

Zimbabwe: A Revolution that Lost its Way?, Andre Astrow, Zed Press, London, 1983 (no price stated).

Zimbabwe: Politics, Economics and Society, Colin Stoneman and Lionel Cliffe, Pinter, London, 1989 (no price stated).

Along with Mandaza's *The Political Economy of Transition*, these two volumes represent the most serious attempts to analyse Zimbabwe's version of socialism. Writing nearly a decade ago, Astrow was probably the first author to predict that newly independent Zimbabwe would never become anything approaching a socialist state. For Astrow this was a foregone conclusion, a "predictable result of the nationalist leadership's class interests and the nationalist movement's entire strategy" (p2).

A Marxist of the orthodox Trotskyist variety, Astrow repeatedly stresses that the working class was never really a significant component of the struggle to liberate Zimbabwe. Without working class involvement, Astrow argues, any transition to socialism after 1980 was impossible. This situation Astrow blames on two factors. First, he targets the trade unions. Before 1980 he contends that the role of trade union leaders was "policing the African working class" (p25) rather than mobilising the workers for action. The author documents how the pre-independence federations such as the Southern Rhodesia Trade Union Congress actively tried to keep unions out of nationalist politics and steer them in a capitalist direction.

Aside from the historic weakness of the workers' movement in Zimbabwe, Astrow also criticises what he calls the "Political Programme of the Petit Bourgeoisie" (p135). The writer argues that the leadership of both ZANU and ZAPU, despite rhetorical remarks to the contrary, never were genuinely socialist. The goals of the liberation movements, in Astrow's view, was "to democratise the existing political structure, in order to eliminate racial discrimination" (p136). However, due to the intransigence of the settler regime, a moderate political leadership was forced to take up arms and make radical promises to the masses in order to enlist their support.

Astrow demonstrates this dynamic between the leadership and the masses by concretely examining ZANU and ZAPU's positions on the land question. While the military wings of both groups mobilised peasants with promises of land, according to Astrow at no point did either movement promise unequivocally that they would expropriate a large proportion of settler farms. While ZANU often suggested that all land would be nationalised, Mugabe's quote of 1978 puts these suggestions in context (p139):

"You cannot start off by nationalising everything. You have to take into account the realities of the situation".

Reading Astrow's work nearly ten years after it was written is an interesting exercise. The hindsight of ten years of independence can surely verify some of his points, many of which seemed outlandish in the early 1980's. Yet for all Astrow's documentation of what he calls the "petit bourgeois interests" of the liberation movements, his analysis is too facile and formulaistic. One reason for this is that the book was based on a PhD thesis Astrow wrote without ever visiting Zimbabwe. While he displays a comprehensive knowledge of historical and political documents available to overseas researchers, his work lacks the critical insights that can only be gained by actually talking to participants in a struggle.

Although even the best researcher cannot gain a full understanding of political and historical dynamics in just a short visit to a country, to so comprehensively condemn the outcome of a liberation struggle without any direct contact with those involved smacks of the worst type of First World academic arrogance. Astrow's words would ring much truer to residents of Zimbabwe if they were supported by primary sources which were readily available to him had he managed to visit Zimbabwe or neighbouring countries before 1980.

Aside from this major shortcoming Astrow's work suffers from the rigidity of his ideological outlook. Like many dogmatic Marxists, Astrow simply reduces things to the lowest common denominator. According to Astrow's party line, there is no progress without the total overthrow of the capitalist system. Though independent Zimbabwe may be a disappointment to many, the situation is more than Astrow paints it: a simple change from white leadership to black leadership. The whole intertwining of change and continuity in post-1980 Zimbabwe is much more complex than black leadership replacing white. Many of Astrow's conclusions may be valid but he doesn't quite grasp the subtlety of the social forces which are involved in the class struggle in Zimbabwe.

Certainly a richer work than Astrow's is *Zimbabwe: Politics, Economics and Society* by Colin Stoneman and Lionel Cliffe. Like Astrow, the two authors are leftwing critics of Zimbabwe's brand of socialism. However, unlike Astrow they have been frequent visitors to Zimbabwe and display a much deeper understanding of the country. In this relatively short work (slightly more than 200 pages) Stoneman and Cliffe review various aspects of Zimbabwe's political and economic landscape, from party structures to the agricultural sector to the development of the working class. Their approach is far more systematic than Astrow's and the work is further enhanced by the availability of a wide range of data on Zimbabwe's first years of independence.

Of particular relevance is Chapter Five, "Class and Race". Here the writers try to analyse the position and power of various class groupings which they label the bourgeoisie, the black petty bourgeoisie, the working class and the peasantry. They also include a very superficial section on "the special position of women". Unlike Astrow, they do not present a rigidified class structure, but one in flux. With respect to the bourgeoisie, the authors try to explore to what extent Zimbabwean capitalists represent a "national bourgeoisie" (ie one devoted to local economic development) as opposed to a "comprador bourgeoisie" (one which is totally the servant of transnational corporations). While they do not reach definite conclusions on the question, they do neatly detail the battleground where a large degree of Zimbabwe's fate has been and will continue to be decided. In light of the present moves toward trade liberalisation, the authors' depiction of this power struggle is useful for assessing the contradictions of the future.

In examining the working class, Stoneman and Cliffe also display an emphasis different from Astrow's. In fact they label Astrow a "Marxist purist" for making the blanket conclusion that workers had nothing whatsoever to do with the liberation struggle. Though the organised trade unions gave little assistance to the liberation movements, many individuals "did participate or give support to the nationalist struggle, but often clandestinely" (p65). Astrow's classical Marxist vision of the Zimbabwean working class sees them either as the inevitable emissaries of a socialist order or nothing at all. His portrayal of Zimbabwean workers neglects the links that many workers still have to the rural areas.

Cliffe and Stoneman are aware of this nuance of the Zimbabwean working class when they observe that "workers and peasants cannot yet be regarded as distinct classes" (194). In this context there is little wonder that Zimbabwean working class history has been something different than Marx's traditional characterisation.

In concluding, Stoneman and Cliffe do not self assuredly give a prescription for the revolutionary path as Astrow has done. Nonetheless, they do project a negative view of the country's attempts at socialism (p192):

"Certainly there has been precious little attempt so far to transform the socioeconomic structure or to change the terms of the country's involvement with the world economy in directions that would suggest a transition to socialism and that are differentiated from a more Africanist-oriented path of capitalist development after the decades of racial capitalism".

In the end, for Stoneman and Cliffe, Zimbabwe's "Marxist ambitions" may be merely a "camouflage for an ambiguously neo-colonial and capitalist project" (p195), nonetheless they back off from a view of total predetermination (p194):

"In these circumstances Zimbabwe's prospects are still not completely determined. They are, however, limited ..."

Both of the volumes reviewed here are important contributions to an indepth analysis of post-independence Zimbabwe. The views of all authors represent a leftwing critique of Zimbabwean political parties which rarely sees the light of day within the country outside the pages of *SAPEM* or *Social Change and Development*. Despite both volumes almost total neglect of women they do ask many of the right questions. Astrow's key concern is whether the liberation movements ever were socialist in character. His answer is an unwavering no. Stoneman and Cliffe focus on to what degree the present problems in the country are a product of the failures of government policy and political orientation. They present this as a dynamic situation rather than succumbing to Astrow's more static view. Of the two, Stoneman and Cliffe's work is more valuable and comprehensive, but both should be carefully read by those at all concerned with the path this country has followed and where it will go from here.

Reviewed by John Pape, Harare.

References

Mandaza Ibbo (ed) (1986) *The Political Economy of Transition*, CODESRIA, Dakar.