THE REALIGNMENT OF CLASSES AND POLITICAL ÉLITES IN ZIMBABWE: THE POLITICS OF CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

P Labuschagne[*]

INTRODUCTION

The explanation of the contemporary political developments in Zimbabwe reflects one of the core aspects of politics. The political and economic turmoil in Zimbabwe can be effectively described by applying Harold Laswell's definition of politics as the struggle of deciding who obtains the power to decide who gets what, when and how.

Another of the widely accepted definitions of politics is the one put forward by David Easton who defined politics as the authoritative allocation of values for society (Easton 1965b?21). Easton did not refer to values in its moral dimension, but rather to the benefits and opportunities which people value or desire. According to this definition the reason for the omnipresence of politics in societies is that resources are limited and unevenly distributed in society. Disagreements and conflicts arise between individuals and groups in any given society because of their attempts to satisfy their desires to obtain the scarce values. It is therefore imminent that a referee, such as an elected government, decides about the allocation of limited resources. In this regard politics is the resolution of disputes and conflicts about the allocation of resources (Jackson 1997:7).

In Zimbabwe the ongoing disagreements, disputes and conflicts over whom is going to make the decision is a phenomenon that stretches back to the country's colonial past. Each resolution of a political dispute over the past 120 years in this country resulted in a new (political) relationship that controlled the political power to make the decisions about the allocation of resources and the fulfilment of expectations. However, for the majority of people in Southern Rhodesia during the colonial period, the decisions lacked legitimacy. Legitimacy denotes a general be-lief that the decision-maker's power to make decisions and enforce them, is justified and proper. Legitimacy is therefore a moral or ethical conception which involves

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*   Department of Political Sciences, UNISA.

perceptions of what is right. The large majority of the population questioned the legitimacy of the colonial rulers to make decisions and this led to ongoing conflict.

The Rhodesian government declared itself unilaterally independent on 11 November 1965. The obvious lack of legitimacy and support for this decision caused an escalation of political violence in the former Rhodesia. This dispute led to the formation of a new (political) realignment, the Internal Settlement of 1978, which formed a government consisting of so-called moderate internal leaders. The failure of this political association was followed by the Lancaster House Agreement and the first democratically elected government in Zimbabwe. The new democratically elected government meant a realignment of goups, but this did not end the disputes. The dissatisfaction of the marginalised whites in Zimbabwe led to further disputes and a perpetuation of the conflict.

It must be understood that politics is also about the resolution of disputes and the ongoing conflicts between opposing relationships are just part of the process and essence of politics. For this reason politics will perpetuate itself over centuries. Since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 the conflicts and disputes between the new political élite and the opposition, the economic élite, were perpetuated in the realignment of groups.

The purpose of this article is twofold - firstly to emphasise that the struggle for political control in Rhodesia, and later in Zimbabwe, was one of alignment or realignment of groups such as the ruling élite, individuals, interest groups, groups and associations which were mainly organised in two weakly defined classes. It follows from this premise that the two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, were never able to develop strongly because of former government policies. Both remained weak and ill-defined during the period of colonial rule.

Secondly it is important to explain in the article why the political conflict in Zimbabwe perpetuated itself, even after obtaining independence in 1980. The reason for this phenomenon is that alignment and realignment of interests of groups were still a dominant force in Zimbabwe, even after obtaining independence. It is therefore important to explain this development after independence, and also why the initial alliance which underpinned the struggle to democratise Zimbabwe in 1980, eroded after only one decade. The initial alliance before 1980 and after independence, was between the ruling élite, the peasantry and the working class, which supplied the mass support and foot soldiers during the liberation war. This alliance was replaced in the early nineties with a new alliance which was formed between the members of the ruling élite and the entrepreneurial and agrarian élites (mostly

whites). This new alliance alienated the peasantry and the working class from their previous central position.

The most recent realignment of groups meant a shift in the development strategy of Zimbabwe from the previous position where the central objective was to redress the inequalities that the lower classes suffered in terms of low incomes, ownership and opportunities, a result of the legacy of the colonial period before 1980. The new configuration of ruling élites (governmental, entrepreneurial and agrarian), which emerged in the early 1990s, provided the social consensus for the introduction of market-based reforms. As Dashwood (2000:5) indicates, there remained little evidence beyond the rhetorical level that the government since this realignment was committed to poverty alleviation and the plight of the poor in the country.

