different degrees of planning. He asks, for example,

"... to what extent is it meaningful to plan an economy over which ownership and control of the productive assets reside in private hands and foreign private hands in large measure at that" (P. 102)

That is a crucial question that has to be posed and answered in more than general terms by all countries which seek, to establish a national economy. So far, few African countries have raised that question let alone answered it satisfactorily.

Ndlela's essay on industry and Moyo's on agriculture are complementary. Ndlela argues that the success of a national industry is contingent on the class forces and social interests behind industry. Moyo, addressing the agrarian question is more forthright when he says;

"... the agrarian structure has altered slightly, but the process of uneven agrarian capitalist development which began eighty years ago, has tended to be reinforced in the last six years".

In both essays the critical question being raised is that the structure of production is a reflection of the class interests controlling the means of production. It is these interests which determine what to produce, for whom and how, both in industry and agriculture.

The dominant interests have remained local private capital and finance capital. It is in this light that Mumbengegwi comes to the conclusion that agricultural policy is characterised by more continuity than change owing to the persistence of the inherited structure of production. Shopo's contribution on the political economy of hunger is empirically illuminating as well as being theoretically interesting. The gist of his argument is that there are in-built depressors of the value of labour power across all sectors of the Zimbabwe economy. These depressors revolve around inadequate and deficient nutrition. Creatively employing the labour theory of value, Shopo concludes that:

"... the political economy of hunger has not been primarily the existence of low wages, high malnutrition rates, etc, which have been the manifestations of a deeper rooted problem — the institutional and structural depression of labour value" (P. 239)

Two essays are addressed to the labour movement. Sachikonye's contribution is a survey of the development of industrial relations in Zimbabwe. He comes to the conclusion that because of the absence of progressive class alliances at the time of independence, state intervention to create centralised trade unions has "... tended to be *not* the transition to *nor* the construction of socialism but the consolidation of capitalism ..."

Two papers on social development are complementary. The papers on education and health both grapple with the question of transforming inherited service structures to make them more responsive to mass needs. Zvobgo on education cautions against too rapid provision of free education particularly if the expansion is financed by aid. Agere finds that the health delivery system has been hampered by the capitalist notion which looks at medicine as a commodity. He argues that private practice must not be subsidized in order to release the delivery of medical services for rural areas. The final paper on social development treats the questions of women. The author, Kazembe, taking a legalistic approach finds that faster progress needs to be made in reforming the law and in particular unifying the law for purposes of equality.

Taking these essays together one comes to the conclusion that all the authors agree that there has been more continuity than change. As would be expected in a collection of this kind, some authors feel that faster progress is not only necessary but possible. Others are more sceptical. No further change is possible outside a revolutionary political context. These questions cannot, of course, be fully answered in the abstract. Much will depend on the class alliances that will emerge to guide the next i.e. the socialist, phase of the struggle in Zimbabwe. Between Fanon's alliance of the peasantry and

the lumpen proletariat against the bourgeoisie and a corrupt proletariat and Cabral's possibility of an alliance between the proletariat and the progressive petty bourgeoisie lie a range of possibilities. With a relatively well developed and organised (though de-mobilized) working class in Zimbabwe it would seem that Cabral's ideas have the greatest potential.

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