

The politics of poverty and the poverty of politics in Zambia's Third Republic

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Zambia in the Third Republic is attempting a double-barrelled transformation, political as well as economic. The poor should be considered as central to both aspects. The majority of the people are poor and in many instances getting poorer, which means the government's economic policies should pay particular attention to their needs. Moreover, their large number warrants giving them a high profile in the distribution of power in this recently redemocratised country.

Democracy is a contested—some say 'essentially contested'—concept, and yet one of the defining features that seems crucial in many accounts of it is a more equal distribution of power and influence over political decisions. In theory, democracy is a condition of political equality.¹ The actual distribution of power will be contingent on the distribution of political resources; and material wealth plus the educational attainments and social standing that often align with wealth can be significant examples of political resource. One possible conclusion is that 'In the absence of progressive social reform the term "democracy" is largely devoid of meaningful content',² when applied to a country like Zambia.

Democratic forms of government are not guaranteed to manage national economic affairs satisfactorily. Moreover, there is little if any agreement on whether there are necessary socioeconomic conditions for democracy to work well as a political system, let alone on the nature of such conditions. But one postulate that has consistently drawn support from political scientists is that an absence of great poverty and socioeconomic inequality is helpful to democratisation. Similarly, the belief that poverty is a problem for democratic consolidation also enjoys wide credence, although neither relative nor absolute poverty are insurmountable barriers to the introduction of a measure of democratic governance. For Huntington for example, 'Poverty is a principal and probably the principal obstacle to democratic development. The future of democracy depends on the future of economic development'; and according to Diamond, 'For the democratic prospect, one aspect of economic development overrides all others in importance: reducing the level of absolute poverty and human deprivation'; furthermore 'poor countries can maintain democracy but only if they deliver broad and sustained (not necessarily rapid) socioeconomic development, especially "human development"'.³ Poverty, then becomes a key issue in deciding how democratic Zambia is today and in assessing its chances of becoming even more democratic in the future.

The poverty of politics may be examined in relation to political activity generally; and more specifically, attention can be focused on the extent to which Peter Burnell is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick, UK.

political activity involves the poor and represents their needs and interests, advances their wants and entitlements. The poverty of politics is not a synonym for the poverty of government, although inadequate political accountability and weak administrative structures can translate into badly-informed decision making and wayward or ineffective policy implementation by the state. Conversely, a record of bad government can lead to a popular enrichment of politics when enough citizens decide they have had enough. That is what happened in Zambia in 1990–91, when a participatory ferment led to the reintroduction of multipartyism followed by the defeat of the former ruling party, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) by the new Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), at the hands of the electorate in October 1991. In contrast, where there is general apathy and indifference and people are disaffected with the political process, and where economic imperatives make all-absorbing demands on the attention of the majority, the political scene is likely to be impoverished. In time, a culture of anti-politics may take over; in the worst scenarios, politics gives way to civil commotion and the dissolution of order.

Poverty profile of Zambia

In the case of a country like Zambia, the records for social data are often patchy and out-of-date, and the figures that are bandied about can give a spurious sense of precision and reliability. Nevertheless, a clear cut pattern emerges from the available sources, and it is one of considerable and increasing poverty.⁴

Of Zambia's total population which is approaching nine million people, over 50% are reckoned to fall below the core poverty line (that is to say they are extremely poor) and a further 10% are moderately poor. Rural people make up over 80% of the extreme poor, and small farmers comprise around three quarters of the extreme poor. For 70% of rural households, monthly per capita expenditure is insufficient to provide a nutritionally adequate diet, even when all spending is on food. For Zambians who are in paid employment (a third of 16–25 year olds are officially recognised as being unemployed), average real earnings at the start of the present decade were less than a third of their 1975 level. The maximum basic unionised wage in 1990 was only 12% of the 1974 level, and the minimum wage was 29% of that base level.

Three quarters of all female-headed households are classified as poor. One in every 10 infants dies before reaching twelve months old; 200 children in every thousand are likely to die before their fifth birthday (up from 160 in 1980); and 44% of all children under five years are nutritionally stunted (54% in rural areas). In the 1980s government spending on education went into steep decline—on primary education from US\$46 per student per annum in 1981 to US\$9 in 1991; on secondary education from US\$237 to US\$38 per student; and on tertiary education from US\$5182 to US\$1144 per student (all at 1985 exchange rates). Government spending on social services fell by a third in real terms between 1984 and 1991. Illiteracy is reckoned to have increased from around a third to 40% of the population, especially among women. Average life expectancy, which had been well over 50 years, is now believed to be significantly lower than that figure.

