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Democracy: Strong or Thin

Namibia Swaziland Zimbabwe

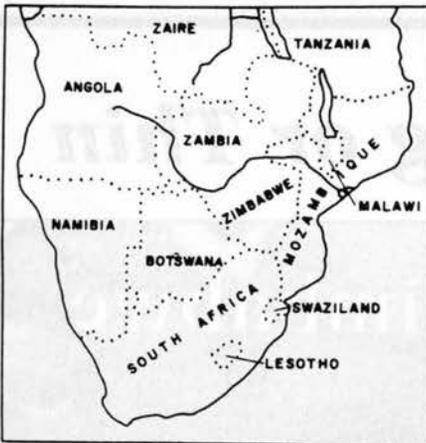


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Southern Africa REPORT

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Correction: In SAR Vol. 12 No. 2 the caption and credit for the illustration on p. 7 were accidentally omitted. The photo-credit is Santos Finiosse - AIM/Impact Visuals. The caption should read "Unemployed youths earn money carrying passengers into boats that cross the bay between Marixé & Inhambane."

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Democracy, Strong or Thin

The debate about democracy continues in Africa, and it bears commenting upon – not least in light of the substance of a number of articles about democracy’s status in southern Africa that appear in the present issue.

In fact, it’s difficult to think of “more democracy” as anything less than a “good thing” on a continent where far too many cruel dictators and arrogant elites have had the run of the shop for far too long. And yet the scope and substance of such democracy is itself in question, its

meaning often narrowed to a set of rather formal practices that have little to do with any deep-cutting political mobilization of ordinary citizens or any genuine popular empowerment. In the words of Larry Diamond, one of the contemporary theorists most vocal in trumpeting the claims of a narrowly-cast and implicitly elitist “liberal democracy” against the struggle to realize any more expansive or popular form of it, democracy “demands that citizens care about politics, but not too much”!

“Not care too much” in part because the outcome of any democratic process is already given, of course: it is, must be, a confirmation of the wisdom of neo-liberalism as the only really sensible strategy for a southern African government – or, indeed, any government – to adopt in our increasingly globalized and re-colonized world. “The new enthusiasm for democracy is conditional,” Manfred Bienefeld writes of the region elsewhere. “Just as Henry Ford once declared his Model-T to be available ‘in any colour so long

as it is black,' bemused electorates now find they can choose any policy regime, so long as it is the neo-liberal one."

But what if – as many readers of SAR will suspect – this neo-liberal economic strategy is not likely to prove particularly developmental for southern Africa? Then the costs of facilitating only a rather shallow form of democratization, and the fundamentally demobilized populace attendant upon it, may prove to be very high indeed. A number of observers worry about the fate, in these terms, of South Africa's post-apartheid ANC regime, with its neo-liberal agenda and its all-too-conventional political practices. In a powerful lead article in this issue, Chris Tapscott argues that Namibia, the country that immediately preceded South Africa into the brave new world of liberal democracy, provides a disturbing case in point of precisely the dangers involved.

Thus Tapscott worries that "despite its auspicious beginnings, the country is increasingly displaying patterns that have characterized autocratic, neo-colonial states elsewhere on the continent." As he goes on to itemize, "these include the arrogation of power by a newly emergent political elite, the drift towards a de facto one party state, the slow but progressive erosion of civil liberties, growing public sector corruption and the continuing poverty of the masses." Dangers indeed.

In order to counter such trends activists in southern Africa have come to think of "civil society" as the seed-bed from which more powerful democratic assertions from below could eventually grow. We have heard much about this theme in previous issues of SAR and Tapscott himself identifies the "weakness of civil society" in Namibia – the lack of development of "NGOs, community-based organizations and other organizations outside of formal politics" – as one factor that is facilitating the outcomes he fears in that country.

In other parts of the region a mobilized "civil society" seems a far more powerful actor, Swaziland, the subject of two complementary articles in the current issue, being an apparent case in point. Of course, in Swaziland even a realized "liberal democracy" would be considered a clear step forward from the unapologetically autocratic monarchical system in place there presently. True, one of our authors – Michael Stephen – does wax somewhat nostalgic for certain features of the quasi-traditional political structure now under so much popular pressure in Swaziland. But for our other author on Swaziland, Jacqui Salmond, there are no such ambiguities. In her view, the trade-union centred popular movement that has surfaced so visibly from within civil society in recent years is, together with its regional allies, the potential bearer of a transformed future for Swaziland.

The Swaziland story is a dramatic one, then, if still one that is very far from being resolved. Other articles in this issue, especially those focusing on Zimbabwe, also speak to the tense interplay between state and civil society. Familiar aspects of the autocratic urges of Mugabe and company surface both from Wetherell's account of the government's attempts to control discussion of a report on its past abuses of power in Matabeleland and from Sara Rich's account of its moves to assert greater control over the NGOs in that country.

And there is also a recognition of some of the ambiguities of civil society itself as a protagonist for progressive change in southern Africa. Salmond notes for Swaziland the potentially contradictory alliance that has found business and labour linking up to push for democratic change there. In Zimbabwe, Saunders argues, the contradictions inherent in such an alliance have already come much closer to the surface. Thus the media and the popular organizations that once collaborated so closely to

press for liberal/democratic reforms in Zimbabwe have begun to drift apart. On Saunders' account, the business-driven media has become much less vocal about deepening the meaning of democracy now that neo-liberal economics has been installed as the government's orthodoxy, leaving the popular organizations far more isolated in their fight against structural adjustment ... and for a stronger brand of democracy.

Ah, strong democracy, there's the rub. The notion has been given currency in the writings of Benjamin Barber, who sees liberal democracy as being, in contrast, "a 'thin' theory of democracy, one whose democratic values are prudential ... means to exclusively individualistic and private ends. From this precarious foundation, no firm theory of citizenship, participation, public goods, or civic virtue can be expected to arise." As for "strong democracy," it is "defined by politics in the participatory mode," a politics through which "active citizens govern themselves directly, not necessarily at every level and in every instance, but frequently enough and in particular when basic policies are being decided and when significant power is being deployed."

Or take the complementary theory of "popular democracy" articulated by Tanzanian scholar and activist, Issa Shivji. Shivji, too, is deeply sceptical regarding the claims of "liberal democracy" to offer any real promise of liberation for the mass of the African population. Instead, he emphasizes the necessary centrality of "popular struggles and mass movements from below" to any substantial democratic advance on the continent. And he also emphasizes the centrality to any such initiatives of a continuing emphasis on the perils of "imperialism" (not least in its neo-liberal guise); on the need to confront them; and on the imperatives of, yes, class struggle. Democracy, strong or thin: in southern Africa, as elsewhere, that is the question.

The Autocratic Temptation Politics in Namibia Now

BY CHRIS TAPSCOTT

Chris Tapscott teaches at the School of Government, the University of the Western Cape.

Slide from democracy

Seven years ago, Namibia made history as the last colony in Africa to attain its independence. At the time, SWAPO's commitment to multi-party democracy, human rights and national reconciliation were heralded as the beginnings of a democratic renaissance in Africa. This perception was reinforced by the new government's much publicised commitment to al-

leviate poverty and improve the welfare of all Namibians. To that extent, the new state was portrayed by many in the international community as a model for other countries in Africa.

It is now evident, however, that despite its auspicious beginnings, the country is increasingly displaying patterns that have characterised autocratic, neo-colonial states elsewhere on the continent. These include the arrogation of power by a newly emergent political elite, the drift towards a *de facto* one party state, the slow but progressive erosion of civil liberties, growing pub-

lic sector corruption and the continuing poverty of the masses. It is further evident that while Namibia has in place the formalistic dimensions of a multi-party democracy (a bill of rights, a legislative assembly, an official opposition), substantive parliamentary democracy has failed to take root.

Authoritarianism

In the 1995 elections, SWAPO returned to power with an increased majority and supported by three quarters of the electorate. This victory has accelerated the drift towards a *de facto* one-party state



Celebrating the November 1989 election victory

Guy Tillim - Afrapix/Impact Visuals

and has accentuated the arrogance of power that has bedeviled other states on the continent. There is increasing evidence, moreover, that with the consolidation of power there has been a resurgence of a strain of authoritarianism that had been latent in SWAPO's leadership since the days of the independence struggle. This authoritarianism may be traced back to the late 1970s and 1980s and the predominance of the military/security establishment in eliminating real and imagined spies within the party. The era was characterised by a highly centralised structure of authority, intolerance of criticism and the repression of any perceived dissent.

With the events of this period suppressed in the official history of the struggle, SWAPO at independence declined to investigate any of the accusations of human rights abuses made against its members by former detainees, on the grounds that this would be against the spirit of national reconciliation. It was argued that, to be fair, the process would have to apply equally to officials from the former colonial and South African forces, and that the exercise would not only be difficult to conduct (since the SADF had withdrawn from Namibia), but that it would stir up old enmities and impede the development of a new national identity. Many of those reputed to have been implicated in the abuse of prisoners were appointed to positions of influence in the new government and, most pointedly, within the military.

The recent publication of Pastor Groth's *The Wall of Silence* (an account of events and conditions in the detention camps of Angola and Zambia in the 1970s and 1980s) met with fierce denial from the SWAPO leadership, including an extraordinary denunciation of the book and its author by President Sam Nujoma himself. Seemingly in response, in late 1996 SWAPO released the publication *Their Blood Waters Our Freedom*, which purportedly accounted

for all persons missing or killed in exile whilst under the charge of SWAPO. Calls by opposition parties for an independent commission of enquiry into missing persons, however, continue to be rejected.

Although the tendency towards greater authoritarianism appears, for the present, to be held in check by the more liberal and social democratic tendencies within SWAPO, there have been repeated attempts to exercise more rigid control over the polity. An example was a move in 1995 to promote a bill to prohibit the publication of "biased reports" on the deliberations of parliament. Although the more contentious dimensions of the bill were subsequently removed, the fact that it was put before parliament at all indicates how sensitive certain sectors of the SWAPO leadership are to criticism.

While it is significant that both the press and judiciary remain independent, both have been strongly attacked by SWAPO ideologues in recent years. The parastatal Namibian Broadcasting Company (NBC), which in the years immediately after independence had aspired to journalistic autonomy, has increasingly become the mouth-piece of the government, and allows little if any substantive criticism of official policy in its reporting. This first became evident in 1995 when the then Director General of the NBC, Nahum Gorelick, was replaced by Danniell Tjongarero, Deputy Minister of Information and Broadcasting, and a long time SWAPO stalwart. Gorelick had aspired to liberal notions of the autonomy of the media, but since his departure, the tone of coverage by the NBC has changed significantly - now programmes perceived to be critical of or embarrassing to the government have, on occasion, been summarily withdrawn at the behest of the SWAPO leadership. At the same time, Namibia's national newspaper, *The Namibian*, which was the champion of SWAPO's liberation struggle and which was vic-

timised by the colonial regime, is increasingly vilified by SWAPO leaders following its critical stance on corruption within the state.

Attacks against the judiciary have generally been on the grounds of the alleged racism of white judges, magistrates and lawyers and their stated leniency in dealing with criminals. Whatever the legitimacy of these claims, they have undermined public respect for the judiciary and confidence in it.

For example, the Legal Practitioners Bill, which was intended to address racial imbalances in the profession by exempting would-be lawyers from mandatory practical exams, has been criticised for its perceived threat to the independence of the Namibian judiciary. This was because the Bill suggested that lawyers would qualify at the discretion of the government. In particular, it was felt, this could lead to a situation where the government, by determining who could enter legal practice, could indirectly dominate and control the Law Society and thereby influence the composition of the Judicial Service Commission which is influential in the appointment of judges. Much of the opposition to the Bill was expressed by the white-dominated Law Society of Namibia and the Society of Advocates of Namibia (hence reflecting their own corporatist interests). Meanwhile, it is significant that the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of the Judiciary, in a visit to Windhoek, asserted that the Bill "violated the universally accepted norms for the protection of an independent legal profession."

Emerging Corruption

Along with the concentration of power in the hands of the political elite has been growing evidence of corruption among senior civil servants and members of the SWAPO leadership. While some of these malpractices may be ascribed to poor financial management rather than dishonesty, others clearly may

not. The most publicised of these cases were allegations of the illegal drilling of drought relief boreholes on the farms of leading politicians, the abuse of board regulations for making tenders and the receipt of kickbacks. The press has frequently speculated on the sudden enrichment of the president's brother-in-law, Aron Mushimba, whose increasing well being has raised charges of preferential access to state tenders. While a measure of corruption might be expected in any democracy, it is inconsistent with the ideals of public accountability to use inconclusive commissions of enquiry as a mechanism to cover up and eventual quash what appear to have been *prima facie* cases.

The opulent tastes of the ruling elite were first revealed in the early 1990s, when in the middle of a critical drought and with the threat of widespread food shortages, the president took delivery of an executive jet, costing N\$70 million. At the time, the deal aroused considerable criticism both domestically and internationally, and precipitated cutbacks in emergency food aid by a number of key donors. At the time, the purchase of the jet was justified on the grounds that it would be open to use by all senior members of government, and that it would have a lifespan of twenty years. Despite this, a smaller jet was subsequently purchased for use by the prime minister, and more recently, it has been announced that the president's jet is to be replaced by a new and more expensive model.

A Weak Civil Society

The growth of a self-serving elite and the drift towards authoritarianism within the public sphere have been made easier by the weakness of civil society within Namibia. This state of affairs may be ascribed to policies of the colonial government and to SWAPO's political strategies during the independence struggle, both of which inhibited the development of NGOs, community-based organi-

sations and other organisations outside of formal politics.

The fact that much of the population of Namibia live in dispersed rural settlements alone has limited the development of a broad national identity. The South African occupation forces, furthermore, actively discouraged the establishment of independent community-based NGOs in the belief that they could be mobilised towards resistance by forces sympathetic to SWAPO. At the same time, although SWAPO was never officially outlawed during the three decades of the armed struggle, the party leadership in exile strongly discouraged the development of internally-based leadership structures – in strong contrast to developments in South Africa at the time, where mass based resistance was a characteristic of the anti-apartheid struggle.

The trade union movement, which in other contexts has been an important player in civil society, is generally weak. This is partly because the organised labour movement is small (scarcely fifty percent of those in formal employment are union members) and partly because of the role of the trade union movement in the national liberation movement and its relationship to SWAPO. Up until independence, the trade union movement was notable more for mobilising politically than for winning concessions for its members. Since independence the fact that some of its most prominent leaders are still closely linked to SWAPO has constrained the emergence of a strongly independent union movement. Under these circumstances, the trade union movement has yet to find its own voice in civil society.

