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REGIONAL STRATEGIES OF DEVELOPMENT: FROM THE FRONTLINE STATES TO SADCC

By

Carol B. Thompson

In discussions about the state in Third World countries, there has been a proliferation of case studies. These intensive historical analyses of political economies have increased understanding about the role of the state in the struggle for economic independence. But even case studies which focus on alternatives for gaining control over national production have often treated each state as an isolated unit fighting against foreign domination.

The experience of Southern Africa challenges this case study preoccupation, because the struggle of the individual Southern African states have, by necessity, been coordinated with each other. The states have found that they cannot separate the development of their own productive forces from those of others in the region. To transform *national* relations of production requires *regional* coordination, especially because colonial history has linked the states under the economic dominance of a more powerful neighbor, South Africa.

This paper briefly discusses the success of the Frontline States (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia) in promoting the independence of Zimbabwe as the basis for coordinated development strategies in the Southern African region. Zimbabwe is independent but not yet economically liberated, and neither is any of the other Frontline States. As Presidents Julius Nyerere and Samora Machel have both stated, political independence is meaningless without economic liberation. Many scholars have concluded that the outcome of the economic struggle in Zimbabwe to reduce South African control could determine the very survival of Botswana, Zambia, and Mozambique as viable political economies. It is important, therefore, to analyze the steps being taken in the region to sustain the movement toward economic liberation.

Frontline States

The Frontline States scored an important victory with the independence of Zimbabwe. The independence was the result of the armed struggle, but the Frontline States played a key role in support of that struggle. In addition to providing territorial sanctuaries and material support, nationals from all five of the states died with the Zimbabweans.

The victory was especially remarkable because all five Frontline States are economically dependent on the West. They are dependent on the states, Great Britain and the United States, that were instrumental in supporting the Smith regime in its resistance to majority rule. In addition, three of the five (Botswana, Mozambique, and Zambia) are very dependent on South Africa for economic survival. A government in Zimbabwe coming to power with the help of South Africa would simply further integrate the region into economic relations with South Africa. For these reasons the internal settlement with Bishop Muzorewa was unacceptable. His government was dependent on South Africa and had minimal legal control over the economy.

The Frontline stood firm in supporting their goals which were, however, quite limited. They did not expect to transform the relations of production in Zimbabwe; that struggle would continue among the Zimbabwean people themselves, long after the guns were silenced. They had only two very basic objectives: 1) a state legally capable of taking control of production and 2) a government coming to power that was not beholden to South Africa. These goals came out of their own experience and are the basis for the ideological congruence that has held them together from the formation of the Frontline in December 1974 to the present.

In spite of very different colonial histories and social relations of production, since independence each of the five states has used state intervention to take control of production. Each took control to coordinate overall development of productive forces, to increase production for local needs, and to direct the allocation of surplus back to the producers (health care, water, etc.). With this shared experience, the Frontline leaders knew the state must have this minimal legal capability of directing the economy.

As important as these similar economic experiences, was the ideological congruence of the five. A state built on the economic and political subordination of the majority, simply by criterion of race, was unacceptable. Their own national independence struggles fought to eradicate that subordination and the independent governments interpreted the struggle in Zimbabwe as a continuation of their own.

Theories of relative state autonomy help us to understand and situate these objectives of the Frontline States in the liberation of Zimbabwe. Explaining the ability of a state to confront the dominant class in certain historical instances, the theories of relative state autonomy are based in the structural Marxist theories of the state but are a critique of them. They acknowledge the importance of economic structures in social relations, but avoid the more deterministic and functionalist

interpretations of the structural Marxists.

It is impossible to elaborate the theories in this short time; I will simply briefly summarize their main argument. The concept of relative state autonomy arises from Marx's discussion of the Bonapartist state where he showed that in certain historical circumstances no one class holds the balance of power. In this situation state action can be decisive for formation of the future social structure; it can be progressive and advance the mode of production. In short, the relations between the state and the dominant class is central to Marxist theory, but the relationship is not obvious and depends on historical and structural conditions. The state may achieve relative autonomy under various conditions: a crisis within the dominant class, or if the mode of production is indeterminant or if the state has a strong base in the dominated classes. In a longer work, I show that these objective conditions were present at different times during the Frontline struggle. The weak and dependent states could assert their relative state autonomy.

The theories, however, do not discuss the potentiality of states acting in coordination to increase relative state autonomy. The theories consider each state as an isolated entity. But it is obvious that relative state autonomy is quite constrained if one state acts alone. If the peripheral state attacks the dominant structures and appropriates the means of production, the dominant classes can retaliate, and often do (e.g. Cuba, Chile, Jamaica). The argument here is that the coordination among the Frontline States was necessary to sustain support for Zimbabwe and assert their relative state autonomy in spite of direct opposition from the dominant class (Anglo-American capital) in the region. Further, this political coordination among the Frontline States has become the basis for coordinated economic planning to reduce their dependence on foreign capital in general, and on South Africa in particular.

Coordinated Development Strategies

The dominance of South Africa in the Southern African region is well documented. A few statistics will suffice to remind us. The combined GNP's of the nine Southern African countries is only about one-third of South Africa's alone. Angola has the only major resource of oil in the region, but it refines only 4.4 percent while South Africa, with no deposits of oil, refines 82.3 percent of the total refined oil in the region. A Rhodesian Front leader said recently in the Zimbabwean parliament that South Africa could crush Zimbabwe with a rail embargo without firing a shot. South Africa dominates the transport-communication networks in the region. Its military capability which is greater than all the rest of Africa combined (except Egypt) has also been documented. South Africa wants to sustain this dominance

by forming a "constellation of states," a policy proposed by Prime Minister Botha after the Frontline States outlined their own plan. The South African strategy has been called the "constellation of Southern Africa" by the Frontline States.

