

REVIEW ESSAY

Democracy and Historiographies of Organized Labour in Zimbabwe*

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Keep on Knocking: A History of the Labour Movement in Zimbabwe, 1900–97. Ed. by Brian Raftopoulos and Ian Phimister. Baobab Books on behalf of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Harare 1997. xx, 164 pp.

Striking Back: The Labour Movement and the Post-Colonial State in Zimbabwe 1980–2000. Ed. by Brian Raftopoulos and Lloyd Sachikonye. Weaver Press, Harare 2001. xxvii, 316 pp., £14.95; \$24.95.

The ongoing, government-instigated collapse of socio-economic stability in postcolonial Zimbabwe brings a poignant light to bear on these two books. They were written in a time – not so very long ago – when it was feasibly safe to air debate on economic policies and political direction in Zimbabwe. This is no longer the case; the fact that several of the contributors to these volumes belong to a political movement besieged by accusations of all manner of supposed crimes against the state, sadly renders these books valuable, *inter alia*, as intellectual artifacts of a freer era. They are also testimony to the tenacity of the Zimbabwean publishing industry.

Keep on Knocking is an interesting hybrid. Its preface was written by Morgan Tsvangirai, then General Secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), now President of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and, at the time of writing, on trial for treason in Zimbabwe. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung sponsored the book's production. By means of this funding, it brings together two of the expatriate doyens of Zimbabwean labour history, a group of Zimbabwe-based intellectuals, and an extensive trade-union-sponsored oral history project. *Keep on Knocking* gives material reality to two imperatives. The first, deeply felt in the 1980s in Southern Africa – was to write history for and with, as opposed to

* My thanks to E. Win for useful comments on a draft of this essay. Any errors remain my own.

about, labour. The second was to provide a means for education-hungry Zimbabwean workers to learn their own history, which had been smothered by a powerful nationalist political narrative. *Keep on Knocking* was thus produced in the best traditions of labour/social history – that the intellectual work of the highest calibre should be made accessible to working people, and that, armed with a critical version of their own history, class-conscious workers could move forward swiftly and more confidently.

This underlying purpose and audience explain the somewhat informal tone of this book as well as several other attributes. There is a lack of footnotes (although each chapter ends with a “note on sources”) and an absence of an extended bibliography (instead there are suggestions for “further reading”). Notable, however, are a chronology of labour-related events in Appendix 3 and a list of trade unionists, some quite obscure, in Appendix 4; this book was really meant to contribute to uncovering the “hidden history” of Zimbabwean labour, rather than to the production of purely academically focused knowledge.

To paraphrase Ama Ata Aidoo: “No Poststructuralism Here”. The first chapter of *Knocking*, by Ian Phimister and Charles van Onselen, is mainly a summary of their 1970s and 1980s works – written in an era confident of its revisionist view of African history – but well preceding the linguistic turn.¹ In fact, Phimister and van Onselen were in large part responsible for revisionism in Zimbabwean history. Their scholarship has been superb and its their impact on subsequent historiography immense; but today even a lukewarm poststructuralist will shudder at their deep reliance on the logic of a master narrative. In this book, the narrative is shorn of its cruder linearity but the underlying premise of African workers gradually achieving a revolutionary consciousness through gradually confronting, articulating, and acting on their grievances against colonialism is inescapable.

In fairness, it must be pointed out that the poststructuralist canon of “inherently unstable nature of categories, the problem of reflexivity, the preference for deep texture and thick description over parsimony, and the Foucauldian extension of power out from the state into the realm of disciplinary discourses and onto the body itself”² has developed only

1. Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia* (London, 1976); Charles van Onselen and Ian Phimister, *Studies in the History of African Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Gweru, 1978); Ian Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890–1948: Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle* (London, 1987); *idem*, *Wangwi Kolia: Coal, Capital and Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1994).

2. Ronald Grigor Suny, “Back and Beyond: Reversing the Cultural Turn?”, *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), pp. 1476–1499.

limited purchase on Zimbabwean historiography.³ It has been more influential in South Africa, where there has been greater access to and interest in European and South Asian critiques of the traditions of Enlightenment-era social analysis.⁴ It is therefore perhaps somewhat unfair to judge *Keep on Knocking* and *Striking Back* (see below) from the standpoint of a style that has originated and largely been propagated elsewhere.