CLASS/ÉLITES AS POLITICAL ACTORS IN RHODESIA/ZIMBABWE

The viewpoint in the previous section was that a variety of groups in the former Rhodesia and later in Zimbabwe were active in the process of aligning themselves to obtain political control to gain access and control over the limited available re-sources in the country. To that extent the developmental legacy of Rhodesia/Zim-babwe is an illustration of disagreement and conflict between groups in their attempt to obtain political control. For political stability it is important that the con-flict be resolved so that the resources can be distributed authoritatively, in other words, that the distribution be accepted by society (Jackson 1997:7).

In the era before independence in 1980 consecutive Rhodesian governments were a synthesis of groups associated as a class aimed at protecting the needs and values of the white people in the country. Simultaneously the black communities and groups were to a great extent coerced to accept the decisions on the distribution of resources in the country.

A class refers to a number of people or groups of people classed together because of their specific interests and needs. Belonging to a class symbolizes a shared common culture and historical traditions which inter alia entail mutual interaction and a clear perspective on issues pertaining to the group. Class in this context must be understood in its generic sense and not in the Marxist idiom. When class is used thus it simply means that the group, associations, élites or ruling élites are grouped together for the above-mentioned reasons. Their strategy can vary from exercising direct power or range from influence to coercion to serve their interests and needs. Class is therefore used as a concept that explains the configuration of individuals who are actively joined together to further their own interests.

The Marxist concept of class was too formalistic for the complexities of African society. Furthermore, Marx's class distinction was too rigid to encompass the divisions and pluralism which are part of the civil society in Africa. Thompson (1999:90) argues that ruling groups in Africa are rarely homogeneous. The political élite that holds power is rather a coalition of competing factions classed together rather than a single close-knit, homogeneous and consolidated class. Class conflict in Africa is therefore not solely a conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat where clear boundaries exist. It is also about groups and individuals co-operating in weakly developed classes which compete against each other to capture and control the power of the state. Social alliances are not based on class solidarity but the willingness to co-operate with strategic allies in order to keep control of the state apparatus. However, the importance of broad class distinctions, such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, is important for governmental and societal stability.

The core of élite theories is summarised in Gaetano Mosca's (1939:50) theory of the ruling class which begins with the following statement: "Between the constant facts and tendencies that are to be found in all political organisms, one is so obvious that it is apparent to the most casual eye. In all societies - from societies that are very meagrely developed ... to the most advanced and powerful societies - two classes of people appear - a class that rules and a class that is ruled."

The first class, the bourgeoisie, is the less numerous one and performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings. The second class, the proletariat, is the more numerous one and is directed and controlled by the first.

The political élite, which originates from the bourgeoisie, can thus be defined as the group of people who at any time, and for continuing periods of time, more or less determines the major public policies and how they are implemented (La Palombara 1974:469). It is clear from literature that many have confirmed the basic thesis that some people have more power than others and one class more power than another. C Wright Mills contended that power in a country was dominated by a military-industrial complex led by top military, corporate political leaders.

Class is also a source of distinctive political attitudes and beliefs. The divisions between classes are rarely well defined, but indicators such as level of income, education and occupation tend to produce class identities. It can be a powerful force particularly when linked to group identities such as trade unions or political parties (Jackson 1997:108).

Larry Diamond (1988:115) defines the dominant class as the instrument which owns and controls the most productive assets, appropriates the bulk of the most valued consumption opportunities, and commands a sufficient monopoly over the means of coercion and legitimation to politically sustain their cumulative socio-economic pre-eminence. The ruling élite originates from the dominant class and aims at perpetuating their position of power. The dominated class strives to obtain the position occupied by the dominant class.

The problem of exporting Marx to Africa

As Thomson (1999:76) indicates, it did not matter how brilliant Karl Marx was, he could not globally escape his own mortality. The modern world is a different place which in many ways negates the basic principles and assumptions of Marxist's ideology. In spite of the existence of European capitalist systems the Marxist analysis hits several fundamental problems such as the presence of a strong middle class and the absence of a revolutionary working class which could be the driving force to start a revolution.

Outside the industrial world it proved more difficult to export Marxist propositions to Africa. At first glance Africa was not perceptive to classical Marxist interpretations, basically because the continent had not been fully penetrated by capitalist production.

It is also evident that Africa is not easily straight-jacked uniformly in models used by social scientists elsewhere. The class struggle is a relative simplification of society in subdividing it into competing classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Apart from the fact that Africa has never been industrialised to the same extent as Europe the power relationship and linkages in society are too complex to fit the bi-polar system that Marx had in mind.

