
The author examines the impact of organised labour on the process of democratisation in Zimbabwe. However, the extent to which democratisation and economic reform has been achieved has been strongly conditioned, on the one hand, by the weaknesses and divisions within the opposition, and by strength and skills of the incumbent regime, on the other. The outcome is the current situation of stalemate in which the formations of working-class organisation have proved powerful enough to defend and win limited political rights, but too weak to topple the formidable edifice of the de facto one-party State in favour of a bourgeois democratic regime. This raises questions of strategy which are touched on at the end of this paper.

Trade Unions in Zimbabwe: For Democracy, Against Neo-Liberalism

by Lucien van der Walt

IT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY FASHIONABLE to claim that the working-class can no longer play the key role in progressive social change assigned to it by most versions of socialist thought.¹ A wide variety of arguments have been marshalled to this end. For some analysts, the working class is rendered increasingly ineffectual by a purported numerical decline, whilst for others, traditional class divisions have been eroded and large sections of the traditional working-class *embourgeoisified* (Gorz, 1982). Another argument identifies the working-class as a largely reactionary and backward looking force (Perrineau and Wieworka, 1995, cited in Jeffreys, 1996). A variant of this view dismisses workers in the Third World as a privileged and co-opted 'labour aristocracy' battenning on the peasantry, and acting as a roadblock to transformation (Arrighi and Saul, 1973; Fanon, 1963). Alternatively, it has been argued by 'African socialists' that class is a 'Western' category of little relevance to Africa (see the discussion in Onimode, 1988). Finally, there are those who question the very centrality of class as a

political factor, arguing that labour is only one of a number of a plurality of social actors, and certainly not a force to which any special significance should be attached (Laclau and Mouffe, 1990).

These claims may certainly be questioned on both theoretical and substantive grounds. Several authors have disputed the reduction of the working-class to manual industrial labour which underlies the argument for the supposed numerical decline of the working class. Instead, these writers argue that both menial service sector and routine white collar work—key employment growth sectors in most metropolitan countries—are essentially working-class occupations, and that the working-class has not, therefore, declined in size (Callinicos and Harman, 1987; Wright, 1985). If anything, it has grown massively: on the one hand, the ongoing deskilling of many previously semi-professional and professional occupations, as well as the virtual elimination of the peasantry has greatly increased the size of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries; on the other hand, there has been the emergence of new proletariats in the Newly Industrialising Countries of East Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Other sources have clearly shown that class inequality has grown, rather than declined, over the past three decades (Westergaard, 1995). It has, for example, proved exceedingly difficult to sustain the view that Third World proletariats are elite groups battenning on the peasantry (Freund, 1988; Jeffries, 1975). Conceptual and empirical work by African scholars and others has also refuted the notion that class divisions and class struggles have been irrelevant in shaping contemporary Africa (see, *inter alia*, Ake, 1983; Onimode, 1988; Shivji, 1976). All of these points clearly suggest that class politics remains as relevant—if not more relevant—as before. The disjuncture between the continued salience of class as a social factor, and strident academic disavowals thereof, is remarkable.

Perhaps the most convincing refutation of the attempts to dismiss class as a social and political factor have been recent labour struggles across the globe. Within a number of metropolitan countries there has been a marked upsurge in labour unrest in response to attacks on the welfare State. France is probably the clearest example of this trend (Jeffreys, 1996), but even relatively moribund labour movements, such as that of the United States of America, have shown signs of revival. Within the Third World, new, militant labour movements have emerged. The struggles waged by the independent trade union movements of Brazil, South Africa and South Korea are perhaps the better

known examples, but important developments have taken place in a number of other settings.

Workers' struggles in Zimbabwe

One such case is that of Zimbabwe, which forms the focus of this article. This southern African country of 12 million people has been rocked by strike action throughout the 1990s.² A four week general strike in the public sector in August 1996 brought out nurses, teachers and other workers for higher wages. The strike followed soon after the workers, many of whom live below the breadline, were awarded a 3 percent wage increase—a marked contrast to the 45 percent rise given to Cabinet Ministers, permanent secretaries and other high-ranking officials at the same time. Organised in the Public Servants Association (PSA), the key public sector union, and supported by the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA), the strikers were joined by tertiary students protesting cuts in their grants. At the time, this was reportedly the most widespread and costly labour unrest in the post-colonial period. Despite earlier threats to dismiss strikers, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government of President Robert Mugabe, which came to power after Independence in 1980, finally agreed to examine the workers' grievances in September 1996.

Dissatisfaction with the government's response sparked a further two-month strike by nurses and doctors. Beginning in late October 1996, this was the country's longest strike action by health workers, ever. Despite police attacks on crowds, threats of dismissal and an initial refusal of the State to negotiate, the health workers stood their ground, and were joined by teachers. In November 1996, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the private sector union federation, tried to launch a two-day general strike in solidarity, although this failed due to large-scale police intimidation and the weak grassroots structures of the ZCTU unions. In 1997, the government backed down, awarding public sector workers a wage increase of 36 percent, which is substantially above the inflation rate of 20 percent.

One particularly important event in the wake of the 1996 strikes was the PSA's announcement of a new relationship with the ZCTU. Subsequently, the PSA formally affiliated to the ZCTU. The PSA now sits on the ZCTU general council, and started paying

dues to the ZCTU in 1998. ZIMTA, with 55,000 members, has not, however, affiliated to the ZCTU. Although a recent ZIMTA congress indicated substantial grassroots support for such a step, the leadership has argued that teachers' 'professionalism' and 'special relationship' to government are preferable to antagonising the State.

In 1997, workers in both the private and public sectors came out on strike. In July, a strike wave engulfed security companies, hotels, restaurants, construction, banks, cement and lime. Railway and textile workers also struck, whilst postal workers embarked on a go-slow. In many cases, workers were demanding wage increases of 40 percent. Employers seemed unwilling to compromise. In one incident, the general-manager of a security firm opened fire on striking employees, wounding at least eighteen.

In October 1997, farm labourers launched two weeks of work stoppages and road blockades under the aegis of the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers' Union of Zimbabwe, one of the ZCTU's 27 affiliates. These strikes by the country's biggest single group of employees—there are 350,000 farm workers, who with their families number 2 million people—were the greatest disruption to the large-scale commercial farming sector since Independence. The workers' demand for a US\$70 wage, a 135 percent wage increase, was not met. However, the arbitration system did order a 40 percent wage rise and an increase in leave days from 12 to 15 workdays. Popular struggle on the land is not confined to wage workers. In October 1996, 2,000 peasants invaded an idle State-owned farm in a challenge to the Zimbabwe government's failed land reform programme. A spokesperson for the group stated: 'We continue to hear and see many farms being acquired by government, not being given to the people... What we fought for continues to be in the hands of Whites and a few individuals in the government and the (ruling) party' [ZANU-PF] (Niyake, 1996).

Another source of dissent have been former guerrillas who fought in the war of liberation in the 1970s. In late 1996, the War Veteran's Association (which organises ex-guerrillas), stated that if land was not provided, it would forcibly occupy the farms of White commercial farmers and ZANU-PF politicians, the latter a key beneficiary of post-Independence land reform. In July 1997, hundreds of former guerrillas camped outside Mugabe's official residence, demanding pay outs from the War Victims Compensation Fund. Payments were suspended in March 1997,

as investigations into widespread plundering of the Fund by senior politicians took place. The civil servant who exposed the scandal died a few weeks later, ostensibly of a suicide, but in the eyes of his family a possible murder.