Up until very recently, political economy suited Zimbabwean historians just fine, as they developed and presented a compelling narrative of social progress – from most points of view – from 1890 to Independence in 1980 and beyond. At varying speeds to varying observers, however, it gradually became clear that the anointed nationalist liberators of the people were actually engaged in deeply antidemocratic activities.⁵ These came into full flower around the time of the 2000 presidential elections. For reasons far more directly related to bread-and-butter issues than to the linguistic turn, therefore, aspersions and doubts have been cast on the narrative of nationalist progress in Zimbabwe.

Readers familiar with Phimister and van Onselen's work will recognize famous riffs in *Keep on Knocking* – names of mines written in Shona and nailed to trees in order to warn other migrant workers away from particularly cruel bosses, for example. The recognition of the importance of this kind of silent yet eloquent protest against the colonial labour regime was a quintessential example of worker resistance in a certain phase of

3. Scholars like Christine Sylvester and Timothy Burke have, however, moulded certain poststructuralist insights with the political economy tradition. See Christine Sylvester, "Women' in Rural Producer Groups and the Diverse Politics of Truth in Zimbabwe", in Marianne Marchand and Jane Parpart (eds), *Feminism/Postmodernism/Development* (London, 1995), pp. 182–203; Burke, "Fork Up and Smile': Marketing, Colonial Knowledge and the Female Subject in Zimbabwe", in Nancy Rose Hunt *et al.* (eds), *Gendered Colonialisms in African History* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 118–134.

4. Examples include Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History", *American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), pp. 1516–1545; David Coplan, "Popular History; Cultural Memory", *Critical Arts Journal*, 14 (2000), pp. 121–137. Contributors to vol. 42 (2000) of the *South African Historical Journal* discussed these issues at some length; see Tim Nuttall and John Wright, "Probing the Predicaments of Academic History in Contemporary South Africa", pp. 26–47; Paul Maylam, "'Dead Horses, the Baby and the Bathwater': Post-Theory and the Historian's Practice", pp. 121–135; Alan Lester, "Global Capitalism, Social Dislocation and Cultural Discourse in South African History", pp. 277–289; G.R. Allen, "Is There a Baby in this Bathwater? Disquieting Thoughts on the Value of Content in History," pp. 290–306. Also relevant are the observations of Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, "'I Saw a Nightmare': Violence and the Construction of Memory (Soweto, June 16, 1976)", *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), pp. 23–44.

5. "While the suffering caused by colonial rule is widely documented and internationally recognized, the suffering in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the 1980s is a history that is unknown except to those who experienced it at first hand"; The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980–1988* (Harare, 1997).

Zimbabwean colonial labour history, and in a sense, of labour historiography itself. Uncovering, recognizing, and theorizing the value of such sources hitherto lying dormant in the National Archives of Zimbabwe made Van Onselen's *Chibaro* one of the great contributions to the historiography of African labour.⁶ In that sense, the first chapter of *Keep On Knocking* almost constitutes an abridged "Greatest-Hits" collection of Phimister and van Onselen.

Chapter 2, written by scholar/activist Brian Raftopoulos, is likewise mainly an abridged version of his previously published work on the development of nationalism in colonial Zimbabwe.⁷ In the 1945–1965 period on which this chapter focuses, Zimbabwean labour began to move with international currents, in terms of general political and social ideology and specifically of strike action. Beloved of Zimbabwean historians, the 1948 General Strike represents, as one observer proclaimed so long ago, the coming of age of Zimbabwean workers. The articulation of this new labour consciousness with the parallel growth of a pan-African-flavoured nationalism has been the subject of several studies.⁸ Raftopoulos's contribution has been to focus specifically on the labour movement's interaction with nationalism during this period, belying the once-popular view that the labour movement in fact made no significant contribution to anti-colonial agitation after the early 1950s.⁹

Chapters 3 and 4 continue the chronological development, by decade, of the story of the development of the formal union movement. These chapters rely more heavily on the interviews conducted by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions in 1994–1995. The folding of this information into the narrative of union development provides an excellent example of one of two things, depending on one's perspective. On the one hand, it can be seen as a broadening of historiography through the inclusion of previously silenced or forgotten voices and perspectives. On the other

6. See Bill Freund, *The African Worker* (Cambridge, 1988); Robin Cohen, *Contested Domains: Debates in International Labour Studies* (London, 1991); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996); Gunilla Andrae and Bjorn Beckman, *Union Power in the Nigerian Textile Industry: Labour Regime and Adjustment* (Uppsala, 1998).

7. Brian Raftopoulos, "Nationalism and Labour in Salisbury, 1953–1965", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21 (1995), pp. 79–94. See also Michael West, "Ndabaningi Sithole, Garfield Todd and the Dadaya School Strike of 1947", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), pp. 297–320.