The figures above describe the situation inherited by the MMD government and its leader, Frederick J T Chiluba when they took office as a result of their sweeping general election victory. In order to assess whether the prospects for the poor are likely to undergo significant improvement in Zambia's Third Republic, and perhaps even during the life of the first MMD government, some account of the political market in Zambia today needs to be given first.

Poverty and the political market

In accordance with the one-party state of Zambia's Second Republic (December 1972-December 1990) the scope for the people to exercise choice was obviously constrained. UNIP was the only legally recognised party, and all UNIP figures apart from President Kaunda were discouraged from standing in the party's procedures for determining its presidential candidate. In contrast today, there is political pluralism and over 30 political parties are registered. But only three have any significant presence when measured in terms of seats in the National Assembly and local councils, or in terms of significant exposure in the national media; and even they have serious organisational shortcomings and, as far as can be established, are financially weak. The three are UNIP, the MMD and the National Party (NP), the last named forming from a splinter group that broke away from MMD in August 1993. Their combined existence may fulfil Joseph Schumpeter's well known minimalist formulation of the democratic method, as 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'.⁵ But they offer only a limited range of alternatives in terms of substantive policies and coherent programmes. None of them can credibly claim to be a party of, by and for the poor, or even of a significant section of the poor. Burdette's claim in the 1980s that 'the large bulk of Zambia's population is now the urban and rural poor and no one currently speaks for them'⁶ would seem to be just as valid today, despite the political upheaval that has taken place in the intervening period.

The limited range of choice applies to several variables. Take economic policy. The government has initiated orthodox steps for monetary and fiscal stabilisation that are technically straightforward to initiate and politically bold, such as removing the consumer subsidy from the nation's staple, maize meal. But the extent of its commitment to fiscal rectitude and full liberalisation of the economy is still questioned by some observers, who allege equivocation and a lack of transparency owing to the intervention of personal and party interests. Prominent party figures seem divided over how far the liberalisation process should be pursued. A refusal to grant autonomy to the Central Bank and the slow early pace of privatisation may be cited, although privatisation began to speed up considerably in 1995, with encouragement from the international donor community. The long awaited decision over what to do with the state-owned Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM), which badly needs a considerable infusion of capital that only foreign multinational companies can provide, will be a key test of the government's resolve. In any case, the government's ability to devise workable measures for delivering the potential of its economic policy

reforms is constrained by institutional weaknesses in the public sector as well as shortcomings in the private sector. It is as true in Zambia as in many other developing countries that establishing macroeconomic stability and 'getting the prices right' will not by themselves work an economic miracle. Low levels of activity may simply remain an entrenched feature of the national economy.

With respect to the other parties, the leaders of the NP subscribed to the MMD's economic thinking when they belonged to that party. One of its 'heavy-weights', the former finance minister Emmanuel Kasonde, was the architect of cash budgeting, which was introduced in January 1993, and which precludes government from borrowing from the Bank of Zambia. Two years after its formation, the NP was still unable to present an alternative programme for government. The press began to claim its initials meant No Party. The organisation's official spokesman and secretary for foreign affairs and international relations, Dr Sam Chipungu barely clarified matters when he declared 'While MMD kisses SAP [structural adjustment programme] every morning and at bed-time, NP hates and rejects it and will work towards the Globalisation of the Zambian economy'.⁷

On the other hand UNIP, which in the wake of its comprehensive election defeat in 1991 abandoned Kaunda's *Humanism*—the ideology that was supposed to be implemented through socialist means—now seems to be groping towards a social market approach. However, up until the middle of 1995 at least, UNIP was badly divided over the issue of leadership. The position of party president Kebby Musokotwane was increasingly being undermined by a faction of the Central Committee who wanted Kenneth Kaunda, who stood down from the party leadership in 1992, to return to its head. Kaunda was duly reelected by the party in June 1995. But in the interim period paralysis prevented UNIP from formulating a coherent package of economic policy proposals and a convincing strategy for retaking office and implementing a distinctive programme.