Angry confrontations took place between veterans and government officials, who were jeered and threatened. A massive police presence marked the fourth African/African-American Summit of businessmen, celebrities and intellectuals in late July in Harare, Zimbabwe, as former guerrillas sought to disrupt the proceedings. Workers at the hotels hosting the delegates also went on strike for higher wages as the Summit came to a close. While conference delegates spoke of 'Black empowerment', riot police dispersed ex-combatants, and the government slapped a two week ban on all strikes and unlawful gatherings which interrupted 'essential services' and compromised 'public safety'.

In August 1997, the government managed to pacify the 50,000 veterans with a promise of a one-off payment of pension arrears, a monthly stipend of Z\$2,000 a head as from January 1998, and free healthcare and education to their families. Nonetheless, whilst this gesture secured the quiescence of the veterans, it proved to be trigger for further workers' struggle as the government sought to finance the payments to veterans through a special 5 percent levy on wages (and company profits), a 2.5 percent hike in sales tax, and higher prices for petrol and electricity.

Organised labour, already subject to low wages, a 30 percent inflation rate, and taxes of up to 42 percent of income, rejected the new levy in a general strike on the 9 December which paralysed the major cities. Despite court permission for a rally in Harare, riot police trying to disperse the crowd clashed with workers who sought to defend themselves with barricades of rubbish bins, wood, and street signs. Two days later, 7 unidentified assailants beat ZCTU general secretary Morgan Tsvangirai unconscious in his office. The government agreed, however, to remove the 5 percent levy on wages. Tsvangirai was quoted in the *South African Mail and Guardian* as saying: 'You can remove leaders, but not the cause. This is class warfare, between the haves and the have-nots'.

Spontaneous food riots broke out in towns and cities on the 19 January 1998. This followed price rises for corn flour, rice and cooking oil of up to 25 percent (partly the product of the weakening of the Zimbabwe dollar), and a rise in sales tax to 17.5

percent. The riots began after demonstrations against the price hikes, and saw shops, hotels, vehicles and, in some instances, politicians' houses attacked or looted. Police and army units, including armoured cars and helicopters, were deployed and at least 2,000 people arrested. Independent sources in Zimbabwe have reported that nine people were shot dead by security forces, and at least four have died in prison subsequently. Slightly more than a month later, hundreds of thousands of workers in both the public and private sector supported a stay-at-home general strike called on March 3 and 4 by the ZCTU. The strike, which was called to demand the removal of the increase in sales tax and a long-standing 5 percent 'development levy', went ahead despite threats by Mugabe that 'we have many degrees in violence', despite orders by Labour Minister Florence Chitauru to report to work, and despite government attempts to deregister the ZCTU. The ZCTU office in Bulawayo was gutted by fire two days later, and arson is suspected.

Having failed to halt the March stay away, government spokespersons and press, notably papers such as *The Herald*, have sought to blame the country's tiny White minority of 80,000—a remnant of colonial times—for the unrest, alleging the existence of a sinister plot to bring down the government and halt current land reform plans which call for the redistribution of 1,772 White-owned commercial farms. This conspiracy theory, which was also raised in relation to the December 1997 and January 1998 struggles, is, unsurprisingly, not supported by any evidence and moreover has been rejected by the unions as groundless. Placards at the 9 December 1997 rally included the slogan 'Don't blame whites for your failures', whilst in an interview in January, Tsvangirai stated that 'no-one takes that (conspiracy) comment seriously'. At present, the ZCTU organises at least 400,000 workers, 30 per cent of the formal labour force.

Outline of the paper

In the remainder of this paper, I examine the background to, significance of, and limitations to, these current class struggles, and the role of the trade union movement in struggles for democracy, and against neo-liberalism, in Zimbabwe. It is argued that the trade unions have been central to the struggle for political freedom in the 1980s and 1990s. This struggle has more recently

been extended to attempts to challenge neo-liberalism through proposed alternative policy-frameworks and corporatist arrangements. However, the extent to which democratisation and economic reform has been achieved has been strongly conditioned, on the one hand, by the weaknesses and divisions within the opposition, and by strength and skills of the incumbent regime, on the other. The outcome is the current situation of stalemate in which the formations of working class civil society have proved powerful enough to defend and win limited political rights, but too weak to topple the formidable edifice of the *de facto* one-party State in favour of a bourgeois democratic regime. This raises questions of strategy which are touched on at the end of this paper.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In the next section, I situate the Zimbabwean struggles within the context of broader developments and pressures for change in Africa. In the third section, I examine the course of events in Zimbabwe, before moving on to explain the patterns which have emerged there. In the final section, I examine the prospects for, and challenges posed by, further democratic changes.

Democracy and the Free Market

Current struggles in Zimbabwe need to be seen against the backdrop of two key processes which have reshaped sub-Saharan Africa over the last fifteen years. Firstly, there has been a process of **political liberalisation** characterised by the loosening of government controls over the political activities of citizens. In a number of cases, this political liberalisation has developed into what the literature terms ‘**democratisation**’: free and fair elections to parliament, freedom of association and the rule of law (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992; Rakner n.d.). I use the term ‘democratisation’ with some misgivings here, for clearly this definition excludes a more radical democratic project of expanding freedom and self-management in all spheres of life. Nonetheless, it is in this limited sense that the term will be employed in this paper.

The second process reshaping sub-Saharan Africa is **economic liberalisation**. In common with the rest of the world, there has been a shift from statist forms of capitalism to what some have called neo-liberalism—the establishment of free markets in labour and capital unfettered by direct State intervention in the

economy, extensive welfare programmes, tariff barriers or price-setting. Neo-liberalism in sub-Saharan Africa has typically taken the form of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs), demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank as preconditions for financial assistance.

Reflecting the IMF and World Bank's long standing commitment to the construction and regulation of an international capitalist system of free trade and capital movements, ESAP policies typically involve policy reforms such as currency devaluation, trade liberalisation and reduction of the economic role of the State (in practice, this means cutbacks in public sector jobs, slashing welfare services, and removing wage and price controls) (Harris, 1989; Onimode, 1989). These policy prescriptions rest on the assumption that the African economic crisis is the product of too much State intervention and an overextended (or 'bloated') civil service (for critiques, see, *inter alia*, Cheru, 1989; Harris, 1989; Onimode, 1989). The IMF and World Bank hold that the key to African recovery is free trade and reliance on Africa's 'comparative advantage' in the production of raw materials for world markets.

The global challenge to authoritarian rule

Political liberalisation in Africa should be seen against the backdrop of the struggles for democratisation that have taken place across the world since the 1970s. In Africa, the democratisation movements which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s were popular risings on a scale matched only by the anti-colonial movements of earlier years (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992). 1990 was a watershed year, with mass protests taking place in at least 14 capital cities, and at least 21 governments launching seemingly significant processes of political liberalisation (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992; also Decalo, 1992). Labour was particularly prominent in these struggles.