In the post-independence era, it is argued, the presence of securocrats in the upper echelons of government (and associated with repression while in exile), has served to restrict free speech within SWAPO, and has limited critical debate on issues of national importance. It

is no coincidence that the most frank discussions and the most explicit criticisms of government policy are to be heard through the anonymous medium of phone-in radio shows. With the passage of time, these "chat shows," broadcast in English and in the vernacular and dubbed the "peoples' parliament," have become the forums for increasingly vociferous attacks on the government. In November 1995, open criticism and veiled threats against the SWAPO leadership led to the suspension of the Oshiwambo call-in programme, Ewilyamangaguluka, because of the abusive tone of callers. That such a step was deemed necessary within SWAPO's political heartland illustrates both the levels of frustration that exist within certain segments of the community, and the party's growing intolerance of popular criticism.

The lack of open debate and free expression within the party has created a climate for intrigue and subterfuge which appears to be reinforcing the factionalism that plagued SWAPO in exile in the 1980s. This is manifesting itself in a variety of different forms. It is evident, for example, in the resurgence of ethnicity within the party. During its first term of office, and despite the fact that the bulk of its support came from the Oshiwambo speaking people, SWAPO had prided itself on the fact that it drew its support from all ethnic groups within the country. Since then, however, a popular perception among many of the smaller ethnic groups is that SWAPO is first and foremost the party of the Owambo people, and that *their* interests are the primary concern of the government.

There has also been a reassertion of tribal identity within several of the seven sub-ethnic groups that make up the Oshiwambo speaking population. Thus the Kwanyama group, who historically were the most defiant of the Owambo people



Adil Bradlow - Afrapix/Impact Visuals

The crossing of worlds on 9 November 1989 - election doings between a Mahimba tribeswoman and a DTA party worker

the SWAPO leadership, it's more likely that voting will parallel the case in Zimbabwe - a decline in poll percentages rather than a swing to opposition parties.

Given that many of the tendencies discussed above are still at an early stage, an array of internal and external factors might yet mitigate them. Thus while the influential international donor community in Windhoek recognised that a new elite would inevitably emerge, the corruption has not been well received. The sanction of reduced aid, at least in the short run, could serve to hold overt corruption in check.

Similarly, the excessive authoritarianism and the associated human rights abuses that occurred in the SWAPO camps in exile would not as easily be concealed in independent Namibia from either the public at large or the international community, including the leading countries within SADC. The autonomy of the press, whilst under assault, remains an important bulwark against such developments. Any steps to formally curb the independence of the news media, however, must be interpreted as an ominous move towards authoritarian rule.

It is also possible that a new configuration of political forces within Namibia, including disaffected members of SWAPO, could emerge to challenge the hegemony of the ruling party, even if they do not seriously threaten its hold on power in the short run. A newly established political party, *SWAPO for Justice*, consisting of disenchanted former PLAN combatants, illustrates this trend, although it must be noted that the move has drawn little popular support.

Even though various factors might constrain current trends, recent developments in Namibia strongly indicate that power is increasingly being centralised in the hands of the SWAPO elite, and that growing authoritarianism and political intolerance are part of this process.

and who had provided the bulk of SWAPO's combatants in the armed struggle, have resurrected a monarchy which had been dormant since the death of King Mandume at the hands of South African forces in 1917. It is still too early to interpret the full significance of this development, but it does suggest a narrowing rather than a broadening of national identity.

The potential for factional struggles is likely to be accentuated should Nujoma step down (as constitutionally obligated) at the end of his current term of office (in the year 1999), and succession struggles ensue. Current trends, however, indicate that Nujoma will make full use of SWAPO's two-thirds majority in parliament to change the constitution, and ensure himself a third (or more) term of office. While such a move might be politically expedient,

forestalling splits within the party, it also paves the way for a long and increasingly autocratic rule by the president.

Conclusion

While SWAPO's gains in the 1995 elections would appear rather surprising in view of the party's inability to significantly improve the living standards of the majority of Namibians and with the growing wealth and arrogance of its leaders, they are not inconsistent with trends elsewhere in Africa. For many of SWAPO's supporters, their loyalty transcends party political issues. Being a member of SWAPO during the long years of struggle often meant as much about personal and family identity and commitment to one's community as it did about loyalty to political leaders. Thus, as people become disenchanted with

Swaziland: I -- Of Trade Unions & Transformation

BY JACQUI SALMOND

Jacqui Salmond, who studies at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, spent extensive time in Swaziland from 1992 to 1995. She maintains close contact with PUDEMO and SWAYOCO and has worked on the compilation of a political biography on pro-democracy advocate Ambrose Zwane.

April 12th, 1973, was a turning point in Swaziland's political history. On that day, King Sobhuza seized all administrative, legislative and judicial powers, denying the people of Swaziland the right to freely associate, to assemble, to organize, or to speak out. Ruling by decree, the Swazi monarchy introduced a series of repressive laws over the next two decades aimed at maintaining political domination. Members of the opposition were subjected to detention without trial and meetings of more than 4 people were outlawed. Although a parliamentary system was formed after the 1973 coup d'etat, the monarchy and its entourage (the Imbokodvo National Movement) have ruled with an iron fist for the past twenty-four years.

Activists in Swaziland today face the difficult task of convincing the public that resistance to an undemocratic government is not a betrayal of cultural identity. [On some of the complexities of the quasi-traditional character of the Swazi socio-political system see the accompanying article, in this issue, by Michael Stephen.] Yet there are growing signs that the people of Swaziland may be ready for a change. With the living standards of the majority declining and fraudulent spending by public officers exposed, the public has grown increasingly disenchanting with the corrupt behaviour of the ruling class. Such tensions have been exacerbated by the harsh global economic climate,

and its impact domestically on rising unemployment and reduced social services. The majority of Swazis are beginning to identify the authoritarian Tinkhundla system [see Stephen] as central to the problem. The agendas of labour organizations, underground political parties, youth, church, and women's groups have converged around issues of political emancipation, labour rights and social justice. Confidence in the monarchy has waned, while revolutionary fervour has intensified.

Strikes

National strikes in 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997 were perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of these changes. A two-day strike called by the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) in 1994 led to the establishment of a tripartite forum, comprised of government, worker, and business representatives, to address the '27 Popular Demands' of the general strike and to seek to improve the working conditions of the Swazi people. The 27 demands included improvements in minimum wages, affirmative action policies, an end to racial and gender discrimination, the right to strike and to organize without state intimidation, the unbanning of political parties, and the freedom to assemble, to associate, and to speak without the fear of reprisal.

The government failed to address these demands. The result was another general strike in March of 1995, which cost the economy over 100 million rand in lost production and damaged property. At this time, the SFTU began to acknowledge the need to mobilize workers to struggle for democracy, conceding that reform could not take place in a repressive climate. Up to this point, the SFTU had deliberately avoided political issues, since the

government only reluctantly allowed trade union activity as long as political issues remain outside their mandate.

In November, 1995, organized labour, underground political parties, and women, youth, and church groups came together for the first time in a unified, labour-led pro-democracy movement. With the threat of yet another strike looming, the Federation of Swaziland Employers (FSE) warned government that business confidence in Swaziland was waning due to the heavy losses during previous strikes. However, government did not heed this warning; rather, parliament passed a new industrial relations act which criminalized mass action by workers, subjecting union organizers to 10 years imprisonment and/or a 10,000 rand fine for inciting labour unrest. One hundred thousand workers responded with a nine day general strike in January 1996.

Confrontation

In a country of approximately 950,000, a general strike of 100,000 workers was extraordinary. As 60% of the population is below the age of 21 and approximately 50% of the population is unemployed, these 100,000 workers constituted virtually the entire national workforce. They halted most economic activity, and the state responded violently. Many activists and union leaders were arrested, tortured and beaten by the state security agents, and one person was killed by police during a demonstration. Electricity, water, food and fuel supplies were disturbed, schools were closed, and over 1 billion rand was lost in production, trade and damage to property.

After a series of secret meetings between South African President Nelson Mandela and King Mswati

III, Swaziland's ruling monarch, a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) was established in July, 1996. This appeared to be a progressive step, yet it fell far short of genuine reform. For example, committee members who were representatives of other organizations (for example, the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO), Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO), Swaziland Democratic Alliance (SDA), SFTU) were prohibited from expressing the collective concerns of their constituents. Moreover, anyone who denounced the CRC was subject to a hefty fine and/or a prison term.

Both international investors and local business began to take a more active role in the negotiation process in a last ditch effort to preserve the business climate. Escalating political instability, production losses and damage to property during the 1996 strike led business to align itself more closely than ever with the labour front in an effort to bring a peaceful solution to the political impasse. Numerous behind the scenes meetings forged a closer relationship between employers, workers, and political activists, signifying the possibility of a departure from the conflictual industrial relations which characterize Swazi workplaces. These seemingly amenable relations between labour and management left government the odd one out in the labour-business-government triad. Although relations remain adversarial at most workplaces, organized labour, the business community and the banned political opposition have formed a rather peculiar social partnership aimed at creating a more broadly democratic environment in which to engage in economic activity.

It is important to note, however, that the business community has kept itself at arms length from the pro-democracy movement because political activity remains illegal in Swaziland. The business community has linked itself to labour's aim of bringing a more democratic

environment to both the workplace and the national political system, but it has yet to form a meaningful alliance with the pro-democracy movement. Due to the conflictual nature of the struggle, business is unwilling to enter political debate in case the government rescinds the many pro-capital locational incentives which attracted them to Swaziland in the first place. Business also faces the difficult task of finding a balance between its inherent need to limit labour rights and the necessity of promoting a stable political climate. Therefore, they have disguised reform as an apolitical issue. Labour, on the other hand, is primarily interested in improving the general conditions of the people, which includes political emancipation.

An intransigent government

The government's uncompromising position over political and labour reform led to another general strike when, in 1997, the country's major industries (sugar, forestry, citrus processing, and many others) were brought to a standstill for the entire month of February, costing the nation millions of rands. Again, the focus of this defiance campaign was primarily political. Again, the government cracked down forcefully on the dissent and activists and trade unionists were harassed, tortured, and jailed. Through it all, this latest incident of civil unrest, the 1997 general strike, consolidated several important trends:

- 1) the convergence of organized labour groups, political parties, and civic organizations into a popular front, a coalition known as the Swaziland Democratic Alliance (SDA);
- 2) the development of a less adversarial relationship between labour and business, as demonstrated by the cooperation between the FSE and the SFTU;
- 3) the emergence of transnational cooperation between organized labour across the region, a trend exemplified by cross-border organizing

and genuine international solidarity throughout the strike; and

4) in sharp contrast, a xenophobic/isolationist response from the ruling class, particularly with regard to the involvement of both the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) during the negotiation process.

For the brutality of the regime has not gone unnoticed within the region. Four neighbouring heads of state sought to bring SADC into the crisis as a conciliatory body. The Cape Town Summit, held on February 19th, 1997, was convened to find possible solutions to the Swazi crisis, with a particular focus on the release of the detained trade union leaders. Hosted by President Nelson Mandela, presidents Chissano of Mozambique, Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and Masire of Botswana all attended. Since King Mswati III was not invited to this meeting, the Swazi government issued an angry response, accusing its neighbours of unwarranted interference in their domestic affairs.

As for COSATU, it has also sought - alongside the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) - to play an important role by trying to exert pressure on Swaziland's unresponsive and repressive regime. More broadly, with the formation of the Swaziland Solidarity Network (SSN) in March 1997 a wide range of organizations from both inside and outside Swaziland (PUDEMO, SWAYOCO, SDA, ANC, SACP, COSATU and others) have come together to initiate a campaign to rid the country of the notorious 1973 Decree.

Of course, these regional initiatives have been used by the regime to buttress the claim that foreigners, not Swazis, are the ones responsible for the dissent: with the help of the state-owned media houses, the regime is responding to the growing

popular front by portraying all opposition forces as foreign, hoping to undermine the legitimacy of the pro-democracy movement. Its success in doing so may prove to be quite limited, however. With the democratic transitions that have taken place in both Mozambique and South Africa during the 1990's, as well as a peace accord that has been signed in Angola, Swaziland becomes the last remaining "sore thumb" in the south-

ern African region. Perhaps increased pressure for democratic reform from the donor community can persuade the regime to restore a decent social and political climate. Continued solidarity among international social justice networks also may be instrumental in the monitoring and reporting of human rights abuses. The international links between the Swaziland Demo-

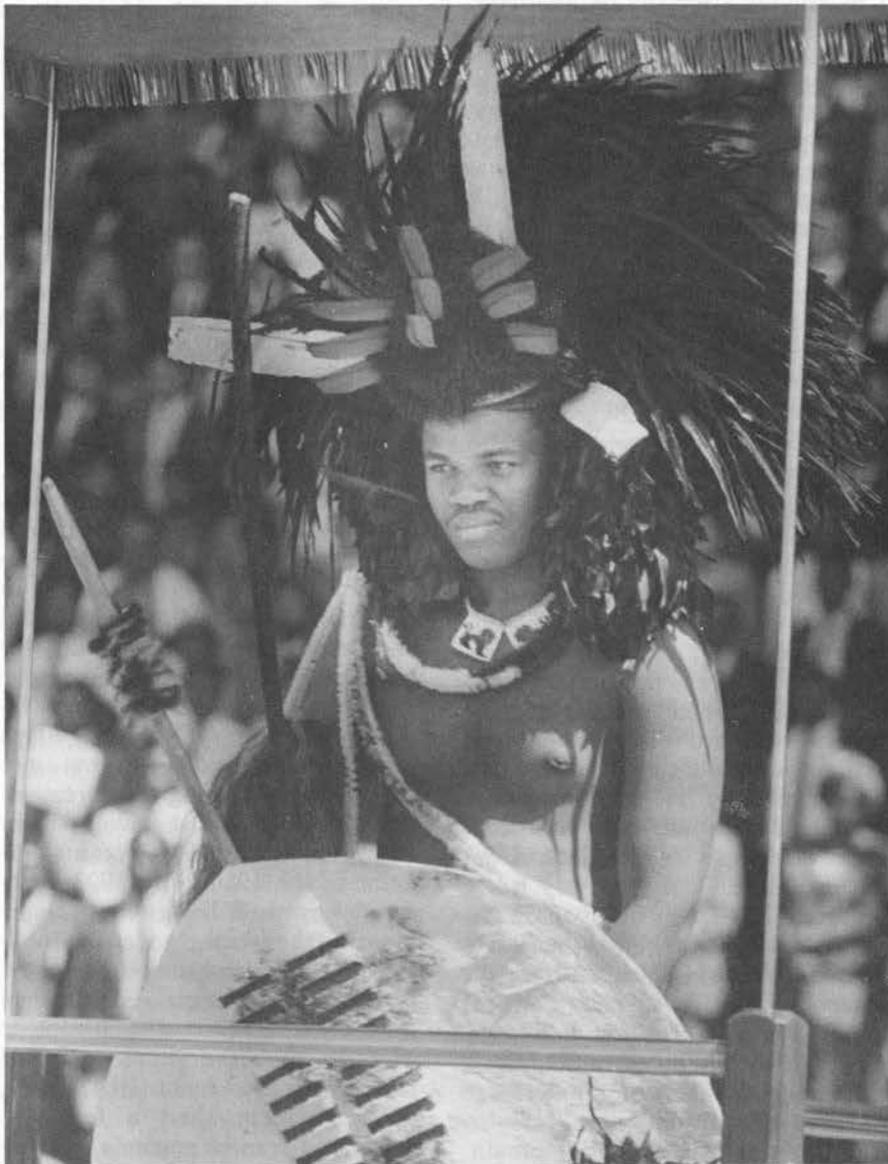
cratic Alliance (SDA) and the ILO, COSATU, ICFTU, ANC, SACP, Amnesty International and others should continue to prove a reliable source of moral, strategic, and material support. But it is the continued consolidation of the social justice movement within Swaziland, whose growing strength has been best exemplified by the strike wave of recent years, that provides the most important hope for the future.

