

Book Review

Cherry Gertzel (ed.) Carolyn Baylies, Morries Szeftel; *The Dynamics of the One-Party State in Zambia*. Manchester University Press 1984

Jan Kees van Donge*

This collection of essays provides a good introduction to the themes that dominated Zambian politics in the seventies. The material which the authors collected during the first general election under a one-party constitution provides the core of the book. They have expanded their scope so that these elections are seen as part of a broader process of the institutionalisation of one-partyism. The most successful essay in this respect is Cherry Gertzel's *Dissent and Authority in the Zambian One-Party State 1973-80*. She deals here with those aspects of Zambian politics that are essential and most intriguing. She rightly sees parliament as a forum from which government was continuously challenged. This criticism was not restricted to the backbench because frontbenchers also could indulge in it and such a situation was not seen as paradoxical. Parliament was, however, only one of the numerous platforms from which government was criticised. A dinner of the Law Society of Zambia, a church paper and, above all, the trade union movement were forums of opposition. On the one hand, this shows the resilience of Zambians in defying authority, on the other it shows that one-partyism and the presidential system allow organisations to function with a large degree of autonomy in Zambia compared to other African countries. This shows the mysterious side of the Zambian political system: it can appear so repressive at one time — for example, during the mass detentions of suspected members of the United Progressive Party (UPP) in 1971 — and yet allow vigorous opposition a few years later.

Other papers in this book do not offer such stimulating observations, mainly because sources are not treated properly and therefore, give no insight in Zambian politics. Baylies and Szeftel identify the rise of the Zambian business class as the major explaining variable in Zambian politics. They identify MPs as businessmen or property owners but they do not make clear distinctions with respect to size and nature of their enterprises. They argue "we have found it useful in the general categorisation of M.P.s to lump all those business interests into an initial, single category of businessmen" (p.74). I am at a loss to see the sense of treating someone who may own a large fleet of lorries that provide a steady income as similar to someone who may own a store that is empty, a bar without beer and a farm under weeds. It is crucial, in order to understand the relationships between wealth politics, to distinguish between those who were business before entering politics and politicians who set up businesses. Baylies and Szeftel make this distinction as well: "many acquired such interests after the acquisition of public office" (p.71). They do not indicate, however, how many, how these were identified, nor do they provide a simple or extended case study to illustrate essential mechanisms of capital accumulation. They refer to another of their publications for such vital information. They do not identify individuals where that would make matters clear and the theses they defend remain, therefore,

Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Dar es Salaam.

74

vague. For example, "eighteen of the winners (in the parliamentary elections) were known to have owned large, very large or multiple enterprises, and five others were large land-owners or commercial farmers" (p. 67). If these people had been named then this statement would have become verifiable. They claim to base such statements on research in institutions that are open to the public — for example, the Company Register or cadastral strip maps of the government's Land Use Services Division, so why do they have to remain vague as to who is involved?

Their vagueness about the actors and their personal attributes is coupled with a great confidence on the part of the authors that they have penetrated the world of Zambian politics. It would have been better if they would have pointed out the uncertainties that are unavoidable in this kind of research. For example, "the difficulty of identifying UPP sympathisers ensured that UPP support could not be fully 'flushed out' of UNIP and that UNIP officials could never be certain that they had succeeded in expelling such dissidents" (p. 147). UPP was an illegal party and, therefore, it was impossible to judge which part was underground, as they were prepared for repression. That was not only a difficulty for UNIP officials but for political scientists as well. Yet, there is no hint at such complications in the access to data in a statement that "what made them (UPP leaders on the Copperbelt) a group, much more than their Bemba parentage, was their urban political record" (p. 134). This is based on "detailed biographical data drawn from both documentary sources and from interviews with those most involved" (p. 159). How do you identify those most involved in an illegal political party? Why are the documentary sources not specifically named? Did any of those sources originate from the UPP offices?

