

large-scale environmental modernisation projects in general. Instead, this is a book where the subtitle offers a more appropriate label and the strength of the Isaacmans' scholarship is in their specific in-depth discussion of this single important mega dam. Readers keen to explore the broader field should also consult other publications such as *The Hydropolitics of Dams: Engineering or Ecosystems?* by Mark Everard (Zed Books, 2013) which provides multiple case studies of dams, water politics and development.

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**South Africa's Suspended Revolution: Hopes and Prospects** by ADAM HABIB

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Adam Habib's *Suspended Revolution* provides a first-rate introduction to South African politics and it will be a point of reference for future debate. His approach is refreshing and his style is accessible to a range of audiences. Now vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, Habib describes himself as an activist and an academic. He concludes: 'scholars must direct their research not only towards understanding and explaining the contemporary world, but also to considering how to change it for the better' (p. 246). Habib argues that 'actors are constrained and conditioned by configurations of power' located within specific 'contexts and historical moments' (p. 231). This framing allows him to assess what actions are feasible, and it gives weight to his judgements. This is true, for instance, when he says that the ANC 'is increasingly becoming . . . a grubby instrument of enrichment' (p. 3). In advancing his case, Habib is always generous in acknowledging secondary sources, which produces a rich bibliography.

In Chapter 1 Habib sets out his stall and summarises his argument. Chapter 2 is an overview of South Africa's political history from the construction of the post-apartheid state, and gives particular attention to constitutional changes. Chapter 3 on the political economy of development argues that the Zuma administration continued a 'shift to the left' (p. 108) initiated during the later years of Mbeki's presidency. He praises the massive increase in welfare expenditure that occurred under Mbeki, suggesting that this was a response to the 'rage of the poor' and social movement mobilisation (p. 90), and applauds the 'strong neo-Keynesian flavour' of economic policy that developed with Zuma (p. 108). Chapter 4 is on 'social pacts' (specifically, government-backed agreements between representatives of capital and labour), which Habib sees as the potential solution to South Africa's woes. He contrasts the pact that was born out of the struggle against apartheid, and died with the introduction neo-liberal policies in 1996, with a stillborn pact that was possible in the period after the ANC's 2007 Polokwane conference, at which Mbeki was removed as President of the ANC. The chapter reinforces a point made earlier in the book that 'Zuma's victory [at Polokwane] . . . was as much a victory for COSATU and the SACP' (p. 29). This success, he says, led to a 'stalemate between unions and the corporate sector' (pp. 128–9). Habib blames Zuma for the failure to create a pact. The balance of forces were propitious, but he lacked 'bold political

leadership' (p. 136). Chapters 5 and 6 on, respectively, state-civil society relations and foreign policy provide useful description and interesting analysis, but are not central to the book's main argument. Habib is generally positive about South Africa's role in the world and knows much of the nitty-gritty, and I mused that he might make a good Foreign Minister one day. Chapters 7 and 8 conclude the book by drawing out implications for policy (Chapter 7) and academic debate (Chapter 8). A key task is the 'conditioning [of] political elites to become more accountable and responsive to concerns of citizens' (p. 201).

The book's prevailing thesis can be summarised as follows. First, political possibilities must be understood within an analysis of 'balance of forces'. Second, a social pact would benefit virtually the whole of society, but is only possible where there is a rough equivalence of forces. Third, there was a Polokwane moment, when a shift to left made such a pact possible. Fourth, as a consequence of poor leadership, this failed to happen.

With regard to the first step, the author's account of what goes into the balance is too limited, and is sometimes reduced to unions, corporations and a government that is able to mediate conflict between the two main protagonists. A broader and more consistent application of 'context' and 'history' would have greater explanatory power. For instance, there is little space for the world economy, but growth provided resources for Mbeki's reforms, and the 2008 crash pushed a million workers into unemployment, thus exacerbating social conflict. Divisions within the labour movement are not considered and scant attention is given to the non-unionised poor, mainly young, whose community protests have reduced the likelihood of class compromise. Importantly, there is no account of the political ideology – and accompanying political organisation – which ties the ANC government to capitalism, and chains the SACP and COSATU's leadership to the ANC.

Regarding the second contention, Habib's rather narrow focus means that his equivalence, or 'stalemate', argument is unconvincing. Under the ANC, capitalists have secured an increased proportion of national income, with a reduced amount going to workers. Big business might say it favours a pact, but it has no pressing need and, as Habib recognises, it would not be prepared to make the concessions necessary to win support from workers. In the present period, it is highly unlikely that 'conditioning' can trump profits. Meanwhile, it was not clear why workers, who, as the author shows, lost out from the mid-1990s pact, would want to accept constraints on struggles for better conditions.

To substantiate his third point, Habib talks-up the achievements of the Zuma government, though he appears to do so inconsistently. In Chapter 1, he writes: 'Polokwane led to a relatively subtle shift in the balance of power' (p. 23), but in Chapter 4 we are told: 'the balance of power changed significantly as a result of ... the ANC's national electoral congress held at Polokwane'. In support of this 'significant' shift he lists a number of, in my view, relatively minor achievements, without placing the weight of corruption, unemployment, failure to deliver services, retreat from nationalisation, etc. on the other side of the scales. For most working-class people the experience of the Zuma government has been negative, and levels of strike action and community protest – the 'rage of the poor' – have reached record levels; much greater than under Mbeki.

The author's explanation for the failure to secure a pact falls back on lack of 'bold leadership', but this resonates with the kind of voluntarism he criticises in Chapter 1. Other explanations might be considered. These include Zuma lacking a programme different from Mbeki's, and him not being above 'grubby enrichment' himself. Crucially, he has never been seriously challenged by his 'left' allies. Indeed, Blade Nzimande, general secretary of the SACP and Minister of Higher Education has become his loudest praise singer. One might suggest that, lacking principles any different from Zuma's, the 'left' ministers have been pulled along in his train.

This is a challenging book and one hopes and expects that a second edition will be required. If so, this would benefit from reflection on consequences of the Marikana Massacre. The event incised a dividing line between the old left (SACP, COSATU leaders and much of the ANC leadership) and an emerging new left (the National Union of Metalworkers [NUMSA], now the country's largest unions, the Economic Freedom Fighters led by former ANC Youth League president Julius Malema, the Democratic Left Front and various community organisations). Cyril Ramaphosa, who, as a Lonmin director, successfully lobbied ministers and police chiefs to have the strike crushed, was elected as the ANC's new deputy president. In contrast, NUMSA described Marikana as a 'turning point', donated R350,000 to the massacre's victims, broke with the ANC, and resolved to explore the possibility of forming a new socialist movement.

So, while a social pact is more remote than at any time since the end of apartheid, a struggle for socialism is back on the agenda. In explaining this shift and considering how to transform the contemporary world for the better, the South African scholar should, like Habib, be an academic and an activist. As academics they need an expanded understanding of 'balance of forces'; as activists they will have to decide which side they are on.

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