As regards political programmes, the MMD government has been criticised for seeming reluctant to push forward the political liberalisation measures and democratic enhancements that were promised in its 1991 election campaign. For example, the judiciary has not been granted substantially increased autonomy. The government has yet to publish a national policy on women's advancement or establish administrative machinery to combat gender discrimination, despite its manifesto commitments. There is a general suspicion that its handling of the recommendations to be made by the Constitutional Review Commission's inquiry into the republic's constitution will satisfy few people, in regard either to substantive amendments to the constitution or the procedure that will be adopted for authorising the change. Opponents of the government charge that there has been a new concentration of power in the presidency, at the expense of intra-party democracy. They claim the MMD seeks to perpetuate the lack of governmental accountability and the arbitrary departures from the rule of law which characterised the one-party state. Defectors to the NP feature strongly among these critics. Indeed, one of their number, Akashambatwa Mbikusita-Lewanika has argued the NP will be more democratic in its internal arrangements than MMD has so far proved to be, because it has to accommodate diversity. In

other words, the National Party harbours several politicians who are equally ambitious to lead the party, and none of them is obviously pre-eminent.

The exodus from MMD at the NP's inception was widely interpreted at the time as having more to do with dashed hopes of high office in the MMD government than with political principle. In practice, the party has remained a divided house precisely because it contains too many would-be chiefs. Baldwin Nkumbula, who became the party's elected president at its first convention, failed to provide adequate leadership and in April 1995 he was replaced by Humphrey Mulemba. There is no guarantee that any democratic flavour in the party's internal workings would spill over into a parallel programme for the nation's polity as a whole. In any case, the party's practice of imposing parliamentary candidates on the constituency branches has annoyed some members. A high rate of occupancy by former UNIP figures in the party's hierarchy also dents its credibility as a democratising force.

By comparison, UNIP will have to work even harder to establish itself as a vehicle for democratisation of the nation's polity. This is partly because of the historical baggage it carries from the era of the one-party state. The association of a few of its members with a 'zero option' plan to instigate civil disturbance so as to destabilise the MMD government in March 1993 also does not help. This is not to say UNIP could not regain significant popular support, despite the difficulties Kaunda will face in appealing to today's young generation of voters. But Kaunda was not a convinced convert to multipartyism in 1991, and there is no evidence to suggest that he has radically changed his views since. Indeed, he has recently claimed to detect in the period since 1991 the rise in intercommunal tension which he always said would be a consequence of political pluralism, and whose spectre he employed in 1972 to justify the introduction of the one-party state.

In addition to what the parties stand for, economically and politically, there is also the question of how the party elites compare, and how representative of society and its problems they are. Members of UNIP's old guard have been accused of clinging to party positions because of the benefits they derive from the organisation's income-generating assets (Zambia National Holdings Ltd), held over from the statist era of the Second Republic. Persons with business interests or in the process of acquiring business interests, such as in trading, finance and farming, plus members of the professions, particularly lawyers, predominate among the upper echelons of both the NP and the MMD party and government. In their public statements many of the most prominent political figures evince an attachment to the trickle-down version of the benefits of economic growth. The poor must wait while the fiscal and monetary conditions for economic revival are firmly put in place. If, as the next general election approaches in 1996, there is more attention given to the poor in the government's publicity materials, and if marginal additions are made to social spending as a result of World Bank and donor-funded programmes, then the practical differences between the MMD and its political rivals on this issue could be mainly rhetorical ones.

True, some senior figures in UNIP and the National Party articulate a concern to protect ordinary people from the harsh effects of structural adjustment, and

they seek to differentiate their position from MMD in this way. They argue for a slower pace of adjustment and for bigger cushions for the poor. But the Zambian people know the steep decline in the country's economy and in their average living standards began in the 1970s, that is to say when UNIP was in power. This intelligence will reduce, even if it does not eliminate, Kaunda's ability to reap political capital from the increases in poverty and inequality that have occurred since the MMD took office. His strongest suit may well be to concentrate on attacking the corruption which is widely perceived to be a feature of the present government. Also, the government's decision on how to restructure ownership and managerial control of ZCCM so as to attract greater participation by foreign corporate capital will not only be significant for the country's future but will also provide another target for public criticism.