This 'second liberation' was underlain by a variety of factors (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992; Decalo, 1992). These included the end of the Cold War. On the one hand, the collapse of the Soviet bloc removed a key model of authoritarian rule, and a central source of aid for allied governments in Africa. On the other, it also substantially devalued the geopolitical worth of Africa in the eyes of the West, and Western powers such as France

put into question their unconditional support for often venal and brutal (but pro-Western) rulers. At another level, ordinary Africans drew inspiration from the actions of pro-democracy movements elsewhere in the world: 'one cannot exaggerate the psychological effect of pictures of the trial and execution of Ceausescu (well-known in Africa as the Soviet Union's surrogate), or of Bucharest's removal of statues of Lenin by a hangman's loop-winch around their neck...' (Decalo, 1992: 13–4).

At the same time, the African economic crisis of the 1980s—the product of *both* external constraints and disastrous government practices—placed many regimes at the mercy of international lenders such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Cheru, 1989; Decalo, 1992; Onimode, 1989; Sandbrook, 1985). The role of the economic crisis and the activities of the IMF and World Bank in Africa in fostering pro-democracy movements was a complex one. On the one hand, the IMF, World Bank and other donors began to add political conditionalities to ESAP prescriptions: improved 'governance' (more accountable, honest, legitimate, open and consensus-based government) was increasingly seen as vital to the effective implementation of economic liberalisation (Decalo, 1992; Harsch, 1993). These added impetus to calls for political reform, although it must be noted that IMF-World Bank 'political conditionality' does not necessarily imply *democratic* government: the lending agencies are more concerned with securing honest governments which can effectively implement ESAP policies than they are with popular self-determination or the right to reject neo-liberalism.

The IMF and World Bank provided an inadvertent push towards democratisation through ESAP's economic policies which promoted mass popular dissatisfaction with the government's implementing neo-liberalism (Harsch, 1993). In the 1980s, popular movements of students, workers and the urban poor, of those who bore the brunt of the African economic crisis, and the effects of ESAP (rising prices, massive cutbacks in social services, rapidly increasing unemployment, and wage cuts and freezes), shook many states. Trade unions, in particular, played a central role in these struggles against ESAP. As the decade unfolded, these popular class movements began to move from economic demands to calls for political reforms, blaming the economic crisis on unpopular and corrupt governments.

These mass democracy movements, raising the banner of multi-party rule, registered remarkable successes against incumbent regimes whose repression and plunder eroded claims to legitimacy based on promises of development, empowerment and national unity (Decalo, 1992). However, the impact of this struggle was conditioned in two key ways. Firstly, the democracy movements were increasingly led by elite class elements who sought to gain (or regain) positions of power, and who favoured forms of economic liberalisation which could provide opportunities for material gain (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992; Harsch, 1993). As the Zambian case shows, this situation readily results in elected parliamentary governments who implement neo-liberalism with even more fervour than their dictatorial predecessors (Ginsburg, 1997; Rakner n.d.).

Secondly, the extent of reforms attendant on popular protest varied greatly: in some cases, minimal liberalising reforms took place, in others the reforms helped confirm incumbent tyrants in power, whilst elsewhere democratic multi-party elections resulted in the replacement in government of almost the entire ruling party by the opposition. These different outcomes were strongly related to contingent factors such as the 'the skill of state elites at using available political resources, the coherence of opposition coalitions, and the relative strengths of elite and opposition groups' (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992: 45).

Capitalism of a special type in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has not been unaffected by developments elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet it is the specific balance of forces in Zimbabwe itself which explain why struggles *for* political liberalisation and *against* economic liberalisation—struggles in which the trade unions have been central—have had only limited success. The trade unions face a formidable and authoritarian capitalist regime, and are further shackled by their own internal weaknesses.

Zimbabwe's Independence in 1980 followed a British-brokered settlement at Lancaster House which ended the decade-long civil war between the Rhodesian government and rural nationalist-dominated guerrilla forces. The belated liberation of Zimbabwe was undoubtedly an advance for the popular classes. However, the new government, which was overwhelmingly dominated by

Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front) in a fragile coalition Joshua Nkomo's substantially smaller ZAPU party (Zimbabwe African Peoples Union), was constrained by the terms of the settlement. These included a 10 year guarantee on the inviolability of private property, guaranteed posts for White civil servants, and 20 reserved seats in a parliament of 100 for the 1 percent White minority (these reservations ended in 1987) (Mandaza, 1987).

Further difficulties arose as the new government revealed strong proclivities towards a capitalist development path and an authoritarian political system, contrary to the expectations of those who took the rhetoric of radical nationalism, and ZANU-PF's proclaimed adherence to Marxism-Leninism, at its face value (Astrow, 1983; Davies, 1988; Hull, 1986).³ Little distinguished ZANU-PF from other African nationalist parties who spoke the discourse of Marxism whilst overseeing the functioning of capitalism, other than, perhaps, a pretence that socialism would follow this capitalist period as vague 'second stage' after the completion of the 'national democratic revolution'.

In the meantime, 'national unity' and 'development' were the currency of the day as Mugabe marginalised hard-line socialists, and undertook a market-led programme of land redistribution whose effects contradicted electoral promises of land redistribution. At Independence 5,000 White farmers owned 50 percent of the land, with the remainder allocated to peasant farmers under communal tenure in African reserves. By the start of the 1990s less than 5 percent of the 900,000 communal area rural households had been resettled on new land under government-financed projects after land had been purchased through the market in 'willing-buyer-willing-seller' arrangements. Resettlement typically involved marginal lands—the bulk of land available on the market—and the exclusion of women from ownership (Cammack, Pool and Tordoff, 1988; Knight, 1990; Levin and Weiner, 1993; Weiner, 1989: 402). Meanwhile, the key beneficiaries of land redistribution tended to be wealthy and politically influential African households, and the dramatic expansion of peasant production in this period was largely confined to this group (*ibid.*).

There are few indications that current land reform promises will alter this pattern. In 1993 a Land Acquisition Act was passed which allowed the government to cancel the leases of a number of White farmers on State-owned farms. Subsequently, however,

the bulk of land acquired this way has been leased to ZANU-PF officials and other influential strata. The outcome of more recent promises to redistribute 1,772 White-owned farms remains unclear at this stage, but the experience of the previous two decades cautions against naïve expectations in the face of populist demagogy. However, it is possible that growing rural dissatisfaction may force the government to act more decisively.