II -- Of Kings & Compromises

BY MICHAEL STEPHEN

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King Mswati III not only inherited one of Africa's last surviving kingdoms from his father Sobhuza II, Africa's longest ruling monarch, but also Sobhuza's ideology of reconstructed traditionalism commonly referred to within the kingdom as the "Swazi Way." What Mswati did not inherit from his father on acceding to kingship in 1986 was Sobhuza's charisma which had allowed him to become a virtual autocrat. Charisma came to Sobhuza over a lifetime of struggle: first to re-establish the Swazi kingship after a twenty-year inter-regnum; then to build a Swazi land community in the colonial period by winning back alienated land and reasserting chiefly authority over it and its occupants; and finally by building the Swazi state and nation after independence by continuing to develop a "Swazi Way" in the face of necessary modernization within the kingdom and increasing instability and violence without. Sobhuza came to be perceived by the majority of his subjects as King - father of the nation and its independence, spiritual and ceremonial leader, representative of a heroic line of ancestors and communicator with them, and, in a real Weberian sense, one who embodied "the gift of grace."



António Muchave - AIM/Impact Visuals

Monarch Mswati III at independence anniversary celebration, 1988

Sobhuza intended that his reconstructed traditionalism and charismatic authority would control the forces of economic and social modernization set in motion from the 1950s by the British colonial authority. In particular, the King and his advisors (the "Central Authority," as they were to be known collectively) struggled, with some success, to retain control over Swazi Nation Land and regain the country's mineral rights after independence. The contemporary power of the Central Authority was to be built on this substructure by expanding control over the right of access to land and its use by the nation. Swazi national rights to land were made part of a web of rights and obligations between king and subject, serving as the basis of both citizenship and a form of mutual dependence. At the same time, the Swazi Central Authority, through its investment vehicle, Tibiyo, became the fulcrum of the new elite by building up a significant stake in the total portfolio of capital in Swaziland through the judicious exploitation of joint ventures with foreign investors, this in turn based on the Authority's monopolization of mineral and property rights and control over their transference.

Democracy?

With independence in 1968, Swaziland was obliged to accept a Westminster constitution which, in that first unsuccessful wave of imposed African democratization, was to introduce "alien" concepts of plurality and competition to leadership, politics and civil society. Sobhuza abrogated it in 1973 and imposed the *tinkhundla* system (or Central Authority conception of Swazi democracy) in 1978, which, with only small tinkering since, is the system that has survived to be challenged today. This "no party" system allows the Central Authority the means to screen potential candidates for parliament and to nominate not only a proportion of the members of both houses but also the Prime Minister

and his cabinet. Opposition organizations and political parties are prohibited and sixty-day detention is employed from time to time to quell dissidence in the labour movement, press and student circles.

As noted, Sobhuza's apparent objective was less to deploy "traditionalism" as a barrier to rural modernization, economic liberalism and democratization than to adapt these European concepts to some perceived "Swazi Way" and to construct appropriate institutions to control the process of change. It was also his clear intention to engineer these institutional guarantees of gradual change in such a way as to guarantee the succession beyond his death. It also bears noting that the use of power by the Central Authority in the time of Sobhuza was not characterized by any dramatic use of state violence - although the authority of the system was challenged, albeit quite discreetly, by certain chiefs during Sobhuza's reign and also, briefly and unsuccessfully, by a fledgling trade union movement (prior to its suppression and demise).

However, during the four year inter-regnum between the death of Sobhuza and the accelerated accession of Mswati, the Central Authority degenerated into a faction-ridden, visibly corrupt and self-interested cabal. A series of events served to bring the political and economic elite, their system and its institutions into disrepute: accusations and counter-accusations, a palace coup by one faction against another, flights into exile, imprisonment of competing elements of the nation's elite - all relatively freely reported by *The Times of Swaziland*, as it happens, but vehemently denied by the Central Authority-controlled *Swazi Observer*. Political and material corruption had been obscured by the belief in Sobhuza's charisma: without him knowledge of such corruption now rose to the forefront of the public domain. Anti-government leaflets circulated,

unions began to reassert their potential, and photographs of riot police clubbing bleeding students featured on the newspapers' front pages during the inter-regnum. Sobhuza's elaborate constructions were tested and, in the absence of a king, found deficient in their capacity to prevent abuses of power and divisive disputes (even though the Central Authority did include a named regent and Queen Mother during this period) For Sobhuza's system of institutions had depended to a high degree for its survival (and for its supportive power base in the community) on the personal integrity of those it empowered and also on their continued commitment to the land community and the system's associated ideology of mutuality.

Under Mswati

Under Mswati, several features indicated the continuing strength of Sobhuza's system of government: the generally accepted reassertion of kingship, for example, and the legitimacy of both the "tinkhundla" political and electoral process and the dominant "Tibiyo" in the economy among the majority of rural, conservative and/or politically neutral Swazi. And yet Mswati and his purged Central Authority were also confronted by challenges. In the time of Sobhuza, opposition had been coopted, pushed into exile or had withered away. For example, the leadership of the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress, which predated independence, went into exile before returning in retirement. The Ngwane Socialist Revolutionary Party, founded in 1978, became dormant in the 1980s. By 1993, however, elements of both were to resurface in the semi-clandestine politics of opposition, alongside several new groupings. And there were other traditions of dissent as well: in 1982 the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO), then no more than a few students and former students radicalized by contact with and support

for the ANC, had began to circulate crude anti-government propaganda calling for revolt and revolution. And the Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYCO), equally obscure, travelled the same path within two years. Such groupings shared a pointed hostility to the form of "traditionalist" electoral process which, they argued, had been created to maintain a monarchist male gerontocracy and they demanded effective reform. Nonetheless, by 1995 Swaziland stood, exceptionally in the southern Africa region, as the only state not to have instituted pluralism and multi-party elections.

True, the Swazi political system has seen some changes following the accession of Mswati, but they were not substantive and while the rural majority remain apparently quiescent, the much publicized but inadequate reforms have failed to satisfy the growing urban population, which views itself as more sophisticated. In his first years, Mswati was at a severe disadvantage due to his palpable lack of experience: he was eighteen when he took his title and twenty one when he claimed full royal powers. As a result his policy has veered from reformist to conservative, as he takes his advice from among his "elders," a group dominated by conservatives of the Sobhuza era (although lacking the latter's vision and pragmatism).

An early change was the appointment as Prime Minister of Obed Dlamini, an educated former trade union leader perceived as a competent administrator with some distance between himself and the King and likely to enjoy the respect of the growing, and now restive, trade union movement. He was a reformist and was also unwilling to repress the illegal but semi-overt activities of the increasingly vocal opposition movement that was evolving. Lack of support from the Prime Minister did not act as a restraint on the police, however, who used extreme violence to suppress a 1990 student demonstration in support

of democratic measures (the university was closed in November of that year). This police activity hardened anti-government resolve, while at the same time the position of the Prime Minister antagonized the royalists who enjoyed the King's ear. And it this group's brand of reactionary conservatism that was to prevail especially in the period following the 1993 election.

Hostility to change

Thus the members of the Central Authority have remained hostile to virtually all change - influenced in part by the manner in which the Zulu King Zwelithini and his retainers were constrained and then divested of all power by the manoeuvres of the initially 'traditionalist' and loyal Inkatha party led by the machiavellian Buthelezi. This lesson in the dangers of allowing political reform and accepting pluralism in any form was further demonstrated, it was felt, by the removal of Lesotho's King Moshoeshe from power and the reduction of the office of kingship itself. Indeed, Moshoeshe's premature but, in the eyes of most observers, accidental death after his return to Lesotho only added fuel to the introverted speculations of the Swazi palace clique as to what might result from any change!

True, a consultation exercise, proposed by the government and sponsored by the Central Authority, had been launched in the period before the 1993 election to ascertain the nature of the political change demanded by the reformists, the degree of support nation-wide for change, and just what kinds of modifications of the system the monarchists would deem acceptable in order to preserve the peace. The result was modest: the insertion of a secret ballot of limited significance into the existing three stage tinkhundla electoral process. The first stage of imposed candidates and their approval by public acclaim,

and the final stage in which Central Authority continued to nominate members to both houses were to be retained, while the middle stage, election of actual members of parliament by an electoral college, was to be conducted by secret ballot. But in the 1993 parliamentary election itself, the first to implement the new dispensation, all the nominated members, including the Prime Minister Prince Jameson Mbilini Dlamini and his cabinet members, were monarchists, entirely negating any reformist tendency arising from the secret ballot.

Using the same system, Central Authority pressed on with such marginally reformed electoral procedures to conduct regional and local council elections in 1994 and town elections in 1995 - the Central Authority thereby continuing to retain more or less total control over the adjusted process of "Swazi democracy." But there has also been a growing realization of the need for further adjustment. During the election campaign, for example, some forty persons were detained and tried under the country's occasionally implemented legislation prohibiting political activity and organization. The fact that all were released within a short time did not compensate for the poor light in which Swazi politics were presented in the outside world. International media condemnation was exacerbated by the by-now customary brutality on the part of the Royal Swazi Police when apprehending detainees and subsequently interrogating them and this did have the positive result of putting some pressure on the government for improved observation of human rights and further reform. Still, despite the fact that the King soon announced another initiative, this time in the form of a Constitutional Review Commission to draft a new constitution for presentation in two years, half that time period has elapsed and there is little evidence of any progress.

More important to Mswati's attempt to firm up his rule has been his turning to an old project of Sobhuza's as a focus for national unity and mobilization, the claim for lands alienated along its border with South Africa during the early colonial years: in 1993, and again in 1996, Mswati has reiterated the demand for the return of these lands from South Africa. This is an old and thorny subject. Not all Swazi in Swaziland or all Swazi living inside South Africa in the alienated lands (formerly the bantustan of KaNgwane and the Ingwavuma district in KwaZulu), wish to see a reincorporation. The current South African government also has little enthusiasm for the claim, although President Mandela has suggested setting up an investigative commission.

Moreover, within Swaziland itself a rather different land issue – one that is much more ambiguous in its implications for the Central Authority – has recently come to the fore. Thus, Dr Malangeni Simeane, an academic of the University of Swaziland, has opened a new debate within Swazi society concerning the claimed need for increased private tenure of agricultural land and the privatizing of non-commercially utilized nation land. His research presents the demands of a growing sector of the Swazi rural population and at the same time has potential to destabilize the social and economic foundation of Central Authority's power base – the rural population and its right to hold Swazi Nation Land held in trust for the nation by the King. This land issue is one that has been growing in the literature of development "experts" for some years but is now out in the open as a further arena of contestation within the general Swazi political constituency.

A contested present

Swaziland has lost its comparative economic advantages within the region. Southern Africa is at peace and therefore Swaziland has lost

much of distinction and attraction as "the peaceful Kingdom." The end of apartheid and the new political dispensation in both South Africa and Mozambique have led to a relocation of some commercial enterprises. Thus, Swaziland has lost many of its comparative advantages, just as growth has begun to be negatively affected by such additional forces as economic recession in South Africa and local drought. Nor is Swaziland any longer the site of a "tame" labour-force either, as illustrated by the increasing labour unrest provoked by both political and bread and butter issues. Indeed, Central Authority resistance to political and economic reform and ensuing confrontation with increasingly organized labour are creating what might be termed an image problem with potential investors from outside.

In 1996 the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions struck for over a week in support of twenty-seven demands for political change, including such fundamentals as the ending of a twenty-three year old "state of emergency" by which Central Authority represses opposition. Three of the trade union leaders were detained under its provisions during the strike. As is also true of the actions of the opposition groups or parties, the strike was not against the monarch itself but for the introduction of democratic measures and opposed to the dominant and anti-democratic role of the secretive Central Authority. The response of the latter was to threaten to call out the traditional spear- and club-wielding regiments to put down the strikers. The police, too, performed their usual odious role during the strike, killing a school girl and a striker. Parliament was divided over the demands but as in the past was thus again revealed to be powerless. Nor were the demands met – although it is true that many of them should fall within the brief of the current constitutional commission.

This year, too, manifestations in support of democratization per-

sist while support grows for democratic change in Swaziland – with support, importantly, from within the South African labour movement and political establishment as well – all combining to increase pressure for such change. [For more information on the growing Swazi resistance movement see also the accompanying article, in this issue, by Jacqui Salmond.] So far no change is evident. The Central Authority has showered abuse on the various South African structures who have attempted to mediate or advise, from the trade unionists to the President, and it continues to manipulate government, exert considerable leverage over the formal economy, resist change in the rural areas, and restrict freedom of speech, association, political activity and publication. And it continues to intimidate and detain would-be political activists, trade unionists and journalists, the police and the prison service brutalizing political and criminal detainees with impunity and as a matter of routine.

* * *

In sum, there is a great need for change in Swaziland, in terms both of the guaranteeing of human rights and of democratization. Given past history, the current constitutional commission is not unlikely to propose adequate reform. If King Mswati wishes to enter the next millennium in office, it is almost past time for him to take fresh account of his situation. Yet at this moment he probably could look to survive as the constitutional monarch with greatly reduced economic and political powers in a reconstituted democratic state. The office of the kingship remains generally popular and, in spite of some of his more outrageously negative public expressions concerning reform, King Mswati himself remains an attractive possible titular head of state to many Swazi. Whether he, or anyone else within the Swazi establishment, has the will and imagination to oversee such a peaceful transition remains to be seen.

The Press & Popular Organizations in Zimbabwe

A Frayed Alliance

BY RICHARD SAUNDERS

Richard Saunders, SAR's "man in Harare" has no fixed address.

In the first wave of political liberalization in the 1980s, most emerging civics and leading sections of the private press shared a common program of reform. It focused on winning concessions from Zanu(PF) on a number of concrete issues: ending the State of Emergency, challenging Zanu's efforts to establish a one-party state, and forcing government to investigate and prosecute cases of public corruption. The result of this cooperation was a social alliance for democratization – or "glasnost," as it was labelled in the immediate wake of the Russian experience.