Thompson (1999:89) points out that the African masses are divided into peasants and proletarians, while the bourgeoisie comes in at least three parts, commercial, bureaucratic and international. Furthermore, the dominant African branch has its base in the state itself, rather than in civil society as Marx predicted. To complicate matters even more the traditional leaders and the informal sector entrepreneur must also be included in the framework and falls outside the orthodox assumptions of Marxism.

The development of the bourgeoisie as a coherent class in society is very important, because it forms the base from which the ruling élite will eventually emerge. With reference to earlier developments in the former Southern Rhodesia during the Fede-

ration era, this development was seriously lacking. The development of classes amongst the black community was deliberately hampered by the government policy of non-competition. Graf (1985:193) indicates that when an essential non-productive successor élite is removed from direct ownership of the means of production and political power, it will later be compelled to look at the state apparatus as its primary source of élite formation and consolidation.

The problem in most colonial states, such as Southern Rhodesia and later Rhodesia, was that they consciously sought to prevent the formation of a national bourgeoisie and the development of a successor élite in black communities. The colonial regime would rather create a series of regionalised and tribalised bourgeoisies such as the local chiefs who could be managed on the basis of divide and rule, than to create a climate for political development and democratisation. This strategy was evident in the policies of the former Prime Minster, Ian Smith, who tried to elevate the chiefs of Rhodesia as the only true representatives of the needs of the masses and in the process undermined their legitimacy.

The dangers are apparent for more than one reason. Nationalist movements develop around the position of the chief and in the long run render him powerless and in the process disrupt the traditional system. Secondly the potential of creating a successor élite, is undermined by obstructing the development of a national bourgeoisie. This undermined the potential of building a democratic character in colonial state. When the successor élite eventually steps into the shoes of the ruling élite, the tendency to enrich themselves and abuse power, is a real possibility.

The impression is then created that the possession of political power by the ruling élite of a country is the *condition sine qua non* for good life: status, security, benefits and above all wealth. It is therefore important that the colonial authorities allow the development of a dominant bourgeoisie class in order to develop a ruling élite with a real dynamic mass-based structure (Graf 1985:195).

Milton Friedman (1962:9) also tries to establish certain logical links between capitalism and political freedom, "because it separates economic power from political power and in the way enables the one to offset the other." Through this process the market removes the organisation of economic activity from the control of political authority and so reduces the concentration of power.

It must be understood that there is a distinctive difference between the ruling and economic élites in a country. The term economic élites was coined by Dashwood who explains (2000:8) that the terms agrarian and entrepreneurial élites (terms that will be used later in the article) apply to élites in specific forms of capitalistic or-

ganization. In Zimbabwe the élites were the large scale commercial farmers, the large industrial, commercial and service enterprises, most of whom came from the white community. The ruling élite refers to senior politicians and bureaucrats who use their political power to establish a base for themselves. They transfer their petty bourgeoisie status to become a fully-fledged bourgeoisie and in the process the state becomes an instrument of that class.

In many countries the same groups may occupy the position of the ruling and economic élites. However, since 1980 the economic entrepreneurial and agrarian élites in Zimbabwe remained largely outside the formal structure of government.

Peasantisation rather than proletarianisation

One of the shortcomings of the former rulers of Southern Rhodesia, as pointed out previously, was that they obstructed the natural development of human association in the country. The policy of consecutive governments in Southern Rhodesia and Rhodesia was to divide and rule and in the process they suppressed the development of classes. It was not only the development of the bourgeoisie that was obstructed but also the development of a coherent proletariat. This process is very efficiently summed up by Leo (1984:15) in his work on classes in Kenya. He described the process of development in Kenya as not one of proletarianisation but rather of peasantisation. In Southern Rhodesia/Rhodesia the political rulers were, because of the higher level of industrialisation, in a more advantageous position for the proletarianisation of the workers, but for obvious reasons this opportunity was not fully developed.

The process of development and the extension of the industrial sector in Southern Rhodesia during the 1940s created a real possibility for some form of proletariani-sation, during a period of higher industrialisation. The post-war period was very advantageous for Rhodesia with factories increasing in number from 294 in 1939 to 473 in 1948. At the same time their gross output grew from US $26 million to US $104 million. In Southern Rhodesia manufacturing moved into second place after agriculture as a source of income, ahead of the thriving mining industry. Moreover, with the Southern Rhodesia's expanding industrial sector and the advantage of being the capital for the Central Africa Federation, which translated into jobs and foreign capital through subsidies, tax rebates and infrastructure investment, the prognoses for industrialisation looked a real possibility. Competing interests in the industrial sector, enhanced by the Africans in the federation countries, stimulated the potential for class formation in the industrial sector (Sylvester 1991:28).

