

Book review

Southern Africa: The new politics

Basil Davidson, Joe Slovo, Anthony R. Wilkinson, **Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution**. Penguin Books, 1976. 374 pp. \$3.95. Reviewed by J. MacLean.

This is a book about revolutionary war. War, even when it is waged by an oppressed people in their quest for freedom, is not a pleasant subject, and this book, although rarely dull, is not always pleasant. Whatever feelings the reader may have concerning the moral legitimacy of or the admissible conditions for a violent response to violence, this book will drive home to him an important fact: the enslaved peoples of the Southern African subcontinent, exasperated after decades of seeking peaceful redress of their grievances, have come to view armed struggle more as a necessity than as a choice. As the South African nationalist leader Joe Slovo puts it: "The path to which South Africa's national liberation movement is committed is not one which it has selected from a group of viable alternatives. There is no other path to the winning of majority rule over the whole of South Africa, for the simple reason that all other routes are permanently barred" (p. 114).

In a sense this volume is really a collection of three small books, each with its distinctive approach, on three separate but related wars: a past war in the former Portugese colonies, a present war in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), and a future war in South Africa. As such it is a valuable source of background information which can help us interpret the fragmentary reports on bombings, shootings, riots, arrests and negotiations in Southern Africa fed to us daily by the media.

Portugese Africa

Basil Davidson examines the long and painful process by which the liberation movements of Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique drew the Portugese army to what one of its generals called "the limits of neuro-psychological exhaustion." His story is that of dispossessed peoples who, starting with literally nothing, succeeded in bringing to its knees a huge military force armed with the most sophisticated Western

weaponry. But it is also the story of the step-by-step creation of new social structures which have enabled the peoples of these countries to regain their own destiny.

Except perhaps when dealing with the confused Angolan situation of 1974 and 1975, Davidson does not present a detailed chronicle of the particular events in each country which led to

independence. His exposition is rather a kind of phenomenology of successful revolutionary warfare, drawing upon the common experiences of the different liberation forces in Portugese Africa. The author's principal thesis is that "successful guerrilla warfare is always and above all political warfar" (p. 21). He shows how the revolutionaries of the Portugese colonies mobilized the population by understanding and identifying with the peasants and workers, and by progressively eliminating structures of oppression in the liberated areas. At the end of his study Davidson points out that social justice is not an automatic concomitant of independence (even with a socialist regime), and he notes that the revolutionary movements

must at present cope with elitist and reformist elements within their own ranks.

South Africa

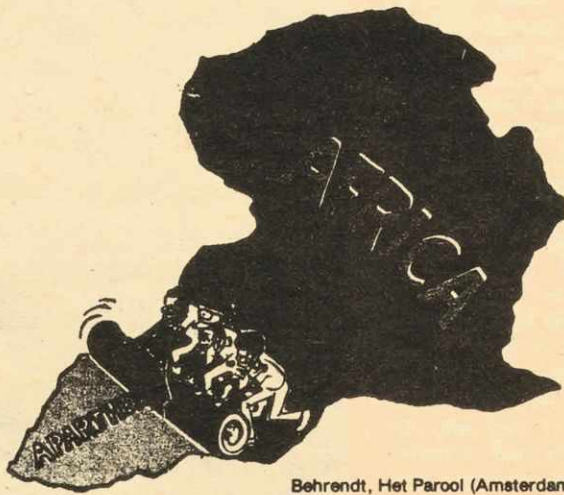
In the second part of the book, Joe Slovo argues that a liberal, evolutionary process of change is not possible in the Republic of South Africa. To support this claim he observes that the recent

depends upon favourable conditions both inside and outside of the Republic's frontiers. Such conditions, he believes, are in the process of becoming a reality; the manifest failure of reformism is engendering a new militancy among the Black population, while the formation of new, friendly states bordering South Africa will facilitate military operations against the racist regime and its infrastructure.

Anthony Wilkinson's concluding essay, "From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe," chronicles in a dispassionate manner the nationalist insurgency against Ian Smith's White dictatorship, as well as the horrifying programme of White counter-insurgency, with its concentration camps and its bombing of villages. The Zimbabwean nationalist movement is not pictured as virgin-pure: we read not only of its factionalism, its blunders in negotiations, and its disagreement on military tactics, but also of its use of questionable techniques (like the mining of roads) which result in black civilian casualties. In spite of all this, the Black insurgency has achieved no small success.