8. Terence Ranger, *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia* (London, 1970); Richard Gray, *The Two Nations* (Oxford, 1960); Nathan Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Southern Rhodesia* (London, 1965); Lawrence Vambe, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe* (London, 1970); Timothy Scarnecchia, "The Politics of Gender and Class in the Creation of African Communities: Salisbury, Rhodesia, 1937–1957", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1993); Teresa Barnes, *We Women Worked So Hard: Gender, Labor and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930–56* (Portsmouth, NH, 1999).

9. David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1982).

hand, it could be seen as a simplistic acceptance of oral history as truth and the romanticization of institutional/organizational history.¹⁰ It is certainly the case that the contributors to this book believed that, through oral history, they were in effect performing an overtly political act. The latter assessment, however, points to the ambiguities of the marshalling of memory and its use as data/information.

Raftopoulos and Julie Brittain, the coordinator of the ZCTU oral history project, wrote chapter 3. They examine the interaction of the labour and nationalist movements in the final years of Rhodesian rule. Bit by bit, the labour movement, which had been practically “the only game in town” in the 1940s and through the mid-1950s, was eclipsed by anticolonial nationalist movements formally founded in the mid-1960s. Nationalism in Zimbabwe, fuelled by a compelling narrative of return to indigenous traditions (especially of resistance to colonial rule in the First Chimurenga of 1896–1897), the obvious injustices of the Rhodesian system, Mozambican and Zambian support, Soviet and Chinese funding, and the pan-African winds of change, would in the space of fifteen short years sweep all before it. Inside the country in this period, as the authors of the chapter explain, there was a deeply uneasy relationship between legislation that limited black industrial advancement, an ultraconservative white trade-union grouping, funding for African unions from the anti-communist International Congress of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), and the growing social polarization and rural-based destruction of life and infrastructure which were concomitant parts of the armed struggle.¹¹ The chapter suggests areas for further research.

Chapter 4, written by Zimbabwean sociologist Lloyd Sachikonye, is a concise and important description of the formation of the ZCTU, the main labour legislation that was adopted after Independence in 1980, and the attempts of the ZCTU to flex its muscles around the imposition and consequences of the government’s adoption of structural adjustment policies in the late 1980s. Important for later evaluations of the ZCTU there is a list of its constituent organizations as of 1996, revealing a fairly shallow reach of unionism. According to Sachikonye, approximately 20 per cent of the Zimbabwean workforce was organized in 32 ZCTU affiliates by the mid-1990s.

10. David Dunaway and Willa Baum (eds), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (London, 1996); Bogumil Jewsiewicki and V.Y. Mudimbe, “Africans’ Memories and Contemporary History of Africa”, *History and Theory*, 32 (1993), pp. 1–11; Isabel Hofmeyr, *We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom* (Portsmouth, NH, 1994). Examples of both perspectives are to be found in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998).

11. For a comparable perspective on the ICFTU and Kenya, see Paul Zeleza, “Trade Union Imperialism: American Labour, the ICFTU and the Kenyan Labour Movement”, *Social and Economic Studies*, 36 (1987), pp. 145–170.

Keep On Knocking, although short, is in many ways a remarkable volume which weaves together many historiographical threads. It has, at least, a quasipopular style; it is based on solid academic research, and was produced with a distinct sociopolitical goal in mind by some of the foremost practitioners in the field. It must be pointed out that, within those boundaries, the book certainly does have weaknesses. Aside from a two-page summary, for example, it says little or nothing about women workers or issues of gender: a serious flaw given the wide availability of sources on African women's history and of studies of African gender and labour at the time the volume was in preparation.¹² In addition, more attention to issues of historiographical debates would have been useful in assisting the book's readers to engage critically with its factual base. Nonetheless, tensions of its production aside, *Keep on Knocking* is a valuable primer for the study of Zimbabwean labour.

In the ensuing years, Brian Raftopoulos, the Japanese scholar Tsuneo Yoshikune, and the core of the same publishing team produced an edited volume on urban history in Zimbabwe.¹³ *Sites of Struggle*, from 1999, set the tone of a much more conventionally academic work, with loosely connected chapters written by expatriates, most of whom had met each other at the friendly tables in the National Archives of Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s: three Britons, four Americans, a Dane, a Swede, Yoshikune, and Raftopoulos, the lone Zimbabwean contributor. This array of nationalities speaks well of the healthy internationalization and cross-fertilization of Zimbabwean historiography, which helped to keep the University of Zimbabwe a vibrant site of intellectual activity through the 1990s.