State intervention in industry in the 1980s consisted of selective nationalisations to rescue faltering corporations; most parastatals were inherited from the colonial period; minimum wage settings tended to depress wage-scales on the whole; and the regime's initial expansion of social services in the early independence period was less 'socialist' than it was in line with similar policies in other newly independent States, not to mention the post-war welfare States of the West (Davies, 1988; also see Freund, 1988; Bienefeld, 1975). Moreover, the new regime strengthened ties with Western states and multilateral lenders, and took care to pay off the inherited pre-1965 external debt (Davies, 1988; Hull, 1986; Knight, 1990). ZANU-PF's defence of capitalism was mirrored by the move of many government officials into commercial activities and the party's 1988 establishment of the Zimbabwe National Holdings Corporation to group its substantial holdings in industry and retail; nearly half of the Cabinet ministers sat on the board of directors (Knight, 1990; Knight, 1996; also Hull, 1986). Although frowned upon in the 1980s due to the ideological constraints imposed by the regime's ostensible 'socialist orientation', this process of *embourgeoisment* has provided the objective basis for class unity in defence of capitalism in Zimbabwe between the emergent bureaucratic and state-linked African bourgeoisie, and their still prominent White counterparts based in private industry and agriculture (Hull, 1986; Sibanda, 1988).⁴

The capitalist nature of the Mugabe government was further underlined by the implementation of a IMF and World Bank-designed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991. ESAP signified a clear break with the protectionist and interventionist approach to economic development previously pursued by the colonial government and later by the Mugabe regime itself—a shift towards neo-liberalism in the Zimbabwean context (Knight, 1992, 1996; Raftopoulos, 1992a, Sachikonye, 1996; Skalnes, 1993; Saunders, 1996). This ESAP contained all the standard ingredients of adjustment: trade and currency deregulation, devaluation of the Zimbabwe dollar (Z\$), the lifting

of price controls, cuts in social spending and the removal of consumer subsidies. According to one analyst, an implicit political conditionality—‘no democracy, no money’—was also understood to be attached to the loans (Knight, 1992). However, this ESAP was unusual in placing an emphasis on making the manufacturing sector internationally competitive in order to earn foreign exchange to service the loans (Saunders, 1996).

Another unusual feature of the 1991 ESAP was the manner in which it was adopted. Although the relatively industrialised and prosperous Zimbabwean economy was hampered by budget deficits, government debts, limited private investment, high unemployment and civil service inefficiencies and corruption, the country had hardly reached the depths of economic crisis which had forced other African countries into the arms of the IMF and the World Bank; indeed, its manufacturing exports were growing, its inflation was low, and the debt service ratio in decline (Knight, 1996; Skalnes, 1993). Instead, the policy shift was in the final analysis engineered not by external pressures but by a domestic political coalition comprising key sectors of the private bourgeoisie (as represented by the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, the Commercial Farmers Union, the Chamber of Mines and the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce), and influential elements of the bureaucratic and State-linked bourgeoisie, particularly those located in the economic ministries (Sachikonye, 1996; Skalnes, 1993).

Although therefore home-grown in many respects, ESAP in Zimbabwe—as elsewhere—signally failed to deliver improved living standards, job creation and economic modernisation (for other examples, Cheru, 1989; Haffajee, 1993; Onimode, 1989). On the contrary! Trade liberalisation promoted deindustrialisation, whilst the loan agreements of ESAP led to a massive expansion in lending that increased State debt, crowded out private sector borrowing, raised interest rates, and reduced investment. Overall, economic growth slowed and became more erratic (Knight, 1996; Saunders, 1996).

ESAP's effects on popular living standards were and are extremely negative (Knight, 1990, 1996: 224, Sachikonye, 1996; Saunders, 1996: 12). Price control relaxation resulted in dramatic rises in the inflation rate (running between 25 percent and 40 percent), and a fall in consumer demand of up to 30 percent. Average real wages fell to the lowest levels since the early 1970s (due in part to wage restraint and high inflation), and at least

55,000 jobs were lost up to 1995, notably in the civil service where 22,000 employees have been retrenched. These job losses are especially severe given a situation of massive unemployment in which fewer than 20 percent of school-leavers each year are able to enter the formal sector. Social services were slashed: health spending fell by 39 percent in 1994-5, spending in the primary education sector fell to its lowest levels since Independence, and cost recovery principles were imposed that required all but the very poor (earning under Z\$400 a month) to pay school and clinic fees. A government 'Social Development Fund' to cushion the impact of economic liberalisation has been characterised by poor planning and implementation, and proved inadequate and largely ineffective.

At the same time, however, Mugabe awarded himself, his top officials, and members of parliament salary increases ranging from 116 percent to 134 percent (Knight, 1996: 224). Ten days after the food riots of January 1998, new legislation was put forward which would increase the (tax-free) pension pay outs of the President and two vice-presidents, as well as entitle them to free and unlimited cars, air travel, entertainment, bodyguards, offices and staff for the rest of their lives (*The Citizen*). In addition to the legacies of colonialism alluded to above, class inequality is marked: in 1991, 50 percent of the population received less than 15 percent of total annual incomes, less than half the figure (30 percent) accruing to the richest 3 percent of the population (Raftopoulos, 1996: 4).

The edifice of nationalist power

These capitalist policies have proved to be a powerful spur to grassroots dissatisfaction and protest. However, these antagonistic responses face substantial obstacles, particularly in the form of the formidable edifice of ZANU-PF rule. In the following section I outline some of the dimensions of Zimbabwean politics in the 1980s and 1990s, and discuss their implications for the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition. I then examine the forms, strengths and weaknesses of popular democratisation movements, paying particular attention to the trade union movement.

Since 1980, ZANU-PF has acted to obtain a monopoly of formal political office, manifesting a consistently authoritarian

tendency justified by the rhetoric of 'security' and national unity. From an early stage, the establishment of a single-party State was openly espoused (see, *inter alia*, Cliffe, Mpofo and Munslow, 1980; Hull, 1986; Knight, 1990; Spring, 1986). These ambitions were initially constrained by constitutional guarantees of free association, but in practice a battery of formal regulations and less formal activities undermined these rights (Knight, 1992; Spring, 1986; also Hull, 1986). Thus, the State of Emergency inherited from the Rhodesian regime was maintained in the 1980s to allow detention without trial. In late 1982, Indemnity Regulations were reintroduced that amnestied security forces in advance for unlawful acts committed in the course of their duties (similar provisions of the colonial regime were briefly repealed after Independence). Censorship laws were reintroduced from August 1983, thus turning the wheel full circle to Ian Smith's time.

The February 1982 discovery of arms at various farms and premises owned by ZAPU allowed ZANU-PF to move against the main rival nationalist party. Nkomo was dismissed from the ZANU-PF dominated Cabinet, many of his assets sequestered and several senior ZAPU officials arrested on treason charges (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Report, cited in *Mail and Guardian* May 2 1997; Spring, 1986). A large-scale counter-insurgency campaign by the North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade was launched in January 1983 in the predominately Ndebele-speaking ZAPU stronghold of Matabeleland. Ostensibly targeted at renegade ZAPU-aligned guerrillas, the campaign was characterised by large-scale arrests, assaults, and murders of civilians, with at least 3,000 people were killed in the early months of 1983. A food blockade was also instituted in parts of the region, despite a devastating drought.

The 1985 general elections took place against the backdrop of the banning of ZAPU meetings in large parts of the party's regional stronghold, mob attacks on ZAPU offices, and the dismissal of remaining ZAPU officials in the Cabinet and security forces were dismissed (Hull, 1986; Spring, 1986). In conjunction with the assassination and disappearances of officials in the United African National Council (UANC) party, such developments doubtless aided ZANU-PF's strong showing in the elections (*contra* Hull, 1986). A three month government crackdown on ZAPU cadres followed the elections with mass arrests of loyalists (Hull, 1986). These painful realities compelled Nkomo to initiate merger talks with Mugabe: these resulted in the

1987 Unity Agreement, and the effective absorption of ZAPU into ZANU-PF by 1989.

In addition to the establishment of a *de facto* one party State, ZANU-PF merged itself with the government: in 1990, there were 52 Cabinet members and 8 provincial governors, all appointed by Mugabe, and most ZANU-PF members (Knight, 1990; Knight, 1992). Five ministries were solely responsible for party affairs, such as the Ministry for Political Affairs which uses its Z\$50 million budget to provide administrative services to ZANU-PF and its women and youth sections. The Army, Air Force and Police leaders served on the party's Politburo at the discretion of the party president.