Still too weak institutionally to establish their own media, several leading civics and social interest groups sought greater influence by cultivating links with key sections of the private sector press. This became apparent when campaigns appeared in the private media but didn't exist anywhere else, and focused on concrete issues of political liberalization, like the government's continued renewal of Emergency Powers and plans for a one-party state. The private sector press presented civics with the opportunity of "leapfrogging" the institutional hurdles to popular democracy put in place by Zanu(PF), not least of which was the Mass Media Trust established by Zanu(PF) as a "neutral" national media.

By providing an institutional point of entry into national debate for emerging social forces, leading elements of the national press became a decisive site for contesting the failing nationalist political order, and for constructing alternatives led

by social interests. For a brief time, at least, publications like *Parade*, *Moto* and even the liberal-capitalist *Financial Gazette*, came close to performing the role of what Gramsci might have called the "General Staff" of the emerging "democracy movement."

At times, the process involved the construction of jarring cross-class linkages: a business newspaper rose to the defence of students demonstrating for socialism; trade unionists called for broad support for national capitalists in the face of incursions from foreign capital. In both cases, the arbitrary and undemocratic exercise of authority by the ruling party was the subject of media attack. What made that attack all the more powerful was the undermining impact of the state's "commandism" within its own media.

ESAP tests existing alliances

However, the second wave of "economic liberalization" was far more politically contentious and less amenable to popular front politics because it tried to remove popular control over the national economy. It also effectively marginalized the decision-making authority of the national political process. The formal introduction of the ESAP and structural adjustment in 1991, then, proved something of a litmus test for existing social alliances in civil society – particularly for those between leading sections of the private sector media on the one hand and civics on the other.

ESAP reintroduced the politics of class and capital into the heart of mainstream political debate, driving wedges into existing coalitions for political reform and creating ideological divides between social ac-

tivists and liberals on one side, and neo-liberal reformists on the other. This gulf would grow rapidly as the negative effects of ESAP and the severe 1992 drought precipitated a realignment of social interests. New civic organizations sprang up aiming to cope with and challenge the withdrawal of the state from the social sector. Ownership of the national media, and the social perspectives they represented, became more concentrated and narrow.

Most of the largest private media had been key participants in the private sector's campaign for neo-liberalism in the late 1980s. Several media, notably *The Financial Gazette*, wedded calls for political liberalization to parallel calls for neo-liberalization of the economy, in a slick media package that proved profoundly influential in the early 1990s. This was before the program's negative implications for the social and industrial sectors were fully understood.

The repercussions for most Zimbabweans were direct and severe: real wages dropped to their lowest levels in twenty-five years, more than fifty thousand formal sector jobs disappeared, and access to health and education services was sharply diminished. In the early 1990s, the grassroots response to this crisis was to produce a growing number of civic organizations. Among them were thousands of local "coping" groups and dozens of local, regional, and national advocacy organizations that increasingly saw government's neo-liberal program as an obstacle to community development and an object of social and political contestation. In effect, the withdrawal of the state from the social sector provoked the influx of

other organizations, led by NGOs and civics. In the process, many politically moribund institutions were transfigured and revitalized.

Media shake-out

However, the economic reforms had contradictory and mostly negative implications for the existing media and its capacity to reflect a variety of social perspectives. Despite promising wider freedom of expression in a liberalized market, ESAP provoked a shake-out within the commercial media that brought advantages to a few publishers and financially damaged many. Initially, the relaxation of government controls over foreign exchange and imports did lead to improvements in production quality in several publications and the appearance of new publications. But this boom was short-lived.

In the early 1990s, rapidly escalating production costs and inopportune shifts in national consumer markets increasingly squeezed margins, adversely affecting new and smaller players disproportionately. The devaluation of the Zimbabwe dollar, steep interest rates (which hovered near 50% in the early 1990s) and the relaxation or complete removal of price controls led to significant cost increases in the import-dependent industry. Meanwhile, the sharp fall in disposable income in the early 1990s, along with the disastrous performance of the economy in the wake of the 1992 drought – and the slow recovery from it – placed severe stress on both consumer and advertising market sales.

There was a further concentration and centralization of large-scale production in the hands of a small number of established publishing houses with larger capital resources and greater existing market share. Titles with established subscription lists and distribution networks – and thus greater circulation and more stable, demonstrable market penetration – were better placed to withstand market contraction and tighter competition in the advertis-

ing market place. These included the publicly-owned national chain, Zimpapers, and a small collection of titles aimed at niche markets associated with minority, high-spending social and business sectors. Even then, some of these market leaders were forced to adopt conservative management practices and tolerate reduced margins in their efforts to ride out market turbulence.

Private press short of capital

Outside of the chains, most private print media were starved of capital in the 1990s and found it difficult to expand to meet heightened market competition and rising production costs. New entries in the market were particularly vulnerable to production and market shifts, but smaller media were also adversely affected owing to their relative under-capitalization. For companies like Modus Publications, the country's largest black-owned private publisher, high interest rates proved a catastrophe whose after-shocks continued to be felt in the late 1990s.

In the early 1990s, Modus borrowed heavily on the back of its profitable *Financial Gazette* to establish a popular weekly tabloid, the *Sunday Gazette*, and Zimbabwe's only independent newspaper, the *Daily Gazette*. But the losses stemming from these investments, in which rising interest repayments played a key role, prompted emer-

gency survival measures. In late 1994 the *Daily Gazette* closed and the *Sunday Gazette* followed fourteen months later. Several titles in Modus' magazine subsidiary disappeared or were released to other publishers, and key fixed assets of the company were sold. Continuing political turbulence within the surviving *Financial Gazette* culminated in the mass departure of key senior editorial staff in 1996 for a new competing weekly business paper, the *Zimbabwe Independent*. Ironically, the *Independent* was funded by the sale of the *Gazette* to its current owners, a development which further underscores the resurgence of established, white-dominated publishing capital.

It now seems clear that the majority of smaller operations have become non-economic, surviving largely on the basis of capital injections via subsidies and goodwill from NGOs, development agency donors, individuals, banks and other debtors. In most instances, this donor patronage is unsustainable, and further contraction in the number of titles outside the main chains is likely in the near future. One consequence will be the further narrowing of available space for a diversity of opinion and critique. Commentary and reportage are already severely limited in terms of analytical sophistication, and this constitutes a further setback.

Political horizons narrow

While ESAP brought with it promises of the "free market of ideas," the heavy marketing of the neo-liberal 'common sense' agenda by government, donors and the private sector have contributed to a narrowing of political horizons in the press. The relative lack of training and critical ability on the part of most editors, writers and reporters, the neo-liberal leanings of many media owners, and the steady barrage of rhetoric, policy reforms and grey information from the state and ESAP's backers, have all contributed centrally to a decline in the



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private media's vitality and diversity.

This situation is particularly evident in media that have a history of critical analysis. Under the current twin pressures of heightened market competition and the neo-liberal ideological offensive, two monthly current affairs magazines, *Parade* and *Horizon*, have shifted their editorial content away from critical political features towards light entertainment and sports. Politics and investigative journalism, it appears, no longer sell magazines in a congested, restricted market.

For activists hoping to use the media to expand the scope and reach of democratic challenge, the reality holds a bitter irony. Published opinion has tended to support government's neo-liberal reform program, while civic politics and popular opinion have increasingly contested the program's essential principles and practices. The political compression of the private press has diminished its capacity to represent and organize popular civil society. Civic leaders and organizers now commonly express doubts about not only the political leanings of the Zanu(PF)-dominated Zimpapers, but also the critical sympathies of leading sections of the private media. This shifting relationship has important implications for the role of the private media in national politics, the process of liberalization within the public media sector and more generally, for the trajectory of the democratization movement in coming years.

Criticisms benefit Zanu(PF)

In some regards, Zanu(PF)'s attempts to repackage its political program by realigning itself with fractious capital have helped the party to absorb criticisms and demands for political reform, expressed through the private media. Indeed, the party has studiously reaped political benefit from albeit limited liberalization within the private press. It has deflected allegations of political intol-

erance by pointing to its media critics as thriving examples of Zimbabweans' freedom of expression. What is not mentioned by party officials, but well understood by journalists, publishers and much of their readership, is the limited nature of criticism that is tolerated without re-priming. Despite its rhetorical commitment to press freedom, the ruling party still holds the monopoly on the electronic media via the ZBC, still keeps a tight grip on Zimpapers and Ziana, and still maintains legal measures that it uses to contain investigative reportage and commentary within tight borders.

The privatizing passion of Zanu (PF)'s neo-liberal state has not been exercised on the jealously-guarded national public media. This gaping contradiction now attracts the attention of both the private sector and reform activists in the civic movement. Both sides insist on opening up the public press and broadcasting system and making them accessible to social interests beyond the ruling party. But while it is apparent that this process must involve the de-linking of the public media from Zanu(PF) and the creation of a press that reflects more accurately the plural nature of Zimbabwean civil society, the precise means by which de-linking should be accomplished – and the preferred ownership structure of the public media in the future – are less clear, and open to contention.

The current wave of political liberalization, set against the backdrop of neo-liberalism's attack on the nationalist state, and on the rights of social groups to gain access to lead institutions in the state and civil society and hold them politically accountable, clearly contains both opportunities and obstacles for democracy activists. In the wake of the recent performance of the leading sections of the private press, it is apparent that privatization of the public press alone is not sufficient to guarantee greater plurality and diversity in a new media.

Narrower access possible

In de-linking the public media from formal political organizations, questions arise about the narrower access that might result from new ownership patterns. To date such questions have been addressed mainly by Zanu(PF), which in trying to protect the state's hold on the public media has warned of the dangers of the alternative: a (white) minority-controlled national media. In the future, it is likely the party will opt for a degree of privatization that primarily benefits its business supporters. This option, too, clearly hinders democratization of the media.

For the most part, leading civics in Zimbabwe have failed to fully address this issue. The calls made through the Zimbabwe Media Council and other institutions for openness, professionalism, tolerance, and reduced censorship in the national media have been first steps; but the key issue of how to structure public accountability within the media has been absent from debate. This reflects uncertainty over the political viability of either a newly configured public media infrastructure, or a fully privatized one. In the past, both have led to popular disillusionment with the national media. In a period of economic and political "liberalization" controlled by a single political organization, there are few practical options for the "democratization" of the public media that do not invite the political penetration by Zanu(PF) or its surrogates.

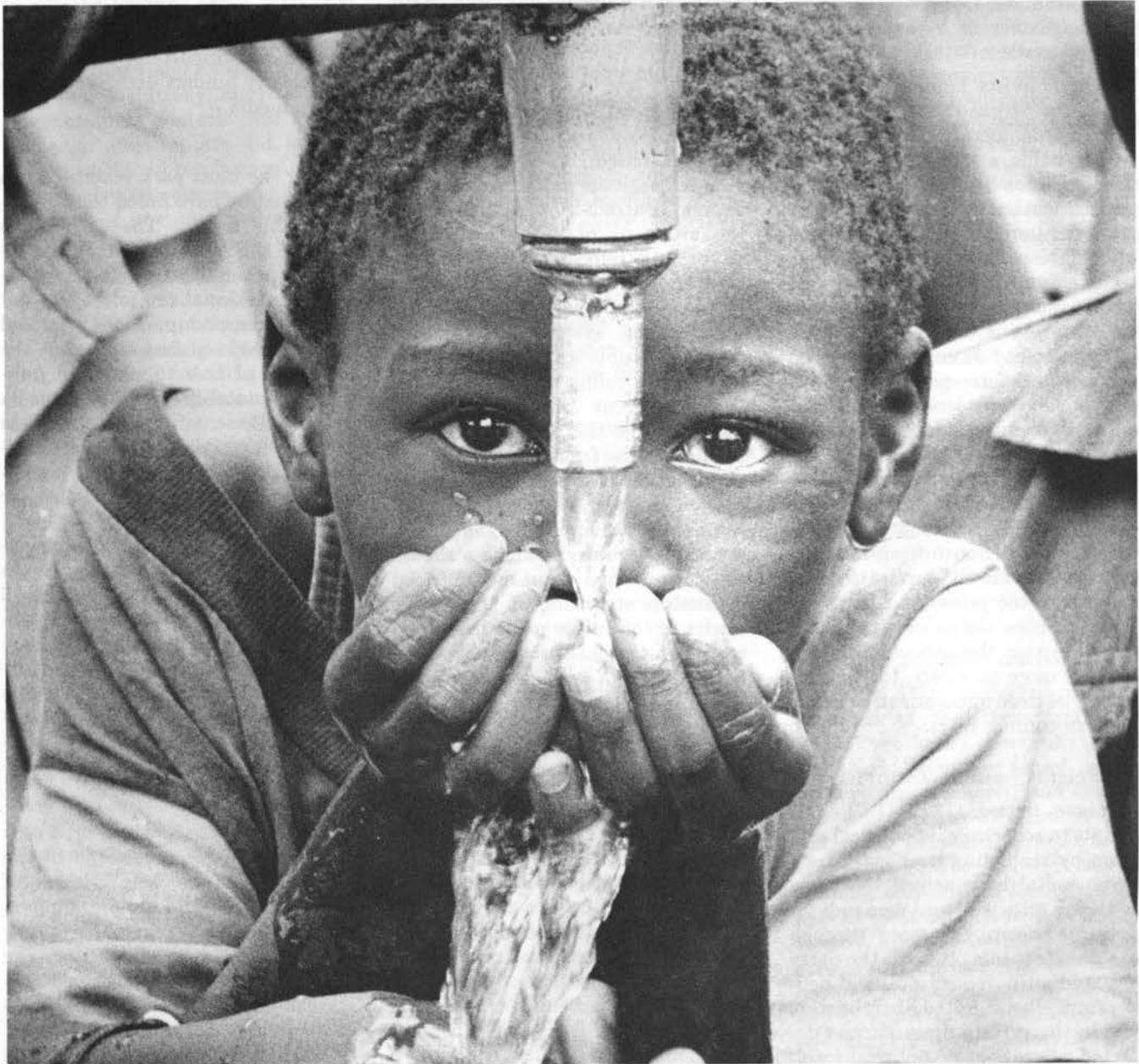
Despite the growing self-confidence of some sections of the private media in their critique of state politics, and public support for the media to "remain at the cutting edge" of civil society, the centre of the democratization struggle has shifted closer to the grassroots of civic activism in the 1990s. In recent years, leading civics have

found more direct means of intervention in the political space, in lobbying government, networking with other civics at all levels, and using established structures such as the churches and social development agencies to communicate with potential allies. This evolving strategy has its own weaknesses, but is nevertheless helping to establish a basis for the wider participation of civics and other social groups in the national political process.