The year 1999 also saw the founding of an opposition party, the MDC, born explicitly out of the struggles of the labour movement to carve out a

12. There was a virtual explosion in this literature by the mid-1990s. Examples include Carolyne Dennis, "Women in African Labour History", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 23 (1988), pp. 124–140; Sharon Stichter and Jane Parpart (eds), *Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and in the Workplace* (Boulder, CO, 1988); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939* (Portsmouth, NH, 1992); Terence Ranger, *Are We Not Also Men? The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe, 1920–1960* (London, 1995); Richard Werbner, *Tears of the Dead: The Social Biography of an African Family* (Edinburgh, 1991); Cheryl Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990); Teresa Barnes, "'So That a Labourer Could Live with his Family': Overlooked Factors in Social and Economic Strife in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe, 1945–52", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21 (1995), pp. 95–113; Diana Jeater, *Marriage, Perversion and Power: The Construction of a Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia 1890–1930* (Oxford, 1993); Timothy Scarnecchia, "Poor Women And Nationalist Politics: Alliance and Fissures in the Formation of a Nationalist Political Movement in Salisbury, Rhodesia, 1950–56", *Journal of African History*, 37 (1996), pp. 283–310.

13. Brian Raftopoulos and Tsuneo Yoshikune (eds), *Sites of Struggle: Essays in Zimbabwe's Urban History* (Harare, 1999).

space in the nation's political life distinct from that of the ruling (and virtually sole) political party in Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF. The core leadership of the MDC came directly from the ZCTU: Tsvangirai, Gibson Sibanda (ZCTU president) and others, although the MDC was always a coalition party.

It should be noted that the gradual flexing of political muscle by the organized workers of southern Africa has been an important and fascinating development. In founding the MDC, for example, the ZCTU was following in the footsteps of the Zambian Congress of Trade Union's decision to enter into a political coalition which led to the birth of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in 1991.¹⁴ Although unevenly, Southern African labour movements have seen little choice but to eventually fight for their interests outside the ambit of postcolonial ruling-party politics. To some extent, these difficult decisions have since been obscured by the powerful post-1994 shadow cast by South Africa's main union federation, COSATU, which entered and has remained in a tension-filled alliance with a fiscally conservative ANC government.¹⁵

The relative lack of a comparable body of work in the region is also important in weighing up the importance of the two books reviewed in this essay. The organized labour/opposition politics interface in other southern African countries has not quite enjoyed the historiographical attention given to Zimbabwe.¹⁶ Similarly, South African trade unionism, while producing vast amounts of educational literature and union education programmes in the decade following the fall of formal apartheid, has not benefited from the kind of political alliance between academic historians and organized labour that produced *Keep on Knocking*. In fact, social history in South Africa, especially labour history, ground to a halt around the time of the first democratic elections.¹⁷ All this leads one to wonder

14. See E. Akwetey, "Democratic Transition and Post-Colonial Labour Regimes in Zambia and Ghana", in Bjorn Beckman and L.M. Sachikonye (eds), *Labour Regimes and Liberalization: The Restructuring Of State-Society Relations in Africa* (Harare, 2001), pp. 23–48.

15. See Eddie Webster and Glen Adler, "Exodus Without a Map? The Labour Movement in a Liberalizing South Africa", in Beckman and Sachikonye, *Labour Regimes and Liberalization*, pp. 120–146; Eddie Webster and Glenn Adler (eds), *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985–1997* (New York, 2002). Other perspectives can be found in Hein Marais, *South Africa: Limits of Change: The Political Economy of Transformation* (Cape Town, 2001); and Ashwin Desai, *We are the Poors* (New York, 2002).

16. Zambia is something of an exception; see E. Akwetey, "Democratic Transition".

17. The two main reasons for this were methodological tensions inherent in social history, which could not remain hidden in a country as conflict-ridden in class and race terms as South Africa – in tandem with the fundamentally demobilizing insights of postmodernism. As mainly practised about black people by white historians in white universities, with the use of powerful master narratives of resistance and struggle, classic South African social history was doomed to be knocked out by a powerful postmodernist conceptual punch. And so it was. See Martin Murray, "The Triumph of Marxist Approaches in South African Labour and Social History", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 23 (1988), pp. 79–101. Triumph was fleeting, however, and

about complex links between time, labour and labour history. It is clear that the history of postcolonial southern Africa illustrates that vibrant national democracy demands robust debate, be it within or without a ruling party – and that such debate demands access to critical information. In the years before the formation of the MDC, the Zimbabwean labour movement encouraged such debate, with an accessible, explicitly pro-trade-union historiography at its disposal. As explained by Morgan Tsvangirai in the preface to *Keep on Knocking*,