Wilkinson views Rhodesia as a de facto colony of South Africa -- yet a colony which the metropolitan power is willing to abandon when the increasingly effective guerrilla war threatens its own security and desire for detente with Black Africa. If this analysis is correct -- and I believe that recent events prove it is -- the inevitable accession of Zimbabwe to independence must be seen as the successful outcome of a protracted military struggle.

History will undoubtedly view 1976 as an important year in the development of Southern Africa. It is a year which has witnessed the consolidation of government power in Angola, the outbreak of widespread disturbances in South Africa, and international recognition of the achievements of the Zimbabwean resistance. The publication of this book is therefore timely, and by contributing to our understanding of the roots of conflict in this region, it may in itself be a small but significant event in the struggle against White supremacy.



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economic expansion of this country has widened, not narrowed, the gap between Black and White. Slovo's analysis of South African society shows that distinctions of class and race are for all practical purposes coincident in South Africa. He concludes that "true national liberation is impossible without social liberation" (p. 139), i.e., without a destruction of the exploitative economic system.

After tracing the history of the nationalist resistance in South Africa -- and the ruthless repression which it elicited -- Slovo turns to the question of the future prospects of this movement. He emphasizes that the liberation of South Africa's non-White majority

Mike Lynk

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to maintain Tanzania and other undeveloped countries as hewers of wood and drawers of water rather than providing any self-reliant indigenous growth. It will maintain the present international division of labour.

You were on an African campus for a year studying with Tanzanian students. In what way are their goals, conceptions of themselves, lifestyles, different from ours?

Lynk: Well, it begins at their whole conception of society, I guess. There they are actually trying to build, at least verbally, a socialist society. Most of the students have entered university only after doing a two year service to the nation after high school. This would mean either a rural, statistical office for example, or serving their two years with the army or working as an agricultural extension officer or teaching literacy in the countryside. So once having come to university, they are probably more mature than our students here and they probably have a greater feel for life and for the struggles of the common people than the students here do. This in turn influences what they do at University and the kind of career they have in mind. That is, they're interested principally in gaining a skill or a profession that will enable them to go back to the countryside and pick up where they were before, trying to uplift the lives of the working class people in Tanzania.

By and by I was very much impressed with the earnestness and the dedication

to which the Tanzanians felt toward their nation. They had far more patriotism and nationalism than I'd ever seen here. They're far more serious in their work and efforts and are much more willing to get their hands dirty moreso than I've seen in North American students. They seem better integrated into the social life of the country. For one thing we must remember, no university's an ivory tower that always serves some body of people in that country, and to a lesser or greater degree, is integrated with the interests of the ruling group. If the ruling class in that country are peasants and workers then it is to be expected that the students there will have a related conception of life and their contribution to that society will enable them to gain skills and an education which they can use to build a new nation. Another important point I think, is the differences in the conception of education between a developed country, there is, I suppose far more looking out for oneself. There's far more commitment to the gaining of worldly possessions. In an undeveloped country, however, this is partly true. But our conception of country is little more than a sum of the parts. There, the 'whole' is a lot greater than the sum of the parts. There is both an antagonism that arises from the colonial heritage of the past which they're very bitter about, and a brighter future in which they hope they can overcome disease, illiteracy, lack of technical skills and a backward agriculture which colonialism bequeathed to their country.

So finally, they see their education far more practically than we do. They have a greater collective conception of what they will do with their education than students on North American campuses.

Brother from the West

Brother from the west-
(How can we explain that you are our brother?)
the world does not end at the threshold of your house
nor at the stream that marks the border of your country
nor in the sea
in whose vastness you sometimes think
that you have discovered the meaning of the infinite.

Beyond your threshold, beyond the sea
the great struggle continues.

Men with warm eyes and hands hard as the earth
at night embrace their children
and depart before the dawn.

Many will not return.

What does it matter?

We are tired of shackles. For us
freedom is worth more than life.

From you, brother, we expect
and to you we offer
not the hand of charity
which misleads and humiliates
but the hand of comradeship
committed, conscious.

How can you refuse, brother from the west?

-Frelimo