Democracy activism on rise

The state's response, which has included legislated attacks and other efforts at subjugation and encirclement, suggests this strategy may be having some success. Space for democratic activism continues to open. Civics have been able to pry their way into engagement with the state through a reformulated popular nationalist critique ranged against ESAP and its World

Bank and IMF sponsors. This new, loosely-configured nationalist perspective includes the central demand that "national programs" like ESAP be made national by including a diversity of national social interests. Such a popular, inclusive model of nationalism constitutes a powerful challenge to that constructed by Zanu(PF), and seems likely to form the fulcrum point for Zimbabwe's democratization politics in coming years.



Caleb Kenna - Impact Visuals

The State of NGOs in Zimbabwe Honeymoon Over?

BY SARA RICH

Sara Rich, who is pursuing a D. Phil at Oxford, is currently working with ZimRight and with the Ecumenical Support Services in Zimbabwe.

"At Independence we laid down our advocacy ... and we have paid a heavy price."

Paul Nyathi,
director, Zimbabwe Project

After independence, many of Zimbabwe's NGOs benefited from their close links with the government. Even now most would probably describe their relationship with the state as co-operative. It is still *de rigueur*, certainly, to invite a Cabinet Minister, MP or party functionary to open workshops, conferences, and meetings. Beyond the symbols, however, there is also the hard fact that the state remains the dominant player, encouraging a positive working relationship when it serves its purposes while obstructing any NGOs that are perceived to be problematic.

Not surprisingly, then, most NGOs have been working co-operatively with the state as useful to achieving their goals and have remained loyal to the government, rather than criticizing it. Still, the fact remains that an increasing number of NGOs are becoming disillusioned with at least some members of the government. More generally, rising state intolerance of NGO criticism has recently driven some of them towards more active advocacy and lobbying, with many members describing themselves as feeling forced, increasingly, to take an oppositional stance.

Thus, a number of NGOs which, traditionally, had links with the

liberation movements, such as the Zimbabwe Project, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), have become increasingly critical of the ZANU (PF) government. For many, the reports of human rights atrocities committed in Matabeleland during the 1980s [see the accompanying story, in this issue, by Iden Wetherell] were the first sign of trouble. Growing signs of corruption, electoral violence, and intolerance moved other NGOs to take up such issues. Meanwhile, new NGOs, created to address the concerns of post-independence Zimbabwe – women's groups, housing and street children's issues, AIDs and human rights – often lacked a history of close links with the state and were, in consequence, that much more willing to take up a critical stance towards state shortcomings when it seemed necessary to do so.

Of course, most NGOs would agree that state-civil society relations have improved from the difficult days of the 1980s when the state, at war with dissidents in Matabeleland linked to opposition party ZAPU, saw any independent activity as a threat, especially in the Matabeleland and Midlands areas where ZAPU dominated. Yet tensions remain. The Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) monitors many NGOs, and so those working in politically sensitive areas are careful not to discuss confidential issues on the phone. Some NGOs report unexpected visits by CIO agents. In other cases, staff members of NGOs engaged in controversial activities report being followed by CIO agents, who then try to recruit them as informers. Even if the political at-

mosphere for NGOs was not overly threatening, such patterns certainly affected their work, particularly in rural areas.

The PVO act

Then, in 1995, the tensions between the state and NGOs heightened with the introduction of the Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) Act. This Act gave the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare the mandate to register and de-register NGOs, and to suspend executive committee members if it appeared to the Minister on information supplied to him that: (a) the organization no longer operated according to the objective specified in its constitution; or (b) the organization was being poorly administered, jeopardizing its activities; or (c) the organization was involved in illegal activities; or (d) it was necessary or desirable to do so in the public interest. Opponents of the Act argued that NGOs are responsible to their membership and donors, who can remove unsatisfactory leadership or cease funding, and criminal penalties for mismanagement, fraud and other illegal activities also can be applied. Therefore, they questioned why NGOs need "special protection" not required by private businesses or other professional organizations.

In addition, and despite government protestations to the contrary, most observers agree that there was little or no consultation over the PVO Act. The National Association of NGOs (NANGO), with a mandate to inform and mobilize NGOs, has been widely criticized for failing to tell members about the proposed act before it went before Parliament: apparently the only substantive crit-

icism NANGO relayed to Social Welfare was that NGOs preferred the title "NGO Act." Nor was there any real discussion of the Act in Parliament, with only the responsible Minister speaking to the motion which brought in the act. Nor did the passage of the legislation bring much immediate reaction from NGOs – although many did say they were surprised by the act, and, as noted, blamed NANGO for failing to inform them.

The case of the AWC

However, the possible negative implications of the Act for NGOs quickly became apparent. In November 1995, it was used for the first time to remove 12 members of the Executive Committee of the Association of Women's Clubs (AWC) from office. The Association of Women's Clubs has the distinction of being the oldest NGO founded by a black Zimbabwean woman, but otherwise is unremarkable. Begun in 1938 by Helen Mangwende to cultivate skills among grassroots rural women, it was revitalized after Independence. In 1994-5 the AWC was pledged ZWD\$11 million in donor funding to proceed with new programs including skills training and a revolving fund and loan facility to support small scale business activities. However, on 2 November 1995, a one-page Government Gazette announced the suspension of the Executive Committee, except for two members from the Mashonaland region.

Most AWC programs were stopped during the interregnum. The AWC lost credibility both in the rural areas where they work and in the donor community. The ousted women and their families also suffered from the allegations made against them, like Kate MacNeillage, who spoke of being ostracized from her church: "When I enter, they look at me like I am a thief. It is the responsibility of the [Zimbabwe Republic Police] to arrest thieves . . . so why are they not arresting us?"

In 1996, the twelve filed a suit with the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe, contesting the constitutionality of the applicable section of the PVO Act. They alleged that the powers given to the Minister of Social Welfare were in conflict with the Zimbabwean constitution, which guaranteed freedom of association, freedom of expression and the right to a fair hearing. In a ruling handed down on 11 February 1997, the five judges unanimously found that the Act did indeed infringe on the right to a fair hearing. In particular, the judges noted that the act empowered the Minister to act on the basis of information he received regardless of the source of that information, which could be hearsay or malicious. Under the Act, the Minister was not required to hold any sort of inquiry to establish the facts of the case, nor to reveal the reasons for his decision or actions. The court noted that although the Chairperson and officials of Social Welfare had met, no meeting, much less a fair hearing, had been attended by all the women affected, and so they had no chance to defend themselves.

As a result of the decision, the women were at liberty to resume their roles and duties as members of the AWC executive, with their costs paid by the Department of Social Welfare. Rumours were widespread that there would be demonstrations against the court ruling by "ZANU (PF) women," and threats that the AWC women involved, and the members of the PVO Act campaign, would be beaten and harassed. The AWC executive which had been put in place by Social Welfare initially refused to leave the AWC offices, but eventually vacated after a Ministry directive. Because there were allegations that the interim committee sold assets of the AWC, the ousted executive determined not to resume office before an audit of the premises was held. Then they intended to hold new elections for the Executive and start afresh.

It is still not clear why the women were removed. AWC was by no means an oppositional or outspoken NGO. Rumours circulated around Harare about financial mismanagement and other administrative problems, but no charges ever were laid nor did the Ministry present any evidence during the Supreme Court case. One local newspaper story alleged that the women had been replaced by "loyal Women's League members" but Sekai Holland, the ousted Chairperson, suggested that it was a fight among ZANU(PF) cliques, since most AWC members are ZANU women. She suggested that the party's Women's League merely wanted control of the substantial donor funds the AWC was receiving!

The NGO community gave little support to the ousted women, until a group of NGO activists organized a workshop in response to the Act itself in June 1996. Several initiatives emerged from this workshop including action on land and the constitution, and, notably, the Campaign for the Repeal of the PVO Act.

NGO convention

The NGO sector in Zimbabwe is disorganized and fragmented. The umbrella body, NANGO, no longer functions in any meaningful way, and had long lost credibility in the eyes of both donors and members. NANGO's failure to grapple with the PVO Act merely deepened its crisis. NANGO's problems were exposed to public scrutiny in mid-1996, after five members of the Northern Region committee (including Harare) resigned citing a lack of transparency. All five were prominent members of the NGO community and two also played important roles on NANGO's National Executive. The resignations and subsequent dismissal of the executive director – who was criticized for personalizing the organization and indulging in extensive foreign travel – were but indicators of deeper problems within

NANGO. Donors also complained that NANGO lacked transparency and was using project funds for administrative purposes. NANGO also faced a crippling deficit of ZWD\$2 million, owed substantial back pay to staff, and was in need of new premises for its head office.

There were signs of possible resolution of some of these problems

taken. Despite considerable good will as regards possible continued co-operation and self-sustainability, it still seemed that the obstacles to resurrecting NANGO might prove to be beyond the capacity of those willing to work within its structure.

Campaigns and coalitions

In contrast, the liveliest forums of critical analysis and action within

preferable to the original proposal.

The Working Group on Gender Politics, a group of feminists and women's leaders co-ordinated by the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network, met regularly with female Parliamentarians, and managed to delay the second reading of the long-awaited Inheritance Bill, so that Parliamentarians could consider materials collected from Zimbabwean women.

The Lobby and Advocacy Group (LAG), a coalition of about 50 NGOs co-ordinated by the Ecumenical Support Services (ESS), evolved out of meetings with the World Bank and IMF in 1995, when NGOs realized they needed to prepare for such meetings and develop a coherent position, rather than trying to influence the process individually. LAG has initiated a letter-writing campaign requesting a consultation on the second phase of economic reforms, attempted to bring Ministry of Finance officials and NGOs together for dialogue, and is in the process of approaching Parliamentarians to attend a joint Parliamentarian-NGO workshop. LAG has also just launched an electronic conference to discuss lobbying and advocacy.

Most importantly, perhaps, the previously-mentioned Campaign for the Repeal of the PVO Act has developed into a mature group of activists who meet weekly to plan their strategy. The Campaign has collected over 5000 signatures on a petition calling for the repeal of the Act, which it intends to present to the Minister of Social Welfare if she agrees to meet with them. The Campaign has informed local and international NGOs about the Act, holding a series of public meetings and preparing materials for NGOs. Now that the Department of Social Welfare has acknowledged the need to revise the Act, the Campaign hopes to co-ordinate a consultation process to draft new legislation.



Simeon Mawanza - ZimRights

Sekai Holland, chairperson of AWC

at a national NGO convention in April, 1997, that brought together 200 NGOs to discuss NANGO's state of affairs and determine a way forward. However, even this convention was planned without a great deal of consultation, and some of the most active NGOs remained dubious that the convention could initiate change. Many Harare-based activists had already tried in vain to reform NANGO, and were unwilling to invest more time on the problem. In the end, several initiatives to resolve the deficit and staffing crises were mooted, but few decisions

the NGO sector at the moment are the numerous small, ad-hoc coalitions campaigning around particular issues. Thus, in 1996 the Movement for Constitutional Equality managed to change a gender-biased constitutional amendment proposal, by which foreign wives of Zimbabwean men automatically became eligible for citizenship while foreign husbands of Zimbabwean women still had to meet strict immigration criteria. The resulting gender neutral amendment granted automatic citizenship neither to wives nor to husbands; not an optimal outcome, but

Civil society?

If "civil society" is truly the hope for democracy in countries like Zimbabwe, then these low-cost initiatives, often without budgets, offices of their own, or full-time staff, seem to be the most likely purveyors. Yet even here personalities and politics interfere. The PVO Act Campaign, in particular, has been accused of being "too political" and of dividing the NGO community by being too critical of NANGO. One attempt to resolve these problems was a proposal that the NGOs reorganize themselves sectorally, with a national umbrella body to co-ordinate matters between these issue-oriented sectors. Notwithstanding some difficulties with this organizing structure, it seems promising.

Even more promising is the fact that the NGO community does seem to be developing advocacy skills which were not apparent even a few years ago. Despite the experience with structural adjustment in other African states, when Zimbabwe first brought in their 1991 adjustment package (ESAP), there was little practical involvement by NGOs or other sectors of civil society. Now, as the second phase of reforms is being introduced, NGOs are actively engaged in public consultation and trying to engage the government in a dialogue. True, most of this latter effort has been in vain. Nonetheless, such NGOs have at least begun to provide Zimbabweans with alternative ideas and initiatives, thus complementing the efforts of the weak but growing political opposition movement (which, however, recently scored victories municipally), and of the independent press [although for some of the press' ambiguities in this regard see the accompanying article by Richard Saunders].

It remains to be seen what lessons activists in the Zimbabwean NGO sector will draw from these recent experiences in order to advance further struggles. It

will be a story worth following. Perhaps, too, there will also be lessons to be learned from this story by South African activists,

who are, after all, going through a similar transition from opposing an illegitimate government to forging a new relationship with old allies.

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The Matabeleland Report

A Lot to Hide

BY IDEN WETHERELL

Iden Wetherell is assistant editor of the Zimbabwe Independent, a national weekly.

Zimbabwe's rulers have reacted defiantly to a report which implicates them in gross human rights violations in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces in the 1980s.

The report "Breaking the Silence" was compiled by two local non-governmental organisations, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF), and presented to President Robert Mugabe in March. It provides shocking evidence that thousands of innocent villagers were starved, tortured and murdered as the army's North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade ram-

paged through the western and central provinces in the mid-1980s in a campaign to suppress veteran nationalist Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (Zapu).

While the target of the campaign, codenamed Gukurahundi after the first summer storm, was ostensibly ex-guerrillas loyal to Nkomo, the casualties were overwhelmingly Ndebele-speaking civilians.

Mugabe has yet to respond formally to the report, details of which have been leaked to the press, and the Catholic bishops are refusing to release it until he has done so. But this has not stopped him from launching a vitriolic broadside against the CCJP, describing the report as

"divisive." In a clear swipe at the authors, Mugabe criticised "people who wear religious garb and publish reports that are decidedly meant to divide us." "Let us remember," he said, "that there are those who are bent on mischief-making - persons perhaps who see in our unity and the history of the struggle that unites us, a force against their own machinations." "If we dig up the country's history in this way," the president warned, "we wreck the nation and we tear our people apart into factions."

The state media has obediently taken up the theme, suggesting the report was part of a wider conspiracy to divert attention from the ruling Zanu-PF party's programme to redistribute land and localise economic ownership. One newspaper

The following are unauthorized excerpts from "Breaking the Silence: Report on the 1980s Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands," compiled by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, March 1997. The report is available electronically at <http://www.mg.co.za/mg/zim>.

5 Brigade was destined to become the most controversial army unit ever formed in Zimbabwe. Within weeks of being mobilised at the end of January 1993 under Colonel Perence Shiri, 5 Brigade was responsible for mass murders, beatings and property burnings in the communal living areas of Northern Matabeleland, where hundreds of thousands of ZAPU supporters lived.

Within the space of six weeks, more than 2000 civilians had died, hundreds of homesteads had been burnt, and thousands of civilians had been beaten. Most of the dead were killed in public executions, involving between 1 and 12 people at a time. The largest number of dead in a single incident so far on record was in Lupane, where 62 men and women were shot on the banks of the Cewale River on 5 March.

