

Jack Parson, *Botswana – Liberal Democracy and The Labour Reserve in Southern Africa*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1984

Jack Parson's book is a most welcome addition to the small collection of books available on contemporary Botswana. It is undoubtedly a pioneering work, which has firmly laid the foundation for a radical historiography on Botswana.

The author, using Botswana as a case study, seeks an understanding of the contemporary politics and social change in Third World Labour reserve political economies. He tries to achieve this by employing Marxian conceptual and analytical tools, with particular stress on class and state relations.

The first chapter of the book surveys the geography, climate, geopolitics and the political economy of economic growth and development. Emphasis is put on the constraints imposed by the landlockedness of the country and the geopolitical consequences resulting from its juxtaposition with a powerful, hostile neighbour. The well-known problems of an unfavourable climate, uneven rainfall, colonial underdevelopment generally, and its specific manifestations sectorally, are discussed.

The second chapter treats briefly but systematically the pre-colonial political economies and how colonialism penetrated and eroded the internal dynamic and autonomy of these societies. The chapter proceeds to survey the consolidation of colonialism and the resulting underdevelopment. This underdevelopment process is discussed in detail; so also are the social transformations which ultimately led to anti-colonial nationalism. The last part of the chapter discusses the various threads of nationalist development, the specific character in which this nationalism unfolded, and its various political-ideological forms.

Chapter Three surveys the post-colonial political evolution, looking at institutional changes, and the trends and patterns in the liberal bourgeois parliamentary electoral system. It surveys the reasons underlying the electoral success of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party and the performance of the opposition.

Chapter Four discusses the rationale of development strategy and the allocation of resources in relation to the development of Botswana's agricultural, mining, and manufacturing sectors.

Chapter Five surveys the implementation and consequences of this development strategy. This is seen to have been an essentially capitalist development strategy, which has had profound implications for further class formation and struggles, particularly as new wealth (from minerals) strengthened the ruling petty-bourgeoisie in alliance with foreign capital. Political relations, contradictions and struggles between the various classes are discussed.

Chapter Six addresses Botswana's position as a frontline state in Southern Africa considering also its relations with other African countries, the USA, and the USSR. The problems posed by the geopolitics of the region (in particular the liberation processes in Namibia and South Africa and their implication for Botswana) are discussed. The chapter ends with a consideration of Botswana's foreign policy options and dilemmas in the face of the changing circumstances in Southern Africa.

Chapter Seven underlines the remarkable stability (at least for the time-being) of the nation's multiparty system, and its basis in the political economy. Finally, the book ends with a discussion of the political economy of growth—the trajectory of the internal class struggles and their likely political consequences in the future.

The book is simple, very readable and rich in up-to-date empirical data which gives it a very informative character. Without any detailed theoretical debate, the book is an ideal starter for the country's readership, which is largely anti-theoretical. For this reason, the

book should easily find its way into the University's teaching material and into the hands of civil servants, politicians and teachers at large. In fact it is a very mild distillation of the author's major thesis "The Political Economy of Botswana: A case Study of Politics and Social Change in Post-Colonial Societies" (1979), and his major articles in international journals "Cattle Class and the State in Rural Botswana" (JSAS, 1979); "The Working Class, The State and social Change in Botswana" (SALB (5) 1980); and lastly "The Trajectory of Class and State in Dependent Development: The Consequences of New Ealth for Botswana" (JCC, 1983). In comparison to the thesis and these articles, the book is conspicuously weak in analysis and as a summary of the author's research into the political economy of Botswana. It is not clear why this is so.

However, it is not possible in a work of this kind to avoid consideration of the conceptual framework employed. The author makes it clear at the beginning of the book that he is using a Marxian perspective. It is not the intention of the review to critique the entire Marxian application of the author, but only to make a few comments. The author introduces a new concept (developed previously in his thesis) of the "peasantariat". This concept is coined to denote the specific working class that is created under condition of labour-reserve political economy i.e. a class located in capitalist production relations as well as retaining roots in peasant production. It therefore stands between the peasantry on one hand and a full proletarianized working class on the other. But the concept contrasts nothing more than a specific case of partial proletarianization (oscillating labour migrancy) with full proletarianization. In short, whilst it is undoubtedly useful to distinguish between full and partial proletarianization, it is my view that the concept of "peasantariat" is both misleading and unhelpful. The author's conceptual and theoretical tensions with regard to this concept are clearly manifested in the book and in his other writings, for instance when he tries to distinguish the working class and the peasantariat. Such a distinction actually leaves Botswana with no working-class at all. The question may be posed "How many workers in Botswana have completely cut ties with rural peasant production?" The answer is there are very few. What the author calls the peasantariat is actually the working-class created

under a specific condition of capitalist reproduction. It would be theoretical pedantry to define a working class in the Eurocentric terms of the experience in which proletarianization proceeded with complete dispossession of the workers from the means of production and their more or less permanent residence in the towns. The concept of the peasantry does not really advance our understanding of the contemporary class structure of Botswana.

Also the book does not adequately address the question of the liberal bourgeois parliamentary system in Botswana. Why has Botswana remained a multi-party bourgeois state up to now; what are the dynamics of this system; and, above all, what are the problems, prospects and limits of this liberal democracy? What is most lacking in the book is the situating of the study in the context of the current Marxist debate regarding the limits and prospects of capitalist development in the Third World countries, that is, the question of the possibility of independent capitalist national development in the dependent and peripheral capitalist countries.

In short, one would have expected, in the end, the author to draw a balance-sheet of post-colonial development, using all the crucial indicators to show whether indeed an independent national development has been achieved or whether development up to now proves one of the fundamental conclusions of Marxism that under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leadership 'the complete and genuine solution of the national and democratic tasks in the dependent and peripheral capitalist countries is not possible'. (E. Mandel). This is the case if by national democratic tasks in the Third World context we mean first, the agrarian transformation that abolishes all residues of slavery, feudalism or other pre-capitalist system in a country's agriculture; second, the national liberation which not only involves the unification of a nation but also its emancipation from imperialism (neo-colonialism) and the creation of a unified national economy and market and their protection from cheaper foreign goods and the control of certain strategic natural resources; third, the achievement of democracy which involves not only the juridical declaration of democratic freedoms, but the creation of social and cultural conditions for their realization as well as the conditions for popular participation of the mass of

the people in the socio-economic, cultural and political life of a country; and fourth, the introduction of measures to improve the industrial conditions and wage levels of workers, and fostering of a strong worker's trade unionism.

On the whole, despite these major limitations, the book presents a useful introduction to the political economy of Botswana. It succeeds in provoking serious thought, and in the process draws attention to the other side, the dark side of our national development process, that is, the inherent and inevitable contradictions, and social and political consequences of a capitalist mode of production. It suggests that however imperceptible the political economic processes may be, the politics of Botswana appear to be moving in the direction of the typical post-colonial dependent capitalist politics experienced in so much of Africa.

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