Some hard evidence is available on such issues but the authors do not draw upon that. For example, one does not find a list of names and backgrounds of the executive that UPP presented at their inaugural press conference. Ian Scott analysed the social background of those detained during the UPP period as published in the *Government Gazette*.¹ That provides concrete evidence from which limited conclusions can be drawn as it is, of course, not certain that those detained were actually involved. Many of them denied vehemently that they had anything to do with UPP. This data is not referred to in this book.

The result is that the authors become too selective in handling sources and simplify reality. Their treatment of secondary sources illustrates that as well. For example, it is important to understand the conflicts between trade unions and the nationalist movement as such conflicts are a persistent theme in Zambian politics. The literature on this topic offers many conflicting interpretations, yet the authors deal with this matter as if there are no doubts. Where did they find the evidence that "by 1955 most of them (trade unionists) held posts in the ANC on the Copperbelt" (p. 124). Andrew Roberts wrote in his authoritative *A History of Zambia* that "African miners, except at Mufulira completely ignored the call to 'national prayer' during the protest against Federation in 1953. In fact a strike call by congress was ignored. Congress found it hard to obtain direct control over mineworkers, who tended to look to the union for nearly all solutions to their problems"². The authors claim that there were many 'personal' links between trade unions and the nationalist movement. This makes it hard to understand why the struggle between UNIP supporters and Katilungu and his followers had to be so bitter. They mention only John Chisata by name as a trade unionist who was in the nationalist movement at the same time

75

There is no analysis of the people who were involved in this struggle and their further career in politics (p. 134). Ian Henderson suggests that there was a big rift between UNIP minded trade unionists and others. He talks about the 'educated men' in the nationalist leadership who captured the trade union movement from the 'genuine' workers.³ Harries Jones has described UNIP, on the contrary, as representative of the poorest and anti-elitist.⁴ The authors adhere to the latter version (p. 123). They are entitled to their particular vision on Copperbelt politics, but they should take account of contradictory evidence.

The paper on Luapula province depicts the province as completely under the hegemony of UNIP. Bates' study of Luapula province is referred to, but no mention is made about the lack of enthusiasm for UNIP in the Luapula valley that he records. Those in the Luapula valley were said to be 'lazy politically' because they were 'too busy to do partywork'.⁵ Apparently, there was not such an enthusiasm for UNIP to be found among people in the fishing business. That is at variance with the proposition that politics is a major concern for people with business interests that is defended in this book. In this respect, it is also striking that it is not mentioned that there are many Jehovah's Witnesses in the Luapula Province who look askance at politics. Elsewhere in Zambia, the Jehovah's Witnesses appeared to be strongly represented among emerging capitalist oriented enterprises.⁶ This suggests that there may be business interests that prefer to keep their distance from politics.

Yet, we should be grateful for the publication of this book. As mentioned above, some parts are very stimulating and the book contains much useful data as well, for example, on the rate of re-election of MPs. It may spur some people to continue to research this fascinating period and a critical use of this book will be a great stimulus. It is, therefore, regrettable that the book does not contain a complete list of candidates and results in the 1973 and 1968 elections which would be very helpful for further research. The book is beautifully produced by Manchester University Press.

References:

1. I. Scott, "Party Politics in Zambia: A Study of the Organisation of the United National-Independence Party (Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis) Toronto 1976 p 167.
2. A. Roberts, *A history of Zambia*. London; Heinemann 1976 p. 219.
3. I. Henderson, *The Origins of Nationalism in East and Central Africa: the Zambian Case*, *Journal of African History*, 11, 4 (1970) p. 600.
4. P. Harries Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1975 p. 154.
5. R. H. Bates, *Rural Responses to Industrialisation, A Study of Village Zambia*. New Haven, Yale University Press 1976 p. 81.
6. N. Long, *Social Change and the Individual: A study of the social and religious responses to innovation*. Manchester, Manchester University Press 1968.