[In Matabeleland South], in addition to the food embargo, mass detentions became a deliberate strategy of 5 Brigade activity. At least 2000 men and women, including adolescents, could be held at one time in Bhalagwe Camp, near Maphisa (Antelope) in Matobo. People were detained for several days or weeks, in appalling conditions. Many people died, and others suffered permanent injuries. It is likely that around

8,000 civilians were detained during these few months, possibly many more. Once more, it was mainly innocent civilians who suffered.

The strategy of 5 Brigade varied in the two regions of Matabeleland, with Matabeleland North experiencing more public executions, and Matabeleland South experiencing more widespread detention, beatings and deaths at Bhalagwe camp: both areas experienced mass beatings in the village setting.

Victims from most areas report that 5 Brigade would forbid people who were badly injured by them from seeking medical attention. In some cases 5 Brigade would return the day after they had been in an area, to "execute" badly injured victims. Other interviews report victims who spend several days with agonising injuries, too afraid to leave their huts, before finally they were helped by fellow villagers to make harrowing journeys on back paths, with the victim in a wheelbarrow or scotch cart, to get medical attention.

TESTIMONIAL 1:

On 5 March 1983 four people were taken from our home. The youngest was myself, then a girl of fifteen. The 5 Brigade took us - there were more than a hundred of them. We were asleep when they came, but they woke us up, and accused the four of us - me and my three brothers - of being dissidents. They then marched us at gun point for about 3 hours until they reached a camp.

We were lined up and had to give our names, before they took us to a building where there were finally 62 people.

edited by a Mugabe relative invariably applies the prefix "alleged" to any mention of the atrocities.

But in Matabeleland itself there is outrage that Mugabe's government is attempting to exculpate itself under the cover of national unity. Roger Sibanda, a former guerrilla, reflects a widely-held view that "the souls of the Ndebele who were massacred during Gukurahundi will never rest until their families are compensated and traditional rites performed." There is growing pressure for full disclosure of wrong-doing.

Professor Welshman Ncube of the University of Zimbabwe Law faculty said people who were responsible for atrocities against civilians had no moral authority to occupy senior positions in the government and armed forces. "Mass murderers should not be entrusted with responsibility," he said, "especially where they are tasked with protecting human rights."

The authors see their proposal

for a Reconciliation Trust to channel assistance to survivors and victims' families as essential to a healing of the wounds – psychological as much as physical – in Matabeleland where alienation is still strong.

The refusal of the Catholic bishops to release the report has caused friction with their co-authors, the Legal Resources Foundation, who are now threatening to publish it themselves. LRF spokesmen privately voice suspicion that the bishops are anxious to appease Mugabe and sweep the whole issue under the State House carpet. Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa presided over Mugabe's wedding to his former staffer Grace Marufu last August.

Amnesty International, who Mugabe labelled "Amnesty Lies" when the human rights watchdog asked him to investigate allegations of torture in 1984, has meanwhile urged the Zimbabwean leader to acknowledge that massive human rights violations took place and to remove those identified as having been in-

involved. In a letter to Mugabe, who is the new Organisation of African Unity chairman, Amnesty International secretary-general Pierre Sané of Senegal said repression of discussion on the report would prevent reconciliation and was in itself a human rights violation.

"When a state continues to deny its responsibility for atrocities committed by its security forces and suppresses open dialogue about human rights violations, a sense of impunity is created as members of state agencies feel that they can abuse human rights without being punished," Sané said citing the examples of Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

He called on Mugabe to be more than just a figurehead OAU leader by promoting and protecting human rights among member states. Despite the furor, the majority of Zimbabweans still have no idea of what took place in Matabeleland in the 1980s thanks to a largely complicit state-owned media. Mugabe clearly aims to keep it that way.

Then they took us out one by one and beat us. They beat me with a thick stick about eighteen inches long all over the body. We were beaten until about 3 A.M.

Then the 5 Brigade marched us to the Cewale River, a few hundred meters away. All 62 of us were lined up and shot by the 5 Brigade. One of my brothers was killed instantly, from a bullet through his stomach. By some chance, 7 of us survived with gun shot wounds. I was shot in the left thigh. The 5 Brigade finished off some of the others who survived, but my 2 brothers and I pretended to be dead.

After some time, we managed to get home. The 5 Brigade came looking for survivors of this incident at home – they found my brother who was badly injured, but left him . . . My brother had a gun shot wound in the chest and arm, and later had to have his arm amputated at the elbow, and then later at the shoulder. My brother had to have his food amputated because of a bullet wound.

TESTIMONIAL 2:

The uniformed 5 Brigade soldiers arrived and ordered my husband to carry all the chairs, a table, bed, blankets, clothes and put them in one room. They also took all our cash – we had \$1,500 saved, to buy a scotch cart. They then set fire to the hut and burnt all our property.

They accused my husband of having a gun, which he did not have. They shot at him. The first two times, they missed, but the third time they shot him in the stomach and killed him.

They then beat me very hard, even though I was pregnant. I told them I was pregnant, and they told me I should not have children for the whole of Zimbabwe. My mother-in-law tried to plead with them, but they shouted insults at her. They hit me on the stomach with the butt of the gun. The unborn child broke into pieces in my stomach. The baby boy died inside. It was God's desire that I did not die too. The child was born afterwards, piece by piece. A head alone, then a leg, an arm, the body – piece by piece.

The impact of 5 Brigade in Matabeleland North and South was profound. In both regions, 5 Brigade enhanced the notion of "ethnic" difference, produced a widespread fear, and developed a conviction that political freedom of expression was not permissible in Zimbabwe. This conviction remains today. In both regions, rural government in the 1980s continued to be incapacitated and subject to attack, even once 5 Brigade was withdrawn.

As 5 Brigade violence in both areas was very sudden and very intense, it was perceived as worse than anything ever experienced before. People retain the perception that such state inflicted violence could occur again in the future: having once witnessed the completely unexpected and inexplicable, it is not unreasonable to assume it could recur, particularly as the events of the 1980s have never been publicly acknowledged and no guarantees that it will not happen again have been given.



Rodger Bosch - Impact Visuals

Banning Landmines

A Conference Report

BY VALERIE WARMINGTON

Valerie Warmington is the Chairperson of Mines Action Canada, a coalition of Canadian NGOs and others committed to achieving a global ban on landmines and to increasing support for mine clearance and victim assistance in affected regions of the world.

There are an estimated 50 million landmines scattered throughout Africa, twenty million in Southern Africa alone. Estimates suggest that 250,000 people have died or been injured because of landmines in Africa in the past 35 years. Yet as political discussions aimed at ending the humanitarian crises caused by landmines intensifies, African governments have remained relatively silent on the issue, despite being

the most heavily mine-affected continent in the world.

Earlier in February, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), working closely with newly-formed coalition member, the Mozambique Campaign to Ban Landmines, sponsored the 4th International NGO Conference on Landmines in Maputo, Mozambique. An impressive 450 organizations from 60 countries gathered together to consider how to reach and mobilize more organizations in this global campaign.

The conference was an undeniable success. Announcements by the governments of South Africa and

Mozambique that they had banned landmines captured media and public attention throughout the region and around the world. These governments, as well as those of Malawi, Swaziland and Tanzania, joined the more than 50 countries around the globe supporting a fast-track approach to banning landmines. Popularly referred to as the Ottawa Process, this approach calls for countries to become involved in the negotiation and signing of a treaty banning landmines in Canada in December this year.

The Ottawa Process is increasingly recognized as an achievable and credible approach to the call for strong and urgent international

landmines

action against anti-personnel mines. In the final session of the Maputo Conference, the 800-NGO strong ICBL reaffirmed its commitment to the Ottawa Process and underscored its view that other forums, such as the UN Conference on Disarmament would take too long.

The ICBL's base of support in Africa was significantly expanded and strengthened as a result of the Maputo Conference. Established campaigns, like the South African Campaign to Ban Landmines, with a membership of over 100 NGOs, shared their experience with many interested NGOs and emerging campaigns across Africa. Many of these campaigns are new to the world of political lobbying and inexperienced in mobilizing public opinion in support of political objectives. However, this inexperience is countered by the motivation, commitment and determination of these individuals and groups in their opposition to landmines.

The Association of Disabled People in Mozambique (ADEMO) is actively involved in the Mozambican campaign. ADEMO members are collecting signatures for the petition to ban landmines globally.

A hopeful sign of the growing recognition of ban-landmine coalitions

by governments was a recent invitation by the Zimbabwean Government to the country's Campaign to Ban Landmines to tour the Zimbabwe Defence Industries (ZDI) factory in Domboshawa. The invitation was intended to confirm that the factory was not producing landmines. While encouraged by the gesture and the briefing given to them by ZDI's General-Manager Colonel T.J. Dube, the Campaign points out that more than an end to production is required. Large stockpiles remain intact and an estimated 1 million mines pollute Zimbabwe's land. The Zimbabwe Campaign continues to encourage the government to commit itself to the Ottawa Process, destroy existing stockpiles and increase efforts at mine clearance.

The Angolan Campaign to Ban Landmines took advantage of a recent visit to Angola by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to get his signature on a petition calling for a comprehensive and immediate ban on landmines. Mr. Annan's signature is an important addition to the millions of signatures collected around the world by national ban-landmine campaigns.

Recently, national campaigns in southern Africa and other inter-

ested groups met in Harare to develop strategies to ensure strong South Africa Development Community (SADC) involvement in the Ottawa Process. Zimbabwe is expected to join Mozambique and South Africa in banning landmines. Malawi, Swaziland and Tanzania have expressed their support for a ban but seem to be waiting to see how other governments respond at the Organization for African Unity Conference on a Landmine Free Africa taking place in Johannesburg May 19 to 21.

At the Harare meeting, a committee was formed to coordinate regional efforts to convince governments to participate in negotiating and signing a treaty banning landmines this December.

Regionally, another important opportunity for southern African campaigns to draw attention to the landmines issue was an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) hosted seminar for senior political and military officials of SADC states held in Harare April 20 to 23. The seminar facilitated an exchange of information and experience between SADC members aimed at producing a common southern African approach to the anti-personnel mines problem. This meeting was also an excellent opportunity for Campaign members to capitalize on media and public interest.

Media interest in the landmines issue remains high in southern Africa. Recent coverage included a call by Mozambican President Chissano for a global ban on anti-personnel landmines at the Islamic Conference in Pakistan, coverage of the Harare campaign meeting and the ICRC seminar.

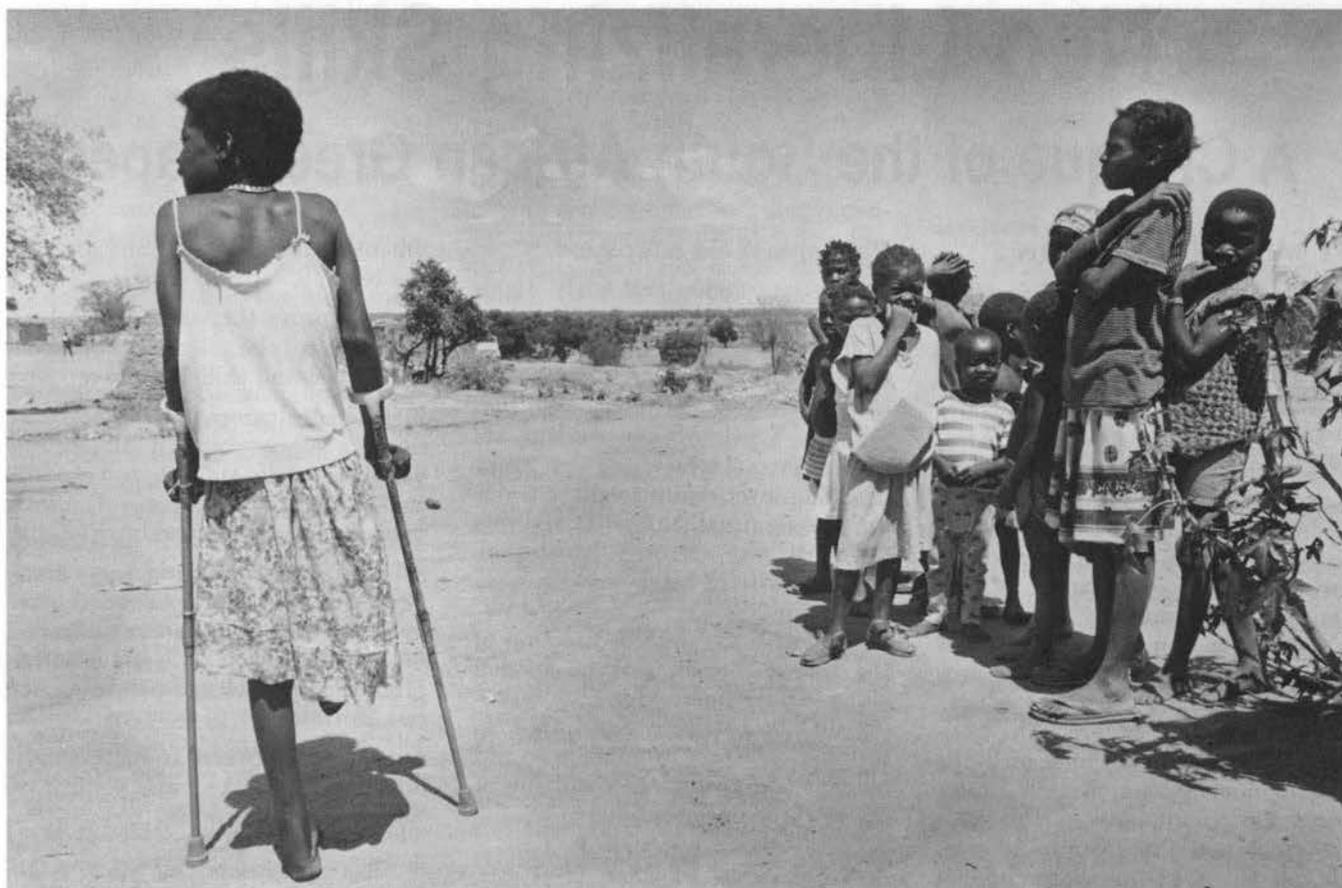
The next major opportunity to promote the campaign is the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Conference on a Landmine Free Africa: The OAU and the Legacy of Anti-Personnel Mines in Kempton Park, South Africa, May 19-21. On the opening day of the conference, the



Valerie Warrington

Red flags mark detected mines for later detonation

landmines



Rodger Bosch - Impact Visuals

South African government intends to destroy some landmines. This conference provides a unique opportunity for campaigners to meet with African government representatives and to provide them with information that has persuaded other governments to ban landmines and to increase efforts at mine clearance and victim assistance.

Like the ICRC seminar, the OAU conference provides NGOs with ready access to the media. Campaigners will focus the attention of African citizens and citizens around the world on the positions of participating governments. Efforts to take full advantage of these opportunities are being spearheaded by the South African Campaign to Ban Landmines. The experience gained will strengthen the capacity of African Campaigns to inform people everywhere of the humanitarian and developmental realities of land-

mines and what their governments can and should be doing.