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that despite these features, and despite the authoritarian inclinations of the ruling party, Zimbabwe did not develop into a fully fledged dictatorship: some societal criticism of the government continues to be permitted, so long as this does not challenge the regime itself. Although the government controls the broadcast media, and owns up to 90 percent of the print media (*Mail and Guardian*), a critical press, represented by *Southern Africa Political and Economic Monthly*, the *Financial Gazette* and other papers, also exists, whilst grassroots opposition, small opposition parties and public discussions and debates on political issues are tolerated (Cowan, 1993; Knight, 1992; Raftopoulos, 1992a).

A political terrain shaped by struggle and conflict

This limited space for democratic debate is *the product of conflicts between civil society and the State, as well as of divisions within the State and party apparatus* (Raftopoulos, 1992a). This is illustrated by the failure of ZANU-PF to establish a *de jure* one-party State in 1990 when the Lancaster House restrictions on constitutional amendments expired, and ZANU-PF's landslide victory in the 1990 election (taking over 95 percent of seats) provided an apparent mandate for the proposed political change. However, ZANU-PF was itself divided on the issue. In addition, there was widespread opposition from civil society, including capitalist associations, the legal profession, the trade unions, and students and staff at the University of Zimbabwe, as well as from foreign donors (Knight, 1992; Sachikonye, 1996). The domestic opposition drew upon a long tradition of opposition to the idea

of the one-party State which had emerged in the early 1980s, opposition which secured support in the late 1980s from the student movement, the trade unions and nascent opposition parties such as the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) (Knight, 1990; Raftopoulos, 1992a).

The weakness of the Parliamentary opposition

Despite these small victories, opposition parties continue to face formidable obstacles in their attempts to use the political space provided by the 1990 and 1995 multi-party elections, and in their attempts to articulate popular political and economic grievances over corruption, economic hardship and political repression (Eppel, 1996; Gova, 1996; Hatugari, 1994; Knight, 1992, 1996; Sylvester, 1995). Some obstacles are due to the inherited Westminster-type electoral system which systematically under-represents minority parties: ZUM acquired only 2 seats in the Assembly in the 1990 elections, as opposed to the 20 to which its share of the vote would entitle it in a proportional representation system. ZANU-PF's restrictions on free political activity also pose a challenge, especially in the form of intimidation of political opponents, particularly by the ZANU-PF Women's and Youth Leagues, and the subversion of free electoral procedures. In 1990, for example, ZUM candidate Patrick Kombayi suffered a near fatal shooting amid clashes between ZUM and ZANU-PF supporters in the run-up to the elections (the two convicted gunmen, both linked to ZANU-PF, were later pardoned by Mugabe). In June 1997 Fidelis Mhashu, an independent mayoral candidate for Chitungwiza township south of Harare, was beaten up by forty members of the ZANU-PF youth wing when he tried to inspect the voters roll. A Cabinet Minister and three members of parliament stood by as the event took place.

In 1990, the State of Emergency was lifted after 25 years, but the colonial-era Law and Order (Maintenance) Act remained in force, proscribing meetings of over 200 people without police permission, and providing a pretext to block opposition gatherings. A 1990 law entitles any political party with 15 or more parliamentary seats to a government subsidy; in practice this has given the ruling ZANU-PF about Z\$30 million annually. Mugabe used Air Force helicopters on his 1995 election campaign

trail, as well as government vehicles and trucks to ferry people to rallies. The government controlled media serves as a continual propaganda platform for Mugabe and ZANU-PF and denies the opposition positive exposure. ZANU-PF was assured of at least 30 seats in the 1995 parliament even before a single ballot was cast, as the President is entitled to appoint 12 non-constituency members, as well as 8 provincial governors, whilst 10 chiefs are elected by local chiefs themselves beholden to the ruling party that preserves their power. ZANU-PF also uses patronage to gain support, whilst the unelected chiefs have helped 'deliver' the rural vote: as elsewhere, the authoritarian powers of the chiefs over their subjects renders truly democratic processes impossible (e.g. Levin and Weiner, 1993; Mamdani, 1988).

Given these conditions, it is unsurprising that many opposition parties boycotted the 1995 elections, so that that only 65 of the 120 elected seats were contested (Gova, 1996; Saunders, 1995a). Yet not all the blame for the weaknesses of the opposition can be placed on ZANU-PF: the opposition was and is itself typically poorly organised, lacking clear policies, and hampered by a low profile and a lack of resources (Cowan, 1993; Gova, 1996; Knight, 1992; Saunders, 1995a; Sylvester, 1995). One analyst comments of the 1995 elections:

A more motley and inefficacious group of opposers would be difficult to find... Headed by has-beens... [the opposition] confronts these obstacles with ill-informed naiveté, a lack of heart, and immature whinging... [It] seems to become more witless and incompetent with each round of polling (Sylvester, 1995: 418, 420).

Combined with growing levels of voter apathy (only half the electorate voted in 1990 and 1995, as compared to over 90 percent in 1980 and 1985), itself the product of a sense of futility and economic hardship, these weaknesses have undoubtedly limited the extent of democratisation (cf. Gova, 1996).

The centrality of the masses in motion, not in voting

Given these conditions, a number of analysts have suggested that opposition is most likely to emerge from within the ruling party (e.g. Knight, 1992; Sylvester, 1995). There is, however,

little evidence that such a process is taking place. ZANU-PF retains the remarkable coherence which has forestalled any major split in the party since the 1970s. Indeed, the material I have presented here clearly indicates that, insofar as the extent of democratisation and liberalisation is conditioned by factors such as the skill, coherence, strength, style and resources of the incumbent elite and the democratic opposition, respectively, Zimbabwe provides a text book case of a country in which determined, powerful and largely cohesive ruling party is able to consistently outmanoeuvre its weak, divided and insubstantial opposition, despite the formal existence of a multi-party system, and despite popular dissatisfaction with the political and economic policies of the incumbent government (cf. Bratton and van de Walle, 1992).

One must, however, be careful not to reduce opposition to the ZANU-PF regime to the efforts of electoral parties only. On the contrary, *it is outside the sphere of parliamentary politics that some of the most effective opposition can be found, as the popular classes have taken to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with corruption, authoritarianism, poverty and the ESAP policies of ZANU-PF.*

The student movement has long spoken out against what it called government and ZANU-PF 'plunder, slander and looting sprees' (cited in Knight, 1990: 204). In September 1988, for example, students issued a manifesto calling on Mugabe to end corruption, accelerate land reform, improve relations with trade unions, and cut spending on the bureaucracy and 'white elephants' such as the party headquarters, a Sheraton Hotel and International Conference Centre, and the national sports stadium. Predictably, student demonstrators were attacked by riot police, 478 were detained, and a law lecturer deported. Similar clashes took place in, 1989, but this time, the police drag net was cast wider: Tsvangirai of the ZCTU was charged as an 'agent' of the South African government after he wrote a letter supporting students; 11 members of ZUM were arrested and others forced into hiding (Knight, 1990; Raftopoulos, 1992a; Sachikonye, 1996). The government also passed the University of Zimbabwe Amendment Act in 1990 granting more power to the State and University authorities to deal with dissent, despite opposition by students and academic staff. Nonetheless, regular cuts in student grants due to ESAP have led to repeated and occasionally violent student demonstrations throughout the 1990s: in July 1996,

University and technical college students embarked on demonstrations for an increase in their pay-outs which led to street fights with police, the closure of technical colleges, and the withdrawal of student grants to activists; in November 1996, students again clashed with riot police outside the University campus during a demonstration against cut backs; in 1998 students boycotted classes in support of demands for more loans and grants.