Spokesmen for the National Party as well as UNIP have expressed concern over the dismantling of Zambian industry. For instance over 70% of installed capacity in the clothing sector ceased production in the 12 months following January 1992. This industrial retrenchment is the result of a historical lack of international competitiveness and the recent opening of the country's market to foreign competition, combined with the exigencies of privatisation and the closure of financially unsupportable state enterprises, Zambia Airways for example. But the NP's sentiment seems to be more one of economic nationalism than acute social concern. After all, formal employment in urban areas has been relatively privileged. Average annual earnings in manufacturing have been twice those in agriculture, and the figure in mining is twice as much again. Similarly, the condemnation by opposition politicians of the government's intentions to eliminate some jobs and depress or restrain real wages in the lower-middle ranks of the large public sector workforce looks to be politically opportunistic. A populist platform like this may appeal to the newly impoverished but does not necessarily betoken an identification with the poorest groups in society and those who have always been very poor. The bottom fifth of society, who enjoy less than 5% of the nation's income, are in the main to be found elsewhere. Anyway, even the MMD government will be unable to execute large civil service redundancies unless the donors show willing to fund the inherited arrangements for severance pay, something they have shown little enthusiasm for so far.

In addition to the three most visible members of the party political market, there are another 30 political parties, according to the Registrar of Societies. For the most part these are little more than one-person bands with 'interim' presidents. They have neither formal organisational structures nor credible political and economic programmes, and they are bereft of material resources. They do not expand the real scope for effective choice by the electorate. Organisational bodies with names like Labour Party and Revolutionary Socialist Party might be thought to present industrial workers with some radical alternatives, but they are not on good terms with the trade union movement. The dominant union, the mineworkers, has always been wary of making partisan political commitments. In any case, the industrial workforce is in decline; in total well over 70 000 jobs are said to have disappeared from the formal sector since 1991, out of a total that has never risen above 400 000 employees. Just over half of all Zambia's citizens live in urban and peri-urban areas and so large numbers

of poor people are to be found in the towns and cities; and this is where the decline in living standards has been most marked in recent years. Nevertheless, the majority of the poorest people still live in the rural areas.

In sum, the poor are a large but widely distributed and variegated group. They are vulnerable to sectional and provincial politicking by any politicians who choose to make appeals along ethnic and linguistic lines. This, along with the underdeveloped state of lateral communications and national transport routes, reduces the chances of one or two political parties capturing the active support of the great majority of the poor and promoting their active entry into the political system. Even within the agricultural workforce there are significant differences. The incomes of households along the line of rail communications in Central and Southern Provinces could benefit from the liberalisation of maize marketing which has already taken place, but farmers in the more distant areas of Luapula and North-Western Provinces will be handicapped. So far it is the middlemen, not the producers, who have prospered most from the marketing changes. Many growers are burdened by substantial debts. These have risen considerably as a result of the high interest rates that were produced by the government's attempts to finance its own spending through such devices as the issue of treasury bills. The most marginal farmers are themselves purchasers of maize at certain times of the year, and end up paying the vastly increased prices. Thus, even the World Bank has acknowledged (in its 1993 Country Economic Memorandum for Zambia) that rural inequalities are likely to increase, in the wake of the government's adjustment policies and the movement away from pan-territorial arrangements for agricultural marketing and support.

The poor are not a strong or united political force. They do not obviously register in the inner councils of the three main parties, and they do not have notable standard-bearers among the parties on the fringe. The strategy of the pro-poor faction in the World Bank is said to be to build a consensus within governments on the need to pay more attention to poverty, rather than try to impose an appropriate policy-orientation through conditionality. In Zambia, it may not be easy to identify suitable counterparts from among the political parties who are prepared to take on ownership of a committed poverty agenda, although there could be more resonance inside the ministries, where there are some very able public servants. The government's presentation to the Paris club meeting of donors in December 1994 might give some comfort, for it spoke of a refocusing of policy objectives once the transitional phase of economic adjustment has been completed in 1997. However, there is no certainty that social objectives would then be made a priority, rather than, say, renovation of the country's physical infrastructure. The government's observations on the rehabilitation of social infrastructures were noticeable for the contribution that seems to be expected from the non-governmental organisations.

Poverty and political practice

While the scope of meaningful choice offered in the political market is rather limited, and there is no significant pro-poor party with strong foundations and

effective leadership, it is also the case that conduct among the political elite can be found wanting in a wider sense.

The essential nature of politics is a matter of some dispute in the scholarly tomes, as befits a subject that has been defined in several different ways. But one recurrent theme is that politics centres around what is common or general to the whole community (the polis)—the *res publica*. Thus, political rule is concerned with the general interests shared by all members of the community; in non-traditional societies it will be tied to public policy and thereby to the business of the state, or statecraft.