Further growth in the industrial sector during the period 1953 to 1957, when the manufacturing sector increased from seven hundred to thirteen hundred firms, contributed to an uneasy peace in the industrial sector. The foreign firms especially accounted for more than 70% invested in the industrial sector. The white middle class was upset about the expansion of black proletarianisation at the time when a nationalistic wave swept over British colonies to the north of Southern Rhodesia. In the Central African Federation the new catchword was based on the development philosophy of racial partnership. The underlying assumption was to derail the rising tide of black nationalism which had engulfed the rest of the British colonies and to prevent black proletarianisation.

The Rhodesian Prime Minister, Godfrey Huggins, was well aware of the potential problems that this approach could create in Southern Rhodesia as a unit in the larger Federation and the demands of the blacks of Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland to keep the Federation free from racialism. Huggins consequently developed vague principles of governing policies in the light of which the position of the African would be progressively redefined. He coupled partnership with standards and a businesslike approach. Huggins shared the growing perception that this development could be put to good use in absorbing the upcoming black class in small numbers which would be aligned with the whites against any challenge from the black proletariat to white paternalism in Southern Rhodesia (Sylvester 1991:31).

This development was simultaneously enhanced by the peasantisation of small scale farmers in Southern Rhodesia. This step inhibited the linking up of the small scale farmers with the workers to create a substantial proletariat. The potential for class formation was therefore efficiently muted.

The large majority of blacks in the former Rhodesia were peasants. As Thompson (1999:81) indicates, they are the masses in African society. Because they supply their own subsistence from small scale farming it limits their potential interaction with the capitalist market. If the state imposes taxes on income or on consumer goods and it becomes too high the peasants simply disengage from the capitalistic sector and revert to subsistence farming, relying on their ability of self-sufficiency for survival. In this way their inclusion in the capitalistic sector was effectively hindered.

Although the peasantry, because of their large numbers, formed an ideal basis for political mobilisation from 1972 to 1980, they never formed a class which could interlink, interact and support the small upcoming black proletariat in the industrial sector during the days of the Federation. The reason for this phenomenon was their reluctance to interact with the industrial workers and their apparent isolation from

them. It was the mobilisation by black nationalistic movements amongst the peasantry, which drew them into the political arena.

The development of the black proletariat as well as a class system in Southern Rhodesia during the era of the Federation, was consequently successfully hampered. Firstly, the industrial sector was not large enough to build a sufficiently opposing block and secondly, the manipulation of the Southern Rhodesian government ensured that the principle of racial partnership was not sufficiently developed in this part of the Federation. The lip service paid by Huggins helped to secure Southern Rhodesia's entry into the Federation but at the same time white fears were adequately dealt with. The industrial workers were temporarily mollified by the 30% wage increase, but their optimism was short-lived. Soon after the partnership had failed, the experiment of the Federation came to a sad halt. This paved the way for Southern Rhodesia to become Rhodesia and the unilateral declaration of independence in 1965. In this new political unit, which defied the world, any class development was nipped in the bud.

The politics of opposition, from the declaration of independence by Ian Smith in 1965, up to independence in 1980, was basically fought between two opposition classes. The first was a ruling élite which consisted of the minority white group and a limited number of blacks who had aligned themselves with the Smith regime. The opposition, outside parliament, was mainly the black nationalist movements ZANU and ZAPU who aligned themselves with the large majority, the black community. The latter consisted mainly of the rural peasants and the ordinary workers. This development is important to the extent that the rural peasants formed the support base for the eventual winners in 1980. However, this is beyond the scope of the discussion.

ÉLITES, GROUPS AND FACTIONS IN ZIMBABWE AFTER 1980: ALIGNMENT AND REALIGNMENT

Richard Sandbrook (1985:115) identifies the absence of a strong enough class structure and a fully formed bourgeoisie as negative factors preventing the existence of an efficiently run state. A well-developed bourgeoisie means economic development and a class strong enough to support economic transformation and development. Sandbrook further argues that the weakness of the African bourgeoisie combined with the predominance of ethnic and religious conflicts could set the stage for a strongman to maintain political power on the basis of patrimonial rule.