Although the labour movement and its leaders have often been acknowledged in the anti-colonial struggle, the complex relationship of the movement to the growth of nationalist parties and nationalist ideology has frequently been simplified to suit the triumphalist views of nationalist history. We hope that this study provides a more comprehensive view, and that it will encourage a more open and critical process of writing history in Zimbabwe and remind the victors in the political arena that the struggle for independence was a broad and uneven process, with many unsung heroes and unintended effects. The history of a nation-in-the-making should not be reduced to a selective heroic tradition, but should be a tolerant and continuing process of questioning and re-examination. We, in the Labour Movement, submit our history to such a process.¹⁸

One book does not a political opposition make, and it would be ludicrous to so claim. But the combination of forces which led to the production of *Knocking* also contributed directly to the production of the MDC. Both had a lack of interest in the study of social phenomena as text and discourse – which may have been necessary for the emergence of a democratically minded political opposition. Whether or not it will be sufficient remains to be seen. Might bypassing the cultural turn historiographically correlate with the relative difficulty of a national labour-movement-based politics in coming to grips with the multivalent economic power and the complex, shifting practices of early twenty-first-century globalization, for example? On the other hand, can “the turn” and its perspectives on the mutability of power, really service an explicitly political project? State power surely requires strong narratives of legitimacy.¹⁹

the last great work of South African social history is Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine* (New York, 1996). For a trenchant critique of classic South African social history, see Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, “Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa”, in Sarah Nuttall and Carlie Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1998), pp. 89–99. For a discussion of the difficulties inherent in South African social research, see Teresa Barnes, “Owning What We Know: Racial Controversies in South African Feminism, 1991–1998”, in Catherine Higgs *et al.* (eds), *Stepping Forward: Black Women in Africa and the Americas* (Athens, OH, 2002), pp. 245–256.

18. Morgan Tsvangirai, “Preface”, in Raftopoulos and Phimister, *Keep on Knocking*, p. xi.

19. For an examination of this question in South African historiography, see Michael Green, “Social History, Literary History and Historical Fiction in South Africa”, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 12 (1999), pp. 121–136.

Five years after *Keep on Knocking*, Baobab/Weaver Press produced the third volume of its social history trilogy: *Striking Back: The Labour Movement and the Post-Colonial State in Zimbabwe, 1980–2000*. Significantly, it notes that *Keep on Knocking* “provided an accessible text for the ZCTU’s educational programmes and is also being used on undergraduate courses at the University of Zimbabwe; its popularity has already necessitated a reprint”.²⁰

With a title somewhat ironically borrowed from an earlier study of the birth and rise of COSATU,²¹ *Striking Back* is a wide-ranging collection, academic in tone. Like *Sites of Struggle*, it is written by a collection of international scholars. Less focused than *Knocking*, it has a somewhat choppy nature, as it shifts focal length from internal to external, theoretical to empirical, and from sectoral to specific industrial issues. Several chapters are, in effect, political comments on the trials and tribulations of the labour movement as of the time of writing, while others are historically-based examinations of certain organizational aspects of that movement or of postcolonial workplace regimes. Throughout, it has a much more combative and critical tone than *Keep on Knocking*. This is not surprising given the turmoil in Zimbabwean society at the time – the unprecedented milieu of detention, torture and political violence, which has since escalated into a welter of corrupt and cynical helter-skelterism by the Zimbabwean government.²²

The first two chapters of the book are ruminations on the state of political opposition in Zimbabwe as of 2000. The first, written by the indefatigable Brian Raftopoulos, competently reviews events that brought organized labour in Zimbabwe into more direct stance in opposition to the state after 1980, displaying the movement’s “remarkable progress”. It largely begs the question, however, of the actual size and strength of the ZCTU. An indication of how far Zimbabwean labour studies have come from their roots in political economy is a curious silence on the class nature of ZCTU membership in Raftopoulos’s chapter (although it can be addressed somewhat tangentially through the chapter written by Sachikonye, see below). It was once a *sine qua non* in African labour studies that there was at least a loosely determining relationship between one’s position on the class ladder and one’s interest in political action; that