Landmines must be banned. On my way to a minefield being cleared by the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs in Mozambique, I passed through a small village. "The minefield is just ahead," my UN companion informed me. "The mines in this area were laid in rings around villages like this one, probably as a defensive measure." The boundary of the minefield was marked with white ribbon. As we drew closer, I was horrified to see two young girls carrying wood leaving the mined area. Sensing my concern, my UN colleague assured me that they had cleared a "safe lane" to allow villagers access to areas outside the ring of mines. His words could not erase the image of a picture I had seen of the horribly mangled body of a small boy who, as children are prone to do, had

stepped outside the bounds of a similar "safe lane" on his way to school.

The sight of about 20 landmines uncovered and awaiting destruction at the minefield, an area once used as farmland, did little to allay my fears. Nor did the discovery of two tripwired bounding fragmentation mines. Yet, in watching the committed and skilled Mozambican deminers, I realized that in this area at least, it would one day be safe to farm, collect wood and send children out to play.

The price of clearing mines left behind after countless conflicts around the world is overwhelming our capacity to respond. In light of the humanitarian, development and economic costs of landmines, it is incomprehensible that governments continue to tolerate the production and use of so destructive a weapon. The answer is clear - landmines must be banned now.

Neo-Liberalizing Skills

A Critique of the South African Green Paper

BY MELANIE SAMSON

Melanie Samson is with the Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand.

Introduction

The restructuring of apartheid era industrial education and training is undeniably one of the key challenges to be addressed in the democratisation and transformation of the South African economy. For almost a decade the democratic movement has, therefore, been developing proposals for a post-apartheid education and training system. The publication of the Green Paper on Skills Development in March 1997 represents the culmination of this process, and indeed many of its proposals are the same as those mooted by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in the early 1990s. However, the government's neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR), which now sets the policy context, has stripped these proposals of their radical content.

The Green Paper represents yet another example of the ANC's capitulation to neo-liberal restructuring. A careful reading reveals the extent to which the democratic movement's calls for redress and broader economic transformation have been whittled down to narrowly economic proposals for growth in an "internationally competitive" economy. The reframing of education and training as tools for microeconomic reform is starkly revealed by the full title of the Green Paper, the "Green Paper on a Skills Development Strategy for Economic and Employment Growth in South Africa."

Post-apartheid education

In the late 1980s and early 1990s COSATU began to explore the possibilities for restructuring education and training in South Africa. Apartheid education had denied the majority of South African workers access to formal education and training. Employer commitment to training was minimal, and what training did exist was narrowly vocational. The majority of black workers were trapped in low-paying, unskilled positions, with the unskilled section of the labour market further divided along gender lines. Moreover, grading and wages were not linked to training, so those workers who did manage to improve their skills were not rewarded appropriately.

In response to these injustices, COSATU developed a set of proposals for the restructuring of education and training. COSATU proposed the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which would bring together the disparate apartheid education and training systems into one unified, outcomes-based system. This system would cover all levels of learning ranging from primary school and adult basic education up to post-doctoral degrees. Under the NQF South Africans would be able to receive accreditation for experience-based learning, and move more easily from non-formal education into the formal education system. Linking grading to wage structures through NQF-accredited training was central to the COSATU proposals.

The primary objective of the NQF as proposed by COSATU was to redress the structural discrimination of apartheid. A 1993 PRP doc-

ument identifies four main goals of the NQF:

- 1) to improve the wages of workers and reduce the disparity between low-skilled and skilled workers;
- 2) to create career-path opportunities for all workers in all sectors based on skills-training which will enable them to progressively move upwards over their working lifetime;
- 3) to remove discriminatory practices, built on gender or racial bias, by ensuring that fair assessment methods based on skills are used for promoting people and providing access to training;
- 4) to enable workers to increasingly intervene and take more control of the production process.

The proposals for the NQF were complimentary to COSATU's economic policy of *Growth Through Redistribution*, so that redress in the economic sphere would not only eliminate structural discrimination but also boost economic growth by expanding the domestic market.

Thus, social justice concerns were central to the proposed education and training reforms. However, the explicit commitment to redress was undermined by two factors present even in the early debates.

First, redress was not comprehensively theorised. Within the South African labour market the formal sector of the economy is still largely the preserve of black male workers, whereas black women are marginalised within the informal sector. The COSATU proposals for economic development and transformation did not deal with the informal sector, which made them gender biased as they did not address the working conditions of most black

women. Where the COSATU proposals did make explicit demands for the elimination of gender discrimination they were hindered by the treatment of women as a homogeneous category. Workers were either referred to as female or as black. The proposals were therefore incapable of addressing the specific problems of black women workers, and by default catered to the black male workers who already predominated in the formal sector of the economy.

Second, despite an official commitment to growth through redistribution, a line of argument developed simultaneously which stressed a slightly different relationship between the NQF and economic growth. The NQF proposals had been modeled largely on the Australian Vocational Training Programme (AVTP). This programme had been developed to train "multi-skilled" workers to advance the international competitiveness of the economy, not to promote redress. From a very early stage, therefore, these two distinct discourses around the role of the NQF sat somewhat uneasily side by side.

The Green Paper

The 1995 White Paper on Education and Training and the 1995 South African Qualifications Authority Act made legal provision for the establishment of an NQF. Under the NQF all education and training within South Africa is now meant to be outcomes-based, and to fall under three qualification bands: General Education and Training (which includes Adult Basic Education and Training and formal education up to grade 9), Further Education and Training (which includes high school certificates, as well as those earned through workplaces, Industry Training Boards and Colleges), and Higher Education and Training (which includes diplomas and occupational certificates up to post-doctoral degrees).

The NQF obviously requires fundamental restructuring of the apart-

heid education and training systems, and separate initiatives are required in each of the former systems to make them compatible with the new policy. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is slowly beginning to develop policy for the overall development and implementation of the NQF. Within the formal education sector an initiative called Curriculum 2005 has been the main attempt to align educational curriculum with the NQF. The Green Paper is the central effort to develop a comprehensive skills development strategy for the economy within the context of the NQF.

Education for economic competitiveness

The Green Paper makes a series of proposals for new structures and strategies for industrial education and training. It advocates the creation of a Research and Strategic Planning Unit (RSPU) which will collect, analyze and disseminate information on labour market trends and their implications for skills development. This information will be used by, amongst others, the proposed Sectoral Education and Training Organisations (SETOs). The SETOs will identify which skills are needed in their relevant economic sector, and on this basis recommend the creation of "learnerships" in strategic areas.

Learnerships (which will provide workers and potential workers with structured learning and work experience) are the only concrete proposal for the restructuring of industrial education and training contained within the Green Paper. They will be jointly developed by the SETOs and the relevant NQF bodies, and will be accredited within the NQF.

Finally, the Green Paper proposes a levy-grant scheme for training under which companies will pay a payroll levy, 80% of which will go to a Sectoral Skills Fund, and 20% of which will go to a National Skills Fund. Companies will then be able to apply for training grants

which will be awarded to training programmes that meet the sectoral needs as defined by the SETOs. Originally a payroll levy of 5% had been proposed, but in present discussions this figure has been lowered to 1.0-1.5%.

Redress absent

The fundamental preoccupation of the Green Paper is to reorganise and streamline education and training to promote economic growth. In his forward to the Green Paper the Minister of Labour, Tito Mboweni states that:

"It aims to set in motion a skills revolution in our country and nothing less than a revolution will suffice when one considers the urgent need for employment and productivity growth in our country. This Strategy does not claim the development of skills on its own will achieve these outcomes, but it does argue that skilled people are a fundamentally necessary part of any economic and employment growth strategy, and that re-establishing the linkages between learning and working is a condition for growth."

Linking skills development and economic growth is part of an international trend towards using education and training as tools for micro-economic reform. In an era when most governments (either through self-imposed economic policies such as GEAR or externally imposed structural adjustment programmes) have abandoned to the market almost all tools for economic intervention, the idea of harnessing education and training to the service of growth has become highly seductive. The Green Paper, GEAR, and all recent NQF related documents follow the international trend, promoting multi-skilled workers as the key to competitiveness.

Thus, the Green Paper decisively shifts the arguments for a new education and training system. The focus on economic growth and international competitiveness, which featured only marginally in



Kuninori Takahashi - Impact Visuals

the COSATU documents of the early 1990s, is now the main objective of the Green Paper. Moreover, the concept of redress, which was the overriding concern for COSATU, does not even feature in the Green Paper. While repeated reference is made to the need for "social development," this concept is never defined.

Some would argue that the Green Paper does provide for redress implicitly, by focusing on meeting the needs of "target groups." However, the approach to dealing with the target groups reproduces many of the problems of the early COSATU work. The target groups include the unemployed, retrenched workers, youth, women, people with disabilities and people in rural areas. The Green Paper provides no historical analysis to explain why and how these specific target groups have been marginalised, and there is no acknowledgment that neo-liberal macro-economic policies will further entrench these structural inequalities in the labour market.

Throughout the document the target groups are homogenized, so the reality of individuals suffering from multiple layers of structural

discrimination is not acknowledged. For example, the section outlining the problems in industry-based training for the target groups assumes that each target group receives training and education separately. This would seem to assume that all participants in programs for the unemployed, retrenched workers, youth, people with disabilities and people in rural areas are male, while women's training and education needs can be provided for in separate programs for women. The fact that women have been discriminated against in programs for all of the other target groups is not even identified by the authors of the Green Paper.

Despite claims that the Skills Development Strategy will improve the position of the target groups, the RSPU is not required to gather statistical information on their position in the labour market. There is therefore a danger that reliable indices of the Skills Development Strategy's success in catering to the most disadvantaged will not be available. Moreover, target groups will continue to be discriminated against in mainstream training programs as programmes need not demonstrate

that they are unbiased and cater to the needs of the target groups to receive grants. Unlike the COSATU documents the Green Paper includes the informal sector in its skills development strategy, and workers and potential workers in the *small micro enterprise* (SME) sector will be eligible to participate in the learnership programme. However, the Green Paper explicitly states that if the training is to culminate in a nationally recognised qualification, the [relevant] SETO will have to establish that the work experience meets the requirements of the industry and qualification. Moreover, small enterprises will only be eligible to provide the work component of the learnership, if they form groups of training companies which between them are able to provide the range of work experience required.

These conditions will be biased against the SME sector for several reasons. First, the SETOs will establish the requirements of the industry based on what is required to promote the international competitiveness of the sector. As SME producers are more concerned with small-scale production and basic survival, their education and

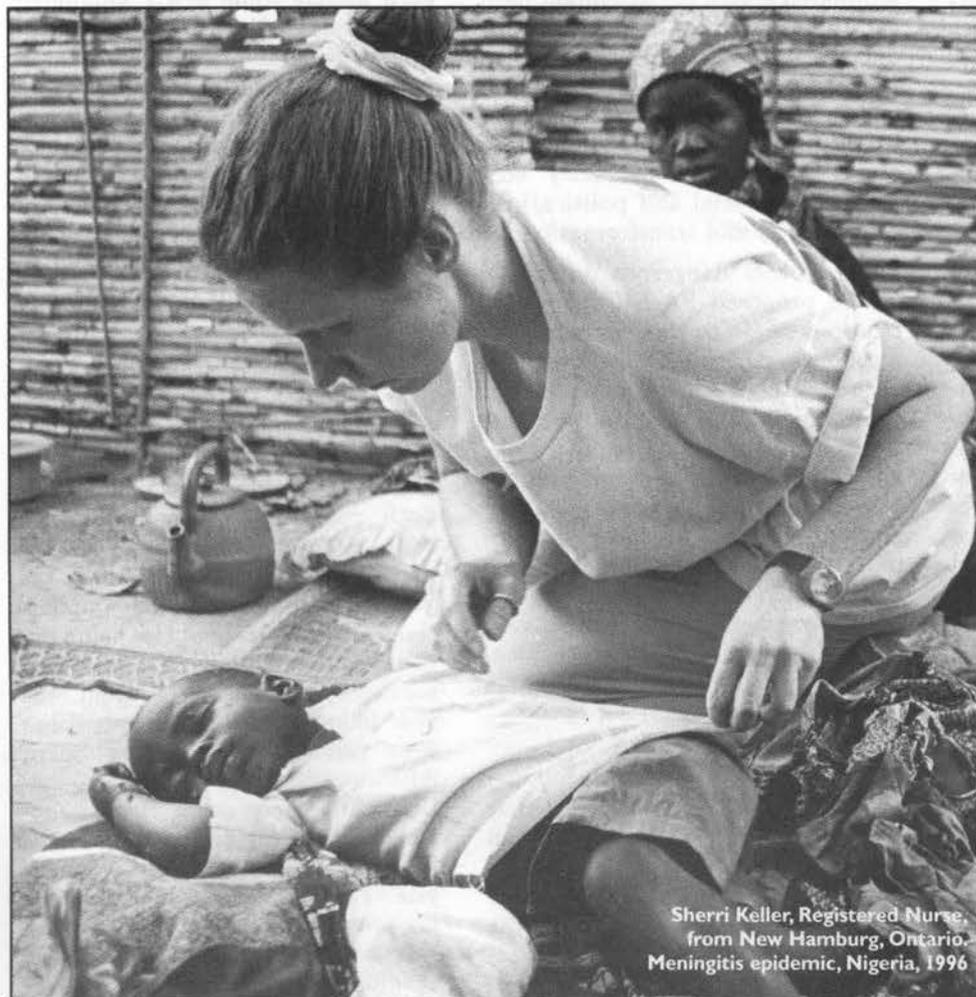
training needs will not necessarily fit with the requirements of industry. The likely result will be a mismatch between the learnerships offered to SMEs and the skills they require. Second, even if the types of skills required in the formal and informal sector were similar, the specific skills required may be different. A learnership placement in a formal sector workplace could therefore be inappropriate for someone working in a SME. For example, the training needs of a seamstress in the informal sector are very different from those of a woman working in a factory. Therefore, even though SMEs are nominally included in the Green Paper, no systematic effort is made to address the real development needs of that sector.

Shifting the debate?

GEAR explicitly called for a Skills Development Strategy to promote international competitiveness. The Green Paper responds to this demand by tightly knitting the provision of education and training to meeting the needs of strategic growth sectors of the economy. Although a token gesture is made to including SMEs in the strategy, the primary objective is undeniably to promote growth in the formal sector of the economy. With the Green Paper, a decade-long process of post-apartheid education and training policy-making has ended on a path very different from that on which it started. Rather than focusing on redress and leveraging radical transformation of

the economy, education and training have been transformed to serve international competition.