Alas, among Zambians there is a view that many members of the political elite are primarily interested not in the collective pursuit of societal goals, but in self-enrichment and personal advancement. A possible exception may be the handful who seek to challenge the territorial integrity of the Zambian state and restore to Barotseland (presently called Western Province) the political autonomy it enjoyed as a Protectorate within Northern Rhodesia and at the 1964 constitutional settlement with Britain.⁸ But even that dispute can be interpreted primarily as a struggle over who should control access to resources, notably land. The general tendency of self-seeking helps us to make sense of (the flourishing practice whereby political figures migrate between parties, sometimes even retracing their steps by rejoining a party they had formerly left, and the endemic factionalism to be found inside all three main parties. For example, Nkumbula rejoined MMD after losing the NP presidency.

The main parties are still a long way from fulfilling the conditions spelled out in Edmund Burke's classic account of party as 'a body of men [sic] united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed'.⁹ Of course, Burke's normative account provides only one of several alternative models of political party, and it is foreign to a number of political systems including that of the USA. Nevertheless, politics as conceived by Bertrand de Jouvenel, as the rallying of wills, remains but an imperfectly mastered art in the organisation of Zambia's parties.¹⁰

Moreover, a number of politicians are seen to have brought the profession into disrepute. Many parliamentarians neglect their constituencies. Only in part is this because of the difficulties of travel in the rural areas, especially in the wet season, and in some cases because of the demands imposed by ministerial duties. The cultivation of business interests in Lusaka and abroad obviously takes away some time and energy. For some, their reluctance to visit the electorate is said to be because they do not have patronage to offer, in the shape of publicly-funded projects. Ministers are accused of deliberately avoiding the countryside, where it is difficult to defend the government's record on maize (always a 'political crop') because of the serious shortcomings of the early attempts to liberalise the market. In the case of three prominent MMD figures (Dean Mung'omba, Derrick Chitala and Chuulu Kalima) who were seen as potential challengers for the party leadership, there was a requirement that they seek prior authorisation from State House before planning campaigning visits to their constituencies. The first two are now forming a new party.

In the government's case, as has already been stated corruption is widely believed to be rife. An involvement in international drugs-trafficking is sus-

pected of a few. 1993 witnessed the implication of some ministers in the diversion of bank credit—which state financial institutions had authorised for the purpose of making maize purchases from farmers—into high earning deposit accounts and lucrative treasury bill investments. In comparison with the previous regime, which was able to retain some esteem thanks to its high profile in regional politics, there is much less opportunity to compensate for domestic failings by gaining prestige from the conduct of foreign policy. The end of apartheid in South Africa and the focusing of world attention on that state as a key to economic development in southern Africa, have reduced Zambia's claims to leadership in the region, notwithstanding its role in hosting peace talks between the Angolan government and its opponents in Jonas Savimbi's (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) (UNITA).

An unsurprising corollary of all this would be the poverty of political debate. A shortfall by government in explaining its policy initiatives could be explained as but one more legacy of the one-party state. But it is unfortunate that political argument based on detailed analysis and hard evidence, and directed towards solving the problems of poverty in particular, tends to be crowded out by the vocabulary of personal invective, rumour-mongering and, occasionally, allegations of tribal influence. Insults are traded even among members of the same party. While the debates in parliament can be spirited, these are accessible to an insignificant proportion of the general public. Broadcasting and the chief long-established newspapers are still in government ownership. The independent print media, claiming to be starved of hard information about the deliberations on which the government's policy formulations are based, often dwell more on the part played by personalities, rather than on illuminating the issues.

Regrettably, the idea of 'constructive criticism' seems to have lost credibility through its association with the formal toleration which was granted by the one-party state. In practice, the leadership of the Second Republic proved to be increasingly intolerant of criticism and imprisoned some of its critics. Now that government in the Third Republic exposes itself more openly to criticism, the tendency has been for the independent media to adopt a heavily negative slant in their approach to advancing public understanding. The editor of the best-selling independent newspaper, *The Post* (which sprang up during the 1991 general election campaign) argues that journalists' right to challenge public persons and government measures means 'the right to speak foolishly and without moderation'.¹¹ The general attitude is also well summed up in a remark made by the head of the Zambia Research Foundation apropos the frequently voiced dissatisfaction with the government's adherence to structural adjustment, when he said it is unfair to ask the critics to offer practical alternatives.