The development potential of the region, even without South Africa, is great. Zimbabwe has already produced one million tons of surplus of maize in 1980. Southern Africa has vast supplies of oil, chrome, copper, iron ore, tungsten, bauxite, and hydroelectric power. The question raised in the Frontline States' planning offices is how to move from here to there? How to overcome the colonial legacy of distorted economies, dependence on outside technology, with inadequate surplus for investment.

First, it must be clarified that none of the states' plans for state intervention in the economy is adequate for transforming production. It is a necessary step to coordinate national plans, but not sufficient. The goal of Angola and Mozambique to put producers in charge of the state is important but not sufficient. The workers and peasants may be in control, but it does little good if they are starving because of international economic sabotage. What is further needed, therefore, is international economic coordination among the states in the region in order to develop their forces of production.

The Frontline States assert that their past economic and political experience will help them in setting up a development strategy. As Samora Machel stated:

The political will that moves the Frontline States, their practice, the experience accumulated over these years, in particular the coordinated actions and the sacrifices, constitute a basis for unity which enables the new challenge for our people, the struggle for economic liberation, to be faced with greater determination.

The independence of Zimbabwe and the unity forged in the common action of the Frontline States created conditions for all the countries in the region to come together in the fight for harmonious and independent regional development (SADCC 2, 27 November 1980).

Second, Frontline economic coordination critiques the previous attempts on the African continent that have been failures. Most of the previous economic integration schemes have separated economic considerations from political ones. They have set up customs unions which have done little but rather develop the already dominant sectors. Customs unions have facilitated capitalist penetration by providing a protective

wall of tariffs which reduces competition. They have promoted coordination simply at the level of exchange or infrastructure, which facilitates the growth of the already dominant sectors. They have increased the inequities within their boundaries.

The regional coordination emerging from the Frontline States' experience, therefore, is trying to base their economic cooperation on the already established political cooperation. Tanzania and Mozambique took the lead on economic coordination in the region when they established the Tanzania-Mozambique Permanent Commission of Cooperation in April 1976. Still angry over the failure of the East African Community, the Tanzanian government wanted to make sure that any regional cooperation would not perpetuate its underdeveloped and poor economy. The Permanent Commission, therefore, set up production complementarity as a priority. Their cooperation was at the level of production, not just exchange. This required, first, that national plans be coordinated to make sure the same priorities were set. Second, production is coordinated so that it is shared by each country. The Commission called for:

industrial complementarity not competition. This means that integrated industries will be those which require access to some or all of both markets, which have significant forward or backward linkages to other national or joint industries.

For example, tire factories were built in both countries but one factory makes tires for trucks, the other one for vans and autos. Neither country suffered from lack of production development and competition was avoided. Marketing coordination was also established for agricultural products such as sisal and cashews.

Learning from this nascent economic coordination, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) has been established to promote regional cooperation to enable the states to take control of production and reduce their dependence on South Africa. Their first emphasis is on the building of infrastructure, a step that is necessary to redirect goods from South African rails and ports. Forty percent of the funds pledged at SADCC2 was for Mozambique to improve its rail and port facilities for traffic from the land-locked countries: Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia. But the governments want to move as quickly as possible to coordinate production and national development plans. The mineral base is present to build several industrial bases. Angola with its oil could build a petrochemical industry. Tanzanian phosphate is designated for fertilizer production. Iron ore in Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, and Tanzania could be directed to iron and steel development. Botswana is already the major supplier of beef and could redirect

its trade to the region, instead of to South Africa. Several such projects are in the planning stages.

Obstacles to Coordinated Development

The opportunities seem endless with such vast potential wealth: minerals, land, and human resources. But major problems loom. The most pressing is the armed aggression of South Africa. Within the first year of Zimbabwe's independence, South Africa had openly attacked not only Angola, but Mozambique, Zambia, and Botswana. It could easily attack the new railways and infrastructure (much as it keeps the Benguela line out of operation by financing Savimbi) if it decided that SADCC was effectively diverting capital. The Frontline States have pledged joint retaliation in the event of a major South African attack, but clearly, the necessity of such military expenditures diverts funds from development.

A second major problem is the contradictory social relations of production among the states. For the Tazara railroad Tanzania and Zambia had a major feud over the wages to be paid to the managers. In Tanzania the wage differential is about 1:18 between the highest and lowest paid employees. In Zambia it is as high as 1:50. Zambia wanted to pay managers of the railroad much more than Tanzania would tolerate. In Mozambican and Tanzanian joint economic coordination, Tanzanians are paid pensions which raise their salaries much above the Mozambicans for the same job. Coordinated plans cannot tolerate for long these highly differentiated wages for the same project. But even more fundamental differences must be addressed. In Mozambique and Angola, the stratification between the planners, managers, and producers is under attack. The producers are participating in management and planning. Can the goals and methods of producer-planners in Mozambique be coordinated with those of the highly specialized technocrat-managers in Zambia?

The final crucial issue is whether foreign technical assistance can be encouraged without simply facilitating the further penetration of international capital into the region. Ultimately changing structural links can only succeed if the social relations of production are transformed.

The victory of the Frontline States in the liberation of Zimbabwe is exciting. A small weak alliance compromised, yes, but won its goals. Regional economic coordination is exciting for alternative theories are being developed to transform the forces of production. The success of the economic coordination depends on the outcome of the class struggle but the class struggle also depends on the successful regional economic coordination. The political success of Zimbabwean independence provides an economic base for reconstruction of productive forces in the region.