Protests and demonstrations have taken place in other sectors as well. In 1993 Zimbabwe got its first taste of 'IMF riots' when soaring bread prices were met with boycotts and street clashes. However, the resistance was short-lived and by 1996, the price of bread was nearly double that which had prompted rioting several years earlier (Saunders, 1996). A sporadic consumer boycott also preceded the January 1998 food riots.

Trade unions on the move

A more sustained response has come from the trade union movement, whose members are amongst those most severely hit by ESAP and other ZANU-PF policies. From the mid-1980s, tensions increased between the State and the official trade union movement, the then 250,000 strong Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) (Raftopoulos, 1992b; Sachikonye, 1996). The pro-ZANU-PF leadership of the unions (see below) was ousted in 1985 by the grouping associated with Tsvangirai, a former mineworker, and a more critical stance towards the ZANU-PF regime's labour and economic policies was adopted, particularly where unions were prevented from engaging in free wage bargaining with employers (Sachikonye, 1996; Wood, 1988).

Economic liberalisation created further tensions, with the unions viewing ESAP as reversing the few material gains of Independence: job security, and subsidies on social services and wage goods (Sachikonye, 1996; Skalnes, 1995). Ironically, however, ESAP was also associated with the phasing out of statutory minimum wages and the introduction of freer collective bargaining, which allowed unions to strengthen their position by winning substantial concessions from management, although the Ministry of Labour retained veto powers over wage agreements in 'the national interest'. Labour laws continued to exclude public service workers (almost 20 percent of the formal

labour force) from collective bargaining arrangements, but these restrictions have not prevented widespread industrial action and unionisation (centring around the PSA and ZIMTA) in this sector in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s (in addition to news reports, see Raftopoulos, 1992b, Sachikonye, 1996; Saunders and Jazdowska, 1994). The combative and well-organised public sector unions represent about 200,000 workers (Raftopoulos, 1992b, Saunders, 1995b).

In addition to continuing conflicts over the industrial relations system, the ZCTU, partly under the inspiration of trade union struggles for democracy in countries such as Zambia, also began to confront the State on broad social and political issues (Knight, 1990, 1992; Sachikonye, 1996). Pressured by the membership, the unions, particularly from 1989, regularly criticised the soaring prices of basic commodities and services, and even attempted to organise consumer boycotts and 'bread demonstrations'. However, the impact of these challenges to neo-liberalism has been limited, and links between the unions and consumer pressure groups remain weak. The ZCTU also openly criticised ZANU-PF's authoritarianism and corruption, defended student protesters, and played a central part in the struggle against the proposed *de jure* one-party State.

The ZCTU unions also launched legal actions, such as a successful challenge to Law and Order (Maintenance) Act provisions against demonstrations, after 6 unionists were detained following a 1992 demonstration against ESAP and amendments to the Labour Relations Act (listed below). At about the same time, the PSA and ZIMTA took the Public Service Commission to court over its unilateral decision to suspend payment of a 13th cheque to public sector workers.

Given the unions' increasingly autonomous and adversarial stance, the ZANU-PF regime began to harbour suspicions that the ZCTU was planning to combine its economic and political critique to form the basis of an opposition movement, and thus took steps to undermine the unions: in June 1992; John Nkomo, then Minister of Labour, describing the federation as 'an organisation of illiterates', ominously stated that 'the ZCTU is now a political party and we shall deal with it in the way that we deal with political parties' (cited in Sachikonye, 1996: 18). The Labour Relations Act was amended to undermine centralised bargaining in the National Employment Councils, remove the legal stipulations of one union per industry, and further delimit legal

strike action. In protest, the ZCTU refused to join Zimbabwe's delegation to the 1992 International Labour Organisation meeting in Geneva, walked out of a meeting with the Minister of Labour to discuss the contentious agreements, and organised country-wide demonstrations.

Towards Corporatism? A critical assessment

As it turned out the ZCTU did not align itself with an opposition party (Cowan, 1993; Knight, 1992; Raftopoulos, 1996; Sachikonye, 1996). Instead, it has concentrated on building its organisational strength and linkages to organisations of students, public servants and academics. The ZCTU also sought to intervene in economic policy by developing an alternative to neo-liberalism. This takes the form of a proposed alternative model of economic reform—*Beyond ESAP: Framework for a Long-Term Development Strategy in Zimbabwe* (1996)—commissioned by the ZCTU.

Accepting the broader need for economic restructuring, the ZCTU hopes that some of the document's recommendations will be incorporated into the second phase of the ESAP, due to be implemented in 1996. Influenced by the NEDLAC (National Economic, Development and Labour Council) model in South Africa, *Beyond ESAP* (1996) calls for a societal corporatist strategy between labour, the State, capital and other actors in which 'all interest groups and stakeholders participate in policy formulation, decision-making and implementation' through a Zimbabwe Economic Development Council. This implies that an expansion of democratic control over the economy is envisaged.⁵ The document also suggests that the State play a more enabling and redistributive role than that envisaged by economic liberalisation.

At the same time, though, the ZCTU's qualified acceptance of the need for ESAP weakens the extent to which it can pose, and organise popular sectors around, a policy alternative to neo-liberalism (see Bond, 1998 for a critique). Indeed, sections of the *Beyond ESAP* document indicate a willingness to endorse, in certain conditions, such measures as means-based welfare, privatisation, and the 'trimming' of the civil service (Bond, 1998). In addition, whilst corporatism may be attractive to capital and State insofar as it promises a more settled industrial relations system, as well as control over key investor variables such as wages and inflation, the extent to which a genuine basis

for societal corporatism has been laid remains unclear (see, for example, Sachikonye, 1996). Corporatism does not develop in a vacuum, but is instead premised on certain material and political preconditions (Panitch, 1986; Vally, 1992). A societal crisis in the form of persistent economic problems or chronically social and class conflict typically provides the prelude to the development of multipartite structures. While such conditions do not inevitably eventuate in corporatist solutions, they do provide an essential impetus to a search for new modes of policy-formulation that can help secure the reproduction of capitalist society. Secondly, it is essential that key economic actors, such as capital, labour and the State, or at least their representatives, are willing (or feel induced) to co-operate with one another in order to resolve the problems facing the country, usually on the basis of the belief that tripartite arrangements will be of benefit to all parties. Finally, corporatism is greatly facilitated by strong organisations on the part of both capital and labour, bodies which can engage effectively in such forums and bind their members to any agreements reached.