In Zimbabwe the configuration of class forces after independence in 1980 was con-
structed as a new ruling élite, ZANU PF, the peasantry and the working class. The
alliance between these three also underpinned the original development strategy of
the 1980s which was concerned with equity and welfare and ways of addressing the
imbalances of the past in terms of incomes and opportunities. However, the new
ruling élite was well aware of the importance of maintaining the health and vitality
of the productive sectors of the economy, which were still largely dominated by the
white community. Although stripped of political power, the whites in Zimbabwe
formed a formidable economic block that could maintain pressure and influence
from behind the scenes. They formed the entrepreneurial and agrarian élite.

Dashwood (2000:190) points out that the latter élites, although stripped of political
power, became an important force in the change of direction in Zimbabwe's de-
velopment strategy. By 1985/1986 it was clear for the ruling élite that the economy
was not performing well, especially because of the growing number of unemployed
people. It was clear that the economy needed market-based reforms and in accept-
ing this they played directly into the hands of the members of the economic élite. In
the early 1990s there was a convergence of interests between the entrepreneurial
and the ruling élite over the issue of market-based reforms, especially over the
matter of deregulation. This extended also to the agrarian élite whose members
were very supportive of the idea of market-based reforms that could quell the
danger of state intervention. However, the gap between the agrarian sector and the
ruling élite remained large, mainly because of the latter's position on the distribu-
tion of commercial farms.

In the late 1980s interests converged into a dominant class on the issue of market-
based reforms. The about-face of government was also possible because of its
stronger position after the merger of ZANU and ZAPU in 1989.

This led to the embourgeoisement of the ruling élite and their alignment, not with
their traditional support base, the rural peasants, but with the entrepreneurial and
agrarian élite. The new alignment in turn had a variety of spinoffs. The members of
the ruling élite enriched themselves and in the process lost further touch with their
traditional basis of support, the peasantry and the working class. Their interests
shifted to the economic élites which was a consequence of the ruling élite's own in-
creasing stake in the economy (Dashwood, 2000:193). In Zimbabwe this process
was enhanced by the fact that the ruling ZANU-PF stayed in power for more than
20 years. Enduring contacts behind closed doors increased the influence of the eco-
nomic élites, largely white, much more than if this process had taken place through
open democratic channels.

This alignment for a variety of reasons did not last long. During the period between 1995-2000 the relationship between the ruling and economic élites eroded to a certain extent. There was growing disillusionment over the reform process and the economic management of the country was responsible for a rift between the ruling and the economic élite. The ruling élite's policy, particularly on the redistribution of land and the farm invasions, created more tension.

At the same time the alienation of the subordinate classes, the peasants, the working class and the petty bourgeoisie outside the state developed as a real threat to the ruling élite. The government figured that they could effectively side-line them as before, but the calculated risk did not pay of. The emergence of Morgan Tsangvirai as leader of the Zimbabwe Commercial Trade Union supplied the peasants, working class and the petty bourgeoisie with a vehicle to articulate their protest about the weakening economic situation and their alienation from a real political voice. The registration of the Movement for Democratic Change as a political party and the good performance in the 2000 election demonstrate the level of opposition to the policies of the Mugabe regime.

Mugabe's reaction was predictable and not good news for an economy already on its knees. Behind closed doors he sanctioned the occupation of commercial farms which could serve a twofold purpose. Firstly it could help to silence the landless peasants to a certain extent and it also penalised the white commercial farmers for their lack of support for ZANU-PF and their support for Tsangvirai's MCD.

ZIMBABWE QUA VADIS?

The purpose of this article was to explain why real class formation was not possible during the colonial era in the former Southern Rhodesia and Rhodesia in the period leading up to the independence in 1980. For a variety of reasons the formation of the proletariat was suppressed and the development of a black bourgeoisie not encouraged. In the process of political manoeuvring to keep the political aspirations of the nationalistic black in check, the ruling élite in waiting was not allowed to develop sufficient resources to deal with the demands of governance.

After gaining independence in 1980 the ruling élite aligned themselves with their support base, the peasants and the working class. However, by the late 1980s they merged their interests more with the entrepreneurial and agrarian élites because they shared a common capitalist ideology. The alienated peasants and working class shifted their support to the upcoming party of Morgan Tsangvirai, who supplied them with an opposition voice. Suddenly Mugabe was in a catch 22 situation. On the one hand the economic situation in the country was worsening and on the

other hand the peasants were demanding the delivery of his promises. His response to the problem was to permit and instigate the farm invasions in a vain effort to win back support. For Zimbabwe as a country this was an unfortunate choice.

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