



GmB/016/0105/43

Trade Unions

What kind of transition?

Reform and Revolution: South Africa in the Nineties, (Ed) Gordon Naidoo (CODESRIA and Skotaville Publishers, R15). Reviewed by Ben Turok



FORWARD EVER: Fears that the transition may deliver 'a deracialised but unchanged economic system' are raised in a new book by Cosatu strategists

THOSE who are in the heat of the fire raging in South Africa are generally reluctant to question too critically the possible outcomes of the struggle.

It is somehow not "polite" to question present strategies and tactics of the liberation movement, especially as the establishment is ever eager to pounce on signs of dissidence or even disagreements. In any case, the imperatives of building ever greater unity are obvious to all.

It is therefore rather courageous for Gordon Naidoo and his colleagues to produce this up-to-the-minute analysis of the differing strands that make up

the liberation movement, to tease open some of the contradictions and attempt to project likely outcomes.

The scene for the book is set in the preface. The discussion is located in a "politi-co-military impasse" and suggests that there is a danger "that the more things change, the more they will remain the same for the majority of the black population". The question is posed whether we are to see a "deracialised but unchanged economic system", and reference is made to the experience elsewhere in Africa where the class divisions which emerged after independence came as a

surprise to the movements which failed to handle them properly.

Many of the contributors to this volume address these issues directly, though more dialogue between them might have generated a more consistent set of arguments; but this is a common problem with books consisting of separate papers.

Insofar as there is an overt common theme it is that sections of the national liberation movement leadership may be co-opted into a wider dominant class, thereby securing for monopoly capital a more stable home than is provided by the present system.

That theme is explored in a variety of directions by the authors and by examining different sectors of the social structure. Moeletsi Mbeki asks whether the deep conflicts in the country can be solved by negotiations and implies that there remains an alternative, less compromising route. He sets out the reasons why both the regime and the movement find it expedient to enter into negotiations at the moment and sets this issue in the context of the balance of forces, both internally and internationally. Mbeki suggests that the ruling class is looking for real political reform as distinct from cooption of compliant elements, though it is not certain that this will be sufficient to resolve the country's conflicts.

Jennifer Clare Mohammed conducts a careful historical examination of claims for group rights and points out that these have been developed to protect privileged whites. She argues instead for collective constitutional rights as part of the future democratic order.

Adrian Sayers discusses the emergence of a powerful labour movement through the various different organisational forms in the past decade. He then debates the prospects for working-class leadership of the struggle in relation to the struggle for democracy and socialism. Sayers raises sensitive issues about the ANC-SACP-Cosatu alliance with respect to the prospects for economic democracy, arguing that greater clarity is needed about the policies of each component.

Other essays in the volume deal in considerable depth with the economic structures of South Africa, including issues such as privatisation and nationalisation.

All in all, this is a stimulating volume which will surely be used extensively in the evolving debate about strategy and tactics in the liberation movement.

□

Ben Turok is the director of the Institute for African Alternatives.