20. Wellington Chibhebhe, “Preface”, to Raftopoulos and Sachikonye *Striking Back*, p. xiii.

21. Jeremy Baskin, *Striking Back: A History of COSATU* (Johannesburg, 1991).

22. Several scholars have noted the intolerance and crushing of political dissent in the ruling party as early as its guerrilla-war years, and certainly during the appalling repression perpetrated in the southwest in the early 1980s. See note 5 above; Norma Kriger, *Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (Cambridge, 1992); Werbner, *Tears of the Dead*; Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the ‘Dark Forests’ of Matabeleland* (Portsmouth, NH, 2000). The nationwide scale and visibility of government-sponsored repression and violence after 1998 was unprecedented, however.

therefore not all union affiliates would be equally politically active, as militant activity would be conditional on leadership, history, and consciousness. There has indeed been remarkable progress in the Zimbabwean labour movement – but Raftopoulos chronicles it without examining any of the above factors. This, in some ways, echoes the old circular accounts of the Zimbabwe liberation forces: they were good because they were the liberation forces because they were good – reasoning which hindered critical analyses of the liberation movement for far too long.

Reading this chapter gives rise to the following questions. What were the contesting forces within the labour movement during this period? Was there really only one conception by labour of the composition of a “movement for democratic change”? And could such a movement be sustained by a labour movement only recently come confidently onto the national stage?

These questions are taken up (albeit in a slightly different form) by Patrick Bond in the book’s second chapter. In examining what he calls “radical rhetoric” of ZANU-PF in the “dying days of Zimbabwean nationalism”, Bond chronicles the relationship between the downward spiral of the Zimbabwean economy, global/IMF discourses, and “the contestation between left-wing and right-wing tendencies within the trade union movement and MDC”.²³ Bond vents a certain amount of spleen on the vice-president of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industry, who became the MDC economic affairs secretary in February 2000. Having a captain of industry running the economics portfolio of a trade-union-born political movement represents, for Bond, a setback which may or may not be overcome by the “radical wing” of the MDC in its efforts to take the nation forward in tandem with the forces of civil society. Writing from his background of considerable expertise in the economic/financial history of Zimbabwe and the recent development of the global anticapitalist movement,²⁴ Bond concludes that it remains to be seen whether or not that radical wing will indeed be able to find its way out of the rut of oscillating between the empty “leftist” rhetoric of ZANU-PF (“land to the people”) and the neo-liberal right wing of the MDC (which could be paraphrased as, “with the help of the IMF we will implement free education, decent minimum industrial wages and freehold tenure”). For Bond, this internal power struggle will determine the extent to which the MDC can remain true to its roots in the labour movement.

Chapter 3, by Paris Yeros, takes off directly from the discussions of the

23. Patrick Bond, “Radical Rhetoric and the Working Class during Zimbabwean Nationalism’s Dying Days”, in Raftopoulos and Sachikonye, *Striking Back*, p. 28.

24. Patrick Bond, *Uneven Zimbabwe: A Study of Finance, Development and Underdevelopment* (Trenton, NJ, 1998); *idem*, *Zimbabwe’s Plunge* (Durban, 2000).

ambiguous role of the ICFTU in 1960s and 1970s trade-union development in *Keep on Knocking*. Yeros is less concerned to comment on the MDC than on its parent body, the ZCTU. His is a balanced assessment of the difficult space inhabited by any nationally based trade-union movement in an era of the unprecedented global flows and reach of capital on the international stage. Yeros discusses the place of the ZCTU in the tricky politics of both regional and international trade union federations. Despite the ZCTU's shift away from more robust critiques of international capital, Yeros believes that in part because of its impressive research capacity, the movement does possess at least the potential germ of a new internationalism that could significantly challenge the hegemony of Western trade union discourses and champion the emergence of a truly Third-World based, "peasant-worker" discourse in the international arena.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are largely empirical examinations of the post-1980 membership, the changing legal framework for, and the record of strike action by organized Zimbabwean labour. For readers unfamiliar with the terrain of Zimbabwean trade unionism, it might have been better to have started the book with these general, factual overviews. But perhaps the editors believed that more unionists, politicians, and Zimbabweanists would read the book, and therefore decided to open it with the more polemical pieces by Raftopoulos and Bond. Be that as it may, these three chapters, by Lloyd Sachikonye, Lovemore Madhuku, and Richard Saunders, respectively, provide grounded views of both the development and possibilities of the movement.

Sachikonye's data reveal a general growth in union membership, and a gradual increase in the ability of unions to institutionalize themselves in terms of collecting subscriptions, engaging in educational activities and research, and training a layer of people who can confidently engage with employers and the state in collective bargaining procedures. Interestingly, however, the chapter maintains the book's general silence on the class nature of ZCTU membership, and there is no list of constituent unions, such as the one from 1996 given in the same author's chapter in *Keep on Knocking*.