Political wealth

The injunction to seek balance means that aspects of political wealth in Zambia at the present time deserve to be mentioned. Here, political wealth refers to features that are positive for democratisation.

Politics is a way of ruling in divided societies without undue violence. Indeed, armed conflict is alien to the political method. Zambia practices politics in this

sense. In Africa that can be reckoned a considerable achievement, for there is the potential for adversity posed by Zambia's multi-ethnic multiracial society, which encompasses over 70 different Bantu-speaking tribes and seven major language groups. There are Zambians of Asian and European origin as well as coloureds, in addition to the majority black populace. And of course there are great disparities in income and wealth, which exceed those in most other countries.

The head of state acknowledges the existence of cultural diversity and differences of view as a welcome and inescapable fact, and not something to be suppressed. The classic liberal argument that individual freedom is the well-spring of progress for society is well understood by President Chiluba.¹² If, as Miller claims, politics is a matter of the peaceful expression, settlement and modification of disagreements, treated through more or less formalised procedures and institutions,¹³ then Zambia is a relatively well endowed polity. Even some parts of Europe are not so fortunate; and the present situation in Zambia compares favourably with its own recent and colonial past.

In political life generally, and in the management of democratisation specifically, leadership is reckoned by many to be of prime importance. President Chiluba praises plural politics and says it should be a civilising activity for society. He argues that it should give rise to enjoyment, and has remarked on a number of occasions that if conflict and opposition did not exist, then politics would become a 'dead game'. Consequently, while there is much talk of the need to introduce greater discipline in the affairs of the ruling party (Chiluba is likely to be challenged for the MMD party's presidential nomination at its next convention, due to be held by February 1996), relations between the government and the opposition parties have been placed on a footing of mutual tolerance, if not equal respect. There is the appearance of a shared intention to carry on the competition in the political arena in broad accordance with certain known and agreed rules of the game. A crucial test lies in the coming months, in the run up to the October 1996 elections to parliament and the presidency. There will be strong temptations to cry foul over the methods being used, particularly by the ruling party, to secure a favourable share of the votes.

Politics is not the sole preserve of political leaders and their parties, and a significant strand of current debates worldwide on the future for democratisation dwells on the potential contribution of civil society.¹⁴ Zambia does not exhibit high levels of public participation in party politics, but the associational life of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is free to build on traditions that date from before the Second Republic and which survived even during the Second Republic, when the scope to exercise influence through the channels of the ruling party was limited. The number of such organisations is growing. The more familiar ones include the trade union movement, which has a history of being semi-autonomous of government and is now distancing itself from the MMD, although it made a major contribution to that party's election campaign in 1991.¹⁵ Then there are businessmen, in the informal as well as formal sectors. Other bodies that have been quite vocal in Lusaka include the Press Association of Zambia, Law Association of Zambia (LAZ), Civic Education Association for Zambia's Democratic Process, National Women's Lobby Group, Foundation for Democratic Process (formerly called at the time of the 1991 elections the

Zambia Elections Monitoring Coordination Committee), the Economic Association of Zambia, and the student body of the University of Zambia (always a thorn in the side of the Kaunda administration, and the instigators of the political demonstrations of 25 June 1990, which proved to be a turning point for the one-party state).

One body that is prominent in seeking to draw attention to the needs of the poor and to move poverty up the political agenda is the Catholic church. An example is the full-page advertisement taken out in newspapers in July 1993 called 'Hear the Cry of the Poor—a Pastoral Letter from the Catholic Bishops on the Current Suffering of the People of Zambia'. The letter used the term economic apartheid to characterise the state of affairs in the nation. The dramatic rise in the price of maize meal since the ending of subsidies has been a particular focus of attention. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace has also spoken out against the government's proposals for reforming land tenure and introducing freehold arrangements, which they believe would allow foreign 'cheque book farmers' to take away the peasants' access to land, and would lead to the further enrichment of people who are well connected politically. In mid-1994 they took the lead in drawing attention to the maize harvest shortfall and impending hunger in some regions, at a time of seeming complacency by the authorities at the centre.

But although the Catholic bishops, and the churches more generally, have always felt able to speak out without fear of heavy reprisals from government (and did so repeatedly in the Second Republic), their efforts for the poor are not particularly well supported by many of the other NGOs. They have their own special interests and concerns. For example, the Law Association of Zambia is said to take more interest in 'elite theorising' than in 'how the rights of the poor may be being abused'; and it has been said of the National Women's Lobby Group that its predominance of relatively affluent and privileged members of society is typical.¹⁶ The poverty lobby and the interests of poor peasant farmers do not occupy a high profile. By comparison, the commercial farmers are organised more systematically, and spokesmen for business are located much closer to the people in power, although even these groups find the MMD government lacks the means to respond sympathetically to many of their representations.