If a deep social and economic crisis is arguably evident in Zimbabwe, it is questionable whether the other preconditions are present. Employers and the State have not, historically, shown a willingness to co-operate with (rather than simply subordinate) workers' organisations (see Sachikonye, 1996). The substantial policy influence of institutions like the IMF and World Bank also undermines the scope for such an arrangement, as these organisations are not party to tripartite structures and are, moreover, reliant on a neo-liberal paradigm critical of unions' effects on the economy.

It is also questionable whether the unions have either the strength to force capital and the State to accept multipartite modes of policy formulation, or the ability to operate effectively within such institutions. In addition to State repression, which is discussed in detail below, the effects of ESAP need to be considered. ESAP weakens the unions at the same time as it increases their scope for manoeuvre, because economic restructuring has severe effects in employment in some sectors (Sachikonye, 1996).

The ability of the unions to resist the continued attacks on their members material conditions, let alone reshape the direction of macro-economic policy, is undermined by the historic weaknesses of the labour movement. Due, in no small part, to historical

conditions, the union movement does not yet have strong grassroots structures, a situation which facilitates undemocratic practices (Adler, Barchiesi and Gostner, 1996; Jazdowska, 1994; Mitchell, 1987; Sachikonye, 1986; Skalnes, 1993; Wood, 1988). This problem has seemingly been confirmed by surveys indicating that formal union structures are often unaccountable to the membership they should serve (Raftopoulos, 1992b; Wood, 1988). In the early 1980s, in particular, there were numerous instances of corruption and lack of accountability, with many key officials of the ZCTU and its affiliates entirely unelected. The new ZCTU leadership that emerged around Tsvangirai in the mid-1980s has struggled to overcome such problems, but problems clearly remain on the factory floor.

The causes of trade union weakness

Trade union weaknesses may be traced, in part, to the pre-1980 colonial period, where conditions militated against the formation of a strong union movement. Although Black trade unions were recognised in 1959, these unions were explicitly forbidden to engage in politics or elect convicted political dissidents, whilst most forms of industrial action were effectively ruled out by various restrictions (Adler, Barchiesi and Gostner, 1996; Jazdowska, 1994; Mitchell, 1987; Sachikonye, 1986; Wood, 1988). Massive urban unemployment, grinding poverty, the small size of the urban workforce, and the partial nature of proletarianisation posed further problems for the development of union size and resources. These difficulties were compounded by divisions between White-dominated and non-racial trade unions, by intense leadership and union factionalism, virtual martial law in the towns during the guerrilla war, a wage freeze, and the financial problems caused by an erratic and optional check-off system. The anti-colonial struggle did little to strengthen the unions: almost no attempts were made to build linkages between guerrillas with urban forces, except in cases where unions could provide conduits for logistical support for the peasant fighters. Thus, the unions entered Independence with perhaps 80,000 African members in 25 trade unions in 5 separate federations, each aligned to a different political party (that favouring ZANU-PF a minority); perhaps 8 percent of the formal sector workforce was organised (Mitchell, 1987; Sachikonye, 1996: 8).

ZANU-PF posed further problems once in power: the regime's ruthlessness in Matabeleland and the electoral sphere was matched by its approach to other popular social movements (Mitchell, 1987; Sachikonye, 1986; Sachikonye, 1996; Wood, 1988: 291). A massive wave of strikes against management racism, and poor working conditions and wages took place in the wake of the independence elections. Often wildcat in nature, sometimes organised by independent strike committees, and only subsiding in 1982, the strike wave was the greatest industrial unrest in Zimbabwe since the 1948 general strike.

Nonetheless, it was met with media hostility (which portrayed the strikers as irresponsible and unpatriotic), and repression and co-optation by the new regime (Davies, 1986; Mitchell, 1987; Raftopoulos, 1992b; Sachikonye, 1986; Wood, 1988). Mugabe condemned some strikes as 'quite inexcusable' and 'nothing short of criminal', whilst the army and police moved in to arrest militants, protect strike-breakers and installations, and enable dismissals of militants. Kumbirai Kangai, the new Labour Minister insisted that workers make use of the 'established procedures' and threatened: 'I will crack my whip if they do not get back to work' (Mitchell, 1987: 108).

At the same time, the government used its emergency powers to pass a Minimum Wage Act in 1980 empowering the Minister of Labour to set wages, ban retrenchments without financial justification or workers acquiescence, and increase social spending. These measures excluded key issues such as wage bargaining from industrial action, thereby undermining the role of unions, and establishing the State as the ostensibly 'logical and natural patron of the working class' (Freund, 1988: 89), to whom appeals could be directed, rather than concessions wrought. While ZANU-PF recognised the workers' committees thrown up by the strike, it restricted them to matters of occupational health and safety, and productivity improvements. The committees and the unions typically had an uneasy relationship. In an attempt to placate capital, ZANU-PF recognised 'works councils', similar to the Rhodesian liaison structures used by management to discuss labour control issues, communicate instructions and resolve small grievances with worker representatives.

The ZCTU itself was initiated at this time by the government at this time as the sole national union centre, based on one union per industry, in an attempt to channel grievances in a 'constructive' direction and remove the influence of opposition

parties amongst union leaders (Adler, Barchiesi and Gostner, 1996; Davies, 1986; Mitchell, 1987; Raftopoulos, 1992b; Sachikonye, 1986; Wood, 1988). In February 1981, the ZCTU was formally established, under the leadership of a ZANU-PF-dominated executive elected through questionable means. This would sit until 1985, when it was ousted by the group associated with Tsvangirai.

The 1985 Labour Relations Act, which superseded much earlier legislation, provided workers with some gains, including rights to 'fair labour standards', to organise in unions and workers committees, to strike in defence of the union or against an occupational hazard, protection from discrimination in remuneration, recruitment and grading, as well as providing facilities for union dues collection (Mitchell, 1987; Sachikonye, 1986; Wood, 1988). Nonetheless, such gains must be weighed against the Act's retention of cumbersome mediation and arbitration procedures, the powers given to the Minister of Labour to veto union's constitutional decisions, to control the assets and salaries of union leaders, to veto wage agreements, and to intervene in dues collection by instructing employers to send deductions to a trust fund rather than the union. In addition, clauses banned strikes in almost the entire economy (agriculture, communications, mining, and transport were defined as 'essential services'). Labour Minister Shava spelled out the purposes of the new law: 'The Government and the party are committed to the maintenance of a well disciplined and fully productive labour force' (cited in Mitchell, 1987: 121).

Towards the future

The shadow of the past, then, looms large over the unions' attempts to challenge the Mugabe regime and its neo-liberal agenda, in a context in which economic crisis and ESAP further erode union organisation. This has concrete implications for the process of change. As argued above, the emergence of a pro-democracy movement in Zimbabwe can be related to factors common to other democracy struggles in Africa, such as the demonstration effect of international democracy struggles, popular hardships due to economic crisis and ESAP, donor pressures, and popular resistance to the one-party State. However, it is noteworthy that in Zimbabwe the extent of political change

has been highly limited—at most it *defended* a degree of political freedom (for example, the establishment of a *de jure* one-party State was *prevented* in 1990), rather than putting into motion a full process of democratisation towards political rights and the establishment of a genuine multiparty system that would loosen ZANU-PF's iron grip on the levers of power.