Therefore, a crucial question is not addressed directly in this book.²⁵ Would one be justified in putting the 1996 list in *Keep on Knocking* together with the observation in Sachikonye's chapter in *Striking Back*, that union membership generally grew except in industries affected by massive retrenchments,²⁶ and concluding that the ZCTU increasingly represents the ranks of the lower-middle, as opposed to the working class? Given the near-conflation, at times, by Raftopoulos and Bond, of "the

25. See also contributions to Arnold Sibanda and Doreen Nyamukapa (eds), *Industrial Relations and Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa: Problems and Prospects* (Harare, 2000).

26. These were sectors such as clothing and textiles, the railways, and domestic service.

working class” with the core of political opposition in Zimbabwe, this is a significant silence.

The chapters by Madhuku and Saunders are rich in data about legislation and 1990s strike action. This information could be very usefully employed in comparative studies of postcolonial African labour regimes,²⁷ suggesting as they do the development of a considerably (although not universally) more worker-friendly legal framework, but a continuing death grip on the right of those workers to strike.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 look at changes in post-1980 working conditions and labour regimes in the agricultural and mining sectors. The chapters by Blair Rutherford and Yash Tandon, on farm workers and their unions, are particularly valuable as they give insight into the dismal, if not desperate, conditions in the fields for farmworkers largely before the controversial “land resettlement” programmes instituted by the Zimbabwean government from 1998 onwards.²⁸ It can be noted that the chorus of voices from white commercial farmers bemoaning the effects of these “programmes” on farmworkers is most ironic in the light of the information revealed in these chapters about the post-1980 oppression of those same workers by those same farmers.²⁹

Rutherford’s detailed chapter on the Urungwe district chronicles the enormous change that was promised, but only partially fulfilled by the post-Independence legal framework for farmworkers. Tandon looks at the *longue durée* of farmworker poverty in Zimbabwe, linking it to national developments but also to the way Zimbabwe has been varyingly linked into the world economic system. His analysis of the social pathology that envelops farmworkers makes this one of the best chapters

27. As in Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002); Frederick Cooper and Allen Isaacman et al. (eds), *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison, WI, 2000).

28. These “programmes”, and the state-supported political violence with which they were accompanied, have since brought Zimbabwean agricultural production nearly to a standstill, with dire consequences for national and regional food security. See Henry V. Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land in Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1984); Ibbo Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition 1980–1986* (Harare, 1987); Christine Sylvester, *Zimbabwe: The Terrain of Contradictory Development* (Boulder, CO, 1991); Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, *Beyond ESAP: Framework for a Long-Term Development Strategy in Zimbabwe Beyond the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme* (Harare, 1996); Sam Moyo, Blair Rutherford, and Dede Amanor-Wilks, “Land Reform and Changing Social Relations for Farm Workers in Zimbabwe”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 84 (2000), pp. 181–202; Rupak Chattopadhyay, “Zimbabwe: Structural Adjustment, Destitution and Food Insecurity”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 84 (2000), pp. 307–316. See also papers contributed to “State-Labour Regimes and Agrarian Reforms in Africa”, First Annual Colloquium, Department of Agrarian and Labour Studies, Institute of Development Studies, University of Zimbabwe, July 2002.

29. See also Dede Amanor-Wilks (ed.), *Zimbabwe’s Farm Workers: Policy Dimension* (Lusaka, 2001).

in the book. Interestingly, he claims that the MDC has also failed quite profoundly to make itself a party representing these poorest of the poor, captivated as it was by Aurban-based, dissident, middle-class forces, including human rights activists, white neoliberals and eventually white commercial farmers themselves”³⁰ – coming closest to engaging with the crucial questions listed above.