It is too soon to say that civil society has been significantly weakened as a result of the accession to political office of a coalition movement (MMD) which initially incorporated several leading figures from civil society. White's pessimism on this point, which he reinforces by predicting that the government's programme of economic liberalisation could weaken the social forces, is in sharp contrast to the more optimistic assessment of Panter-Brick.¹⁷ The government does not share the corporatist ambitions of UNIP's one-party state, and a new generation of NGO leaders is emerging. Some of the MMD government's original recruits have begun the trek back to civil society. The eminent lawyer Roger Chongwe retains for the time being his MMD membership and a seat in Parliament, but has become an outspoken critic of President Chiluba; while another lawyer, and former Vice-President of the MMD government, Levy Mwanawasa, recently called on his colleagues in LAZ to be ever-vigilant with

respect to the rule of law. Nevertheless, what all this means for the poor is far from clear. There are few grounds for saying the NGOs have demonstrated a capacity to influence public policy in the direction of the most vulnerable groups. Zambia might be on course to seeing the emergence of a business class that is not beholden to the state. And its members, along with those elements of international capital with whom there are strong links, may well come to acquire greater and more overt influence over the direction of public policy. But in contrast, the chief role for grassroots community bodies is currently being marked out as delivery agents for welfare services, not lobbying and advocacy on behalf of the poor.

For the time being, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the choice of issues to which sustained attention is being given among the upper echelons is influenced considerably less by non-governmental organisations than by the foreign donors and multilateral financial and development institutions. The foreign aid agencies and diplomatic community, echoed by the independent press and rival fractions within the ruling party, ensure that such matters as corruption, drugs-trafficking and privatisation attain high profiles as items of national importance. In the case of NGOs which, like the Legal Resources Foundation and Women in Law and Development, receive international funding (from Germany's Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the Finnish Development Agency respectively), there is a chance that their agendas too will be susceptible to influence from abroad. To date, the 'rapid and visible' action on the social front which Graham considers to be necessary in view of the urgency of the poverty problem, has not been forthcoming.¹⁸ Local sources in Zambia allege maladministration and political interference in such measures as the distribution of drought relief maize brought in from outside the country and the World Food Programme's food-for-work projects. Other initiatives, such as the mainly donor-funded Social Action Programme, have failed to make a significant positive impact on the political climate, or indeed on the general condition of the poor.

Significance and future prospects

The poor were not the architects of the political transition from one-partyism to multipartyism, but they did contribute to the political climate in which changes to the form of government, and a new approach to economic management, became essential. The urban areas showed increasing restlessness as the 1980s progressed, and by the turn of the decade the street demonstrations turned from voicing economic discontent to an explicitly anti-government message. The push for change came from within the country and not from the international community. The MMD coalition of business and labour leaders, lawyers, academics and politicians who had been in the senior ranks of the UNIP party and government, capitalised on this and then steered the course of events. From July 1991 onwards Zambia's political transition was a managed and not a riotous affair. Since 1991 the poor have become poorer in both absolute and relative terms, and there are more of them. The economic policies of the MMD government are charged with being immediately responsible, even though the reasons

why these policies are required are not of the government's own making. But society's response so far has been largely muted—a mixture of passivity and apathy. How long will this last?

One prognosis is that people are simply waiting until October 1996, by which time they will have regained the appetite to cast a free vote, something that was taken from them during the Second Republic, which fell back on harassment and intimidation to mobilise the vote. Electoral turnouts in parliamentary by-elections in the Third Republic have ranged down from 39% to 12%, with the majority being under 20%, as compared with the modest general election turnout of 45% in 1991. The turnouts in local government elections have been even lower. There are various explanations. The MMD government began life with such a large parliamentary majority (125 out of 150 elected seats) that it has seemed unlikely that the balance of power could be shifted by defeating the ruling party in by-elections and at the local level. An equally persuasive reading is that the high level of abstentions by voters represents a vote of no confidence in all of the parties: the MMD now repels but its rivals do not attract. None of the parties yet appears to offer credible solutions to the pressing social problems. At the very least, judgement on their relevance to this issue has been suspended.