The Green Paper is still being discussed in the National Economic Development and Labour Council, and therefore there is some opportunity for Labour and the Community Constituency to object to its present formulation. However, the Skills Development Strategy is more about a development path for South Africa than it is about skills. With the ANC announcement that GEAR provides a non-negotiable framework for development, it seems doubtful that Labour and the Community Constituency will have much success in shifting the debate about education and training back on track.



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Rallying the Region

SA/EU Negotiations Continue

BY DOT KEET AND THE SAR EDITORIAL WORKING GROUP

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If there is consensus on anything in the contentious post-apartheid economic policy debates, it is that international trade will play a critical role. Two visions of trade and economic development have competed for predominance since the 1994 elections. The ANC's pre-election economic platform, the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP), advocated domestic industrial restructuring and stronger internal and regional economic links as the central task for economic development, with international trade following, and supporting, this internal transformation. The RDP called on South Africa to "integrate into the world economy in a manner that sustains a viable and efficient domestic manufacturing capacity and increases our potential to export manufactured goods," and "develop a prosperous and balanced regional economy in Southern Africa based on the principles of equity and mutual benefit." Yet this vision, which subordinated trade strategies to broader development goals, came up against globally dominant neo-liberal ideas about trade and economic development policies, ideas that prescribed rapid integration into global markets on the assumption that international competition would drive successful domestic restructuring.

In practice, global integration invariably takes place on terms to the distinct disadvantage of weaker

trading partners, destroying, rather than strengthening, much of their domestic manufacturing capacity. An article on South African trade negotiations with the European Union (see "Cap in Hand? South Africa & the European Union," *SAR*, 12, 1 [November, 1996]), exposed the extent to which the "free" trade deal on offer from the EU threatens to incorporate South Africa into the global market-place on terms and at a rate very different to what had previously been contemplated - with the attendant danger that many South African producers, forced to face competition from powerful European agricultural and industrial producers/exporters, would find it extremely difficult to carry through the necessary economic (and social and political) reconstruction and transformation.

The other dangerous dimension of the proposed SA-EU free trade relations relate to their implications for South Africa's fellow members of the southern African development community. The way the proposal was initially presented to SA by the EU ignored both the implications of such an FTA for these countries and their right to have a voice in the process. Furthermore the agreement, as conceived by the EU, seemed to threaten the very possibility of a viable regional integration and development project which the EU formally supports.

Some concerns

At the time of the first *SAR* article on this subject, the South African government had not yet formulated a response to the EU free trade proposal, and there were concerns that the government might not effectively resist the agreement, with all

of its negative implications for the South African agricultural and manufacturing sectors, and for South Africa's regional economic partners. The FTA proposal found support amongst the "old guard" denizens of the South African state apparatus, with their Eurocentric orientation towards South Africa's "traditional trade partners" and their neo-liberal convictions about the proper integration of SA in the global economy. However, the FTA also appeared to have found a certain acceptance even among some newly appointed government officials. Indeed, neo-liberal ideas about economic development strategies have gained rapid purchase in South Africa. The extensive liberalization of trade since 1994 has preceded rather than been a strategically wielded instrument of the extensive, managed domestic industrial restructuring advocated in the RDP and by the trade union federation COSATU.

The proposal from the European Union for a free trade agreement with South Africa did lay bare the implications of the neo-liberal economic development model for both domestic manufacturing and regional development rather starkly and it has contributed towards the growing debates on the implications of neo-liberal policies being imposed and adopted in South and southern Africa. In the event, the year following the EU proposal has seen various initiatives by South Africans, often taken in conjunction with their counterparts elsewhere in the region, to subject the EU proposals to some critical analysis. These are gradually contributing towards the strengthening of regional alliances and the development of alternative perspectives. And

they can in turn strengthen commitment to strategic regional integration rather than simplistic programmes of global integration, possibly providing an important re-enforcement of the South African government's formal commitment to the development of southern African regional economy. Thus, in response to Europe's "divide and conquer" strategy for the region, South African negotiators, in January this year, finally produced their opening negotiating position, one based on a regionally-focused trade and development agreement between southern – and not just South – Africa and the EU.

Promising signs

The extent to which SA officials are willing to pursue these proposals in their negotiations with the EU will serve as a major test of where SA stands *vis-à-vis* the region, but also of the extent to which they are willing or not to acquiesce in the dominant role for global "free" trade in the restructuring of the South African economy. So far, as stated, some signs are promising: the goal of the TDA is expressed as the need to "promote equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation and integration in the Southern African region," SA's negotiating document declared. This was an aim, according to the document, to which "both, South Africa and Europe have repeatedly declared their commitment"!

In addition, South African negotiators argued that if South Africa was to consolidate its new democracy, undo the effects of apartheid and play a developmental role in southern Africa, then the EU must recognize and respect SA's own economic and political vulnerabilities. South Africa called upon the EU for development assistance, investment and other measures to promote economic restructuring and development, rather than a reciprocal free trade agreement more appropriate for two countries or regions with

equivalent levels of economic development.

In carefully phrased terms, SA urged the EU not to miss an "historic opportunity" to play a central role in the reconstruction of South and southern Africa. They called on Europeans to play a different role than that proposed by

NEWS FLASH

S.A. & E.U. DIFFER ON TRADE CONCESSIONS

South Africa has criticised calls by the European Union that Pretoria should extend the same trade concessions to the 15-nations trading bloc as it would offer its Southern African neighbours. Pretoria says such proposals fly in the face of efforts to liberalise regional trade. The European Commission believes South Africa should offer the European Union the same trade concessions as it would offer neighbours in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). European commissioner in charge of relations with South Africa, João de Deus Pinheiro, believes the principle of granting the European Union and SADC the same preferences will see the EU-SA trade talks acting as a "crowbar for opening South Africa to the SADC." South Africa, however, is worried that preferences for the EU would displace SADC products in the South African market and, therefore, undermine the SADC trade protocol. It was stated that SADC countries would find it difficult to compete with EU imports in South Africa. Granting the same benefits to the EU was also contrary to South Africa's calls that the proposed free trade area should take into account the different stages of economic development in S.A. and the E.U.

their trade negotiators and, instead, to be active investors – and potential beneficiaries – in the transformation and development of South Africa and the region.

Four challenges

South African negotiators identified four changes to the EU proposals that would be critical to recasting negotiations to support a developmental and regional framework. These proposed changes also served to highlight the extent to which the EU had been offering South Africa an agreement that was distinctly to Europe's advantage.

First, the negotiators argued that the proposed FTA would merely exacerbate SA's growing and unsustainable trade deficit to the EU, and intensify the distorted trade pattern that finds SA exporting predominantly primary goods to the EU while heavily importing European industrial goods. The negotiators' proposition in this regard is that the agreement must address these historic imbalances in South Africa's trade with Europe, not entrench them.

The second, related change was to end the EU's discrimination against South African agricultural exports. Almost 40% were excluded from tariff-free entry into the EU under the proposed free trade agreement, North African and other Mediterranean producers received preferential trade access for similar products. For an FTA between SA and the EU to be "reciprocal," there would have to be fewer risks and more benefits for South Africa. The South African position is that there has to be greater asymmetry rather than simple reciprocity between the respective parties.

Third, negotiators argued against making acceptance of the FTA a pre-condition for South Africa's access to the important non-trade terms of the Lome Convention (the EU's preferential trade agreement with African, Caribbean and Pacific ex-colonies). Access

to the "non-trade terms" of Lome could provide SA with the right to tender for EU-funded development projects, allow SA to participate in the joint inter-governmental bodies of the Lome countries, and allow goods produced in a Lome member country with South African inputs to have preferential access to EU markets under the Lome "regional cumulation" terms - which could be an important encouragement to southern African joint manufacturing ventures. The EU has already agreed to such Lome access for SA in principle, and these kinds of provisions are important to South Africa and critical to its cooperation with its SADC partners.

The fourth demand was that the EU withdraw its proposals on changes in SA government procurement procedures, intellectual property rights policies, competition policies and other issues from the bilateral negotiations. All these issues are contentious, and are already being dealt with in multilateral fora, SA negotiators argued.

A regional strategy

Both domestic debates and consultations with regional partners played a role in developing the TDA. The Parliamentary Committee on Trade and Industry was particularly active, bringing together other parliamentary committees, soliciting submissions from agricultural, industrial, labour and other bodies, and consulting with other SADC parliamentarians. The government also consulted with the tripartite National Economic Development and Labour Council (NED-LAC), drawing on analyses and proposals from independent research institutes. Trade analysts noted the rapid expansion of South Africa's trade with Africa and the high proportion of manufactures in SA's exports to the African continent compared to the export of mainly primary commodities to Europe. The position which emerged from these domestic consultations was that re-

gional integration had much to offer South Africa, while the implications of aspects of the EU bilateral trade proposal provided much cause for concern.

Other countries in the region have seen South Africa as a potentially powerful ally, but also potentially a devastating adversary should competition prevail over cooperative regional development. In the event, the process of clarifying and deepening regional trade arrangements - while important in strengthening SA's negotiating position with the EU - also bear the promise of protecting the other states in the region which otherwise might be harmed by the SA-EU trade agreement and also of committing SA more firmly to the goal of regional development.

NEWS FLASH

S.A. PROPOSES FUND FOR FREE TRADE FALLOUT

South Africa has proposed that a fund be set up to compensate workers in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) who have lost their jobs as a result of a free trade agreement with the European Union (EU), as well as to provide investment where businesses have been closed.

However, the confrontation between Trade and Industry Minister Alec Erwin and the EU over agricultural exclusions to the accord could delay talks on compensation. South Africa envisaged a fund to assist in the retraining of workers who lost their jobs and to provide investment for new industries where old ones were driven out of business.

EU sources have said that discussions on development funding will be pursued once the S.A. position has been tabled. The next set of technical discussion is set for next week in Brussels.

Hence the importance of the discussions between the South African government and their counterparts in the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland - BLNS). First, the five countries had to get the EU to accept SACU as "real" customs union. With active support from the South African government, the BLNS countries also demanded time and funding from the EU to undertake their own impact assessments of the FTA, as the EU had done with its own members. As a result, SACU members were in a much stronger position to argue that any proposed SA-EU trade negotiations affecting SACU must be coordinated with the current renegotiation of the SACU agreement to support and not threaten that agreement.

SADC acts

Moreover, with SA-EU free trade talks imminent, the SADC countries (the SACU countries, plus Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia, Mauritius) were moved to accelerate their long-standing trade negotiations. In August 1996, they signed an historic trade protocol that will turn SADC into a free trade region during the next ten years. This free trade region will be created gradually through variable and evolving preferential tariff arrangements between the member countries, but with SA granting more favourable access to its markets than it will require of other SADC members. The protocol also recognizes the central importance of programmes to upgrade and coordinate the region's customs systems, improve other infrastructures, and encourage cross-border investment and industrial development.

Negotiating the SADC trade protocol was an enormous first step in consolidating an integrated economy in southern Africa. But it will also strengthen southern African states in their efforts to counter the EU's divisive and self

servicing trade strategies. Registering SADC as a new trade group with the World Trade Organization (WTO) secured a limited but exploitable legal space for SA to justify and defend preferential treatment for regional trading partners. South Africa is now in a stronger position to argue that EU-SA economic relations cannot take precedence over the finalization and effective implementation of this prior SADC trade agreement. Presenting SADC as an internationally recognized economic community also could be used to pressurize the EU to make practical its frequently declared support for integration and development in southern Africa.

If the regionally-based, proactive TDA suggested in these regional trade agreements and in SA's opening negotiating position with the EU is to become a reality, the detailed tariff terms and broader dimensions of the SADC trade agreement must be concretized and implemented as rapidly as possible. South Africa must resist agreeing to specific new trade terms with Europe until there is greater clarity on both the detailed terms of the SADC trade protocol and its likely effects upon SA and its SADC partners. Unless the SADC trade protocol is concretized, the regional Trade and Development proposal may be undermined, even as SA negotiators attempt to put forward a TDA as their counter to the EU's free trade strategy.

South Africa's negotiations with the EU will undoubtedly be a complex and drawn-out process, but particularly so if the South African side really is determined to alter the terms of the debate. The arguments of the SA negotiators must be convincing at the negotiating table, but also bring outside broader public support in South Africa, southern Africa, and Europe. In the interim, SA should be prepared to resist the current reciprocal free trade terms with the EU, and stand firm instead on non-reciprocal trade

access to the EU under Europe's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). These terms provide nearly the same market access that the EU is offering under its FTA proposals – over the long term – but with the advantage that GSP terms are quite immediate and do not have to be reciprocated. In fact, South Africa should argue for the same trade rights as comparable countries which now enjoy more generous terms, even if these, too, have a limited future in EU plans.

Commitment in question

All is not clear sailing, however. There remain serious questions as to whether the TDA will be fully accepted by the EU; and, unfortunately, there is even some doubt about the level of commitment to it by South Africa's own leaders! For its part, the EU has broader strategic interests at stake in its negotiations with SA, not least the re-negotiation of the Lome convention, and there are signs that the EU would prefer to move in the direction of bilateral free trade agreements, such as that proposed with SA, for all but the poorest ACP countries, rather than the broader preferential Trade and Development Relations now in place. Therefore EU leaders will not easily be persuaded to accept the type of equitable development measures of South Africa's TDA approach, for fear of the precedent they might set. As Europe attempts to re-position itself in the increasingly competitive global environment, EU global strategists seem set to challenge precisely the kind of development approaches

APOLOGY

A mischosen preposition in the biographical credit on page 30 of the last issue of *SAR* has provided undue grief to editorial member Carolyn Bassett. We wish to clarify that she is not now, never has been, and never knowingly will be in the IMF or the World Bank.

SA has proposed. Indeed, there are already signs that the skilful European negotiators will recast the language of SA's proposals: in order, precisely, to channel the negotiations back towards reciprocal trade liberalization.

Thus, from the beginning, EU officials have pushed the SA government towards a rapid acceptance of the FTA, presumably to forestall extensive and broadly based regional discussions on the implications of the bilateral agreement for the region. EU officials are uncomfortably aware that in the period since they submitted their original mandate, regional alliances have been building. Undoubtedly, the EU will attempt to use their influence on the more vulnerable governments in southern Africa to press them to settle for less than what a proactive, joint strategy might be expected to deliver. And the more cautious elements, old and new, in the South African government will be subject to similar pressures, pressures that attempt to reinforce an unquestioning acceptance of rapid and extensive liberalization.

The more conservative forces – old and new – in South Africa must be expected to continue to argue that SA should not “antagonize” the EU by refusing to accommodate its free trade proposals. If this cautious, self-defeating approach regains predominance, the SA government may well backslide into some slightly improved proposal for bilateral free trade with Europe, with all the negative implications for South African reconstruction and regional cooperation and development that this entails. Non-governmental organizations, labour, community, church and related forces in South Africa, southern Africa, and Europe itself can exert counter-pressures by playing an informed and active role, pushing for agreements which support economic restructuring and social transformation, rather than simply global integration on highly disadvantageous terms.

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