I have suggested that this limited outcome reflects both the impressive strength, skills and cohesion of the incumbent government, and the weaknesses and divisions of the opposition. Whilst the parliamentary opposition, in particular, is almost farcical in its inefficacy, key organisations in civil society also need to overcome substantial challenges if they are to successfully resist, and, more importantly, provide alternatives to, the rule and policies of ZANU-PF.

The trade unions, which have formed the focus of this paper, have certainly played a pre-eminent role in defending and, in cases, advancing, the economic and political rights of the broad working class and other sectors of society, but they remain hampered by their own small size, by continuing divisions, and by internal problems, such as a lack of adequate grassroots organisation. When combined with external difficulties such as those provided by a consistently hostile State and the impact of ESAP, these flaws hobble the unions and maintain them in a constantly reactive position in which they are confined to responding to an agenda set by the ruling elite. Whilst the ZCTU's *Beyond ESAP* (1996) is without doubt an innovative approach to the challenges of economic reform in the 1990s, the labour movement's ability to influence the overall direction of policy remain open to question as long as its own difficulties, and failure to break more fully with the logic of ESAP, are not overcome. Moreover, it is noteworthy that most recent industrial actions have failed to officially raise political demands, suggesting that the unions lack a clear strategy for linking their industrial might with their political aspirations.

Indeed, such weaknesses are particularly serious given that the unions are one of the few bodies in civil society with either the numbers, or the strategic power (particularly at the point of production) to resist ZANU-PF. As long as the unions have a relatively weak shopfloor base, clear relations with other popular sectors, particularly the poor peasantry, and a clear political programme, their impact on the process of change cannot but be self-limiting.

A fuller realisation of the potential of the union movement requires a concerted effort by the rank-and-file membership to democratise the unions, and the development of an effective economic and political strategy for labour. Whether this should involve electoral activity remains open to question; the experiences of labour parties in capitalist governments are decidedly uneven and often most unhappy.

It would also seem essential that the urban-based unions acquire allies amongst other sectors of the popular classes, particularly the rural masses and the informal sector and unemployed. The increasing agitation around the land question on the part of the poor peasantry, as manifested in recent spates of threatened and actual land invasions, provide a clear basis for workers to forge an alliance with the other main exploited class in Zimbabwean society on the basis of their common grievances against the ZANU-PF regime: economic hardship on the one hand, and land hunger on the other. Rather than labour migrancy posing an insuperable obstacle to union strength, the familial and economic links between the formal labour force and the peasantry could facilitate such an alliance (c.f. Raftopoulos, 1992b). If combined with a consistent attempt to build unity with the student movement and the unemployed, such an initiative could unite the bulk of the Zimbabwean population in an opposition to the skilful machinations of the Mugabe regime. It seems unlikely, however, that such an alliance could incorporate the veterans at this stage: following their 1997 arrears pay outs, the official veterans movement has apparently aligned itself closely with the ZANU-PF government's anti-labour and 'White conspiracy' rhetoric.

An alliance of the direct producers holds the advantage of excluding power-hungry disgruntled bourgeois 'democrats' and ZANU-PF dissidents from a political coalition, thus circumventing the inevitable limits that any agreement encompassing the contradictory interests of these opposed classes would entail on the process of democratisation: a cross-class agreement would inevitably involve, for example, an acceptance of the principle of a capitalist economy and the preservation of the existing State as preconditions for the support of the bourgeoisie; in Zambia the inclusion and influence of business interests in the democratisation coalition is often cited as one of the main reasons why the trade union-backed Movement for Multi-Party Democracy went on to implement unpopular ESAP policies after it took power in 1991 (Rakner n.d.).

Finally, whilst the establishment of a multiparty State is undoubtedly a genuine advance for the popular classes, insofar as it provides a modicum of democratic and civil rights which expand the democratic space in which the majority of the population is able to organise to further its interests, it is important to note the various problems associated with electoral politics: no matter who is in power, the State cannot abolish capitalism or provide the basis for the empowerment of the direct producers as it is a bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of coercion dependent on the revenues generated in the processes of capitalist accumulation (Bakunin, 1990). As the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin argued in the context of nineteenth-century Europe (1990: 67):

It is true that the most imperfect republic is a thousand time better than the most enlightened monarchy, for at least in the republic there are moments when, though always exploited, the people are not oppressed, while in monarchies they are never anything else. And then the Republic trains the masses little by little in public life, which the monarchy never does. But whilst giving preference to the republic we are nevertheless forced to recognise and proclaim that whatever the form of government, whilst human society remains divided into different classes because of the hereditary inequality of occupations, wealth, education and privileges, there will always be minority government and the inevitable exploitation of the majority by that minority. The State is nothing but this domination systematised and regularised.

Similarly, corporatism's ability to actually empower workers, rather than merely secure the acquiescence of union officials in the running of an exploitative capitalist system, may be questioned (see Vally, 1992). International experiences suggest that corporatism has little ability to deliver material gains in the context of economic crisis and underdevelopment (see van der Walt, 1997). This suggests an agenda for trade unions that does not confine itself to the limits and pitfalls of parliamentarism and corporatism. It suggests a need for a genuinely alternative political programme.

Notes

1. For helpful suggestions I would like to thank Glenn Adler, Patrick Bond, and Richard Saunders. For comments on earlier versions of this paper I would like to thank the participants at the African Studies Association of South Africa third Biennial International Conference (8-9 September 1997, Magaliesberg Conference Centre, Broederstroom, South Africa), and the Workshop on Comparing Experiences of Democratisation in Nigeria and South Africa (30 May-2 June 1998, University of Cape Town, South Africa).
2. Unless otherwise stated, news reports have been drawn from the following sources: *Africa Information Afrique*, *A-Infos Hyper-Archive*, *Africa Confidential*, *The Citizen* (Johannesburg), *International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Online*, *The Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg), *PanAfrican News Agency*, *PeaceNews*, *The Sowetan* (Johannesburg). I would also like to thank Richard Saunders for clarifying some points of detail for me.
3. A full discussion of the forces prompting this authoritarian capitalist road falls outside the scope of this paper, but it may be useful to note some salient factors in passing. For the continuities in the relations of production, one needs to consider the compromises made at the Lancaster House settlement in 1980, the continuity in key elements of the old State apparatus such as personnel and role, the effectively pro-capitalist beliefs of both ZANU and ZAPU, the *embourgeoisement* of the African political elite, and the desire for stability in the face of perceived threats from apartheid South Africa and the metropolis (Astrow 1983; Hull 1986; Mandaza 1987; Phimister 1988). For the authoritarian route, factors such as the precedents provided by the colonial regime, the desire to centralise power, personal ambition, a vanguardist conception of the role of the political party, the attempt by one party to capture the State apparatus for purposes of accumulation, and the determination to maintain national unity in fragile political entities all played a role (cf. Ake 1983; Freund 1988; Spring 1986).
4. Some authors like Raftopoulos (1992a) refer to the emerging African elite as the 'petty bourgeoisie'. However, it is misleading in the extreme to characterise a group who control the coercive and administrative power of the State and exert substantial direct control over the economy through state-capitalist institutions and control over investment and allocation decisions as analogous to small property owners, rather than what they are—nothing more and nothing less than a ruling class.
5. This is not to claim that corporatism is actually democratic—for a critical assessment, see Vally 1992.

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