Tandon argues that beleaguered farmworkers have been the Zimbabwean underclass for so long that it has severely stunted their ability to engage with national democratic debates and to be taken seriously by the people engaged in those debates. He claims that their trade union (the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers’ Union of Zimbabwe, GAPWUZ) has not been strong, and has been characterized by internal squabbling. It is difficult to escape the old Marxist chestnut that efficacious worker consciousness is built, not born – and Zimbabwean farmworkers have had few tools with which to do so. The chapter’s postscript correctly predicts that farmworkers will lose even more ground in the violence of the “land redistribution” and resettlement “programmes”. It is interesting, however, that Tandon does not mention the factor of xenophobia, which has come to the fore so strongly in recent years, again targeted at those farmworkers with family ties in neighbouring Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique.³¹

In the book’s final chapter, Suzanne Dansereau provides a clear case study of how long it takes to change deeply exploitative workplace regimes with reformist policies. After twenty years, she shows, Zimbabwean mineworkers have made some gains, notably in improving aggregate wage levels, doing away with single-sex housing, and increasing the participation levels of workers in collective bargaining. Still, the mining workforce is badly-paid and structurally insecure, remaining constantly at the mercy of a “profit squeeze”. Many of the post-Independence benefits have flowed to a layer of skilled workers and managers who are now defined by class rather than colour.

The last chapter to be reviewed here is actually Chapter 7 of the book: “Women, Workers and Discrimination in Zimbabwe”, by Naira Khan and Niki Jazdowska. This topic was neglected in *Keep On Knocking*, and it is a welcome addition to this volume. Khan and Jazdowska have written a

30. Yash Tandon, “Trade Unions and Labour in the Agricultural Sector in Zimbabwe”, in Raftopoulos and Sachikonye, *Striking Back*, p. 249.

31. See Blair Rutherford, “Racial Politics and Beyond in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe: Shifting Public Evaluations of Class Relationships on Commercial Farms”, *Labour, Capital and Society/ Travail, capital et société*, 33 (2000), pp. 192–215. Questions of national identity/citizenship/ethnicity – such as the common popular identification of farmworkers as “manysaland” (i.e. from Malawi) have been somewhat neglected in Zimbabwean historiography. For an interesting exception, which discusses the Islamic heritage of some farmworkers in Zimbabwe, see E.C. Mandivenga, *Islam in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, 1983).

hard-hitting chapter on the social and legal impediments faced by women working in Zimbabwe. They contend that Zimbabwe does not meet the conditions set down by the International Labour Organization with regard to equal treatment of women workers. Most workers and most women workers remain in the agricultural sector, where conditions are generally at their most miserable. One in three women workers, in a survey conducted in the mid-1990s, reported sexual harassment at work; Zimbabwean legal and social frameworks, they argue, are wholly inadequate to deal with this scale of abuse of women. In short, the authors draw a damning portrait of the postcolonial state's interest in, and commitment to, equal rights for women.³² Furthermore, the ZCTU, despite the work of "a few extremely determined women trade unionists" in creating a Women's Department, has not overcome the ghettoization of "women's issues", and women in the organization have little personal or group power to effect changes towards increasing gender equality.³³

CONCLUSION

General and scholarly readers interested in the contribution of the labour movement and of workers to positive political and economic change in Zimbabwe will find much that is valuable in the pages of these two books. Although it is of uneven quality, there is good social history here. Methodologically, *Keep on Knocking* is the more coherent of the two volumes, as it rests on focused scholarship of long standing and a well-defined oral history project. In contrast, *Striking Back* gives mainly the overwhelming impression that the contributors are somehow all on the same political team (although their approaches differ substantially). This does not imply, *inter alia*, dishonourable collusion – the community of scholars of Zimbabwean labour and social history is fairly compact. There is a sense, however, in which *Striking Back* was in itself meant to be a political statement; collecting opinions and debates between academic/activist colleagues directed eventually at dialogue with the ZANU-PF government. Again, this is not illegitimate activity, but it means that the book should be read, not as a carefully harmonized scholarly collection but as an attempt to keep labour's discourses going. Nonetheless, lacking the grounded oral-history perspectives and more popular tone of *Knocking*, *Striking Back* at times paradoxically echoes the difficulties of classic South African social historical analysis in that it is largely "about" rather than "for and with" labour.

32. Similar conclusions are drawn in regards to child labour in Michael Bourdillon (ed.), *Earning a Life: Working Children in Zimbabwe* (Harare, 2000).

33. Naira Khan and Niki Jasdowska, "Women, Workers and Discrimination in Zimbabwe", in Raftopoulos and Sachikonye, *Striking Back*, p. 180.

Overall, the uneasiness of the trade-union movement about making firm alliances with both colonial and postcolonial nationalism emerges as an enduring trend in Zimbabwe. Operating under increasingly difficult conditions, it is impressive that the movement has persisted in its goal of presenting this conclusion through labour-focused research to its membership and to the scholarly world in general. Whole (*Knocking*) or more fragmented (*Striking Back*), such efforts must at least incrementally strengthen the struggling saplings of democratic practice that have grown in Zimbabwean soil since 1980.