If the low levels of electoral participation persist into the next general election, then a government will be returned that is barely legitimated by the electoral process. Such an outcome could exacerbate the existing tendencies towards factional divisions within the parties, and strain the commitment to an orderly conduct of relations between the parties. These are the sort of circumstances in which the political elite can easily discredit democracy, just as the people's failure to use the safety valve of elections would constitute a missed opportunity to prevent popular resentment building against the political system as a whole. Indeed, political analysts like Kohli and Huntington argue that democratic experiments are more often destroyed from above than undermined from below, at least in the early stages.¹⁹ Thus the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of the politicians, and the command of democratic craftsmanship shown by the leaders, will be crucial ingredients for success. Nevertheless, the longer the interval before the parties offer a meaningful set of choices and build popular constituencies for themselves, the greater is the likelihood that general dissatisfaction with the parties and the party system will spill over into disaffection with the polity. Hence, one possible scenario sees the urban poor, if not also the rural poor, ultimately losing patience with Zambia's version of democracy. Apathy turns into alienation, and from there on the state, the supreme political association, would be in serious trouble.

There is an alternative, more benign version of events. In present circumstances, higher levels of participation would take the form of demands on government for immediate socioeconomic improvements, which no party in office could deliver. Competition for a share of the limited public resources for development and welfare would follow the traditional social alignments. Against a background of tight fiscal policies and sluggish supply-side responses in the newly liberalised economy, the politics of sectionalism would set province against province more intensely than ever before. That too would undermine the prospects for plural democracy. Indeed, trends such as these would replicate a

central ingredient of the increasingly fractured party landscape which determined Kaunda to ban political opposition to the ruling party in 1972. What is more, the practice of sectionalism increases the divisions among the poor, and undermines whatever potential they might have to organise collectively on their own behalf.

By comparison, the current prominence of personality among the subjects for political debate could be less likely to instigate serious social conflict and destabilise the polity. Furthermore, a general disinterest in the functioning of political competition, because that is judged largely irrelevant to the formation of economic policy in Zambia at the moment, could be considered a useful antidote to the rise of excessive and divisive claims on the public purse. This belief that party politics has only marginal bearing is, after all, quite plausible. The main determinants of public economic policy in this donor-dependent country are perceived to be the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. There is an overriding constraint on government action in the form of the country's foreign debt. This still tops US\$6 billion (equivalent to 170% of Gross Domestic Product), in spite of the partial debt cancellation granted by some bilateral donors and other measures of debt relief agreed by the World Bank since 1991 (debt relief and aid totalled US\$3.5 billion for 1992–94). Nevertheless, even though the relative quiescence of the poor might help to stabilise the democratic transition, a widespread perception of external control and local impotence is hardly an appropriate springboard for moving further down the path of democratic consolidation. This state of affairs will not encourage the building of an ethic of responsible self-government, in which power and influence come to be widely distributed throughout the populace.

Certain key questions remain unanswered. Will the new economic framework, operating in conjunction with international support, revitalise the country's economy in a way that offers material benefits especially to the poor? If the answer is yes, how soon will it happen and how quickly will the poor begin to appreciate the results? The answers to these questions have a crucial bearing on progress towards further democratisation, in two respects. First, for instrumental reasons the development of appropriate socioeconomic foundations should help underpin the political institutions and further enrich civil society in an appropriate direction. Second, poverty-amelioration is vital for advancing the intrinsic value of democracy which, in the view of some if not all, political theorists is first and foremost a condition of political equality.

In summing up their focus group assessment, Bratton and Liatto-Katundu conclude 'Perhaps the most singular threat to the consolidation of democracy in Zambia today is the growing despair among the majority of Zambians about falling living standards'.²⁰ They found the more vulnerable members of society are beginning to blame their travails on the poorly understood concept of democracy. However, it is within the power of politicians to do a great deal of harm to democratic prospects, if they fail to cultivate respect for their profession and do not develop satisfactory models of party organisation and party competition. In practice, the current trajectory of party politics is so uncertain that the outlook for democratisation could depend primarily on whether the economic policies being pursued by the government prove to be good or bad for the majority of the people of Zambia. In this regard, the state's capacity to

implement the economic policies currently prescribed by the neoliberal paradigm, the dynamism shown by the private sector, and the performance of the NGOs will all be important ingredients; so too will be the measure of support the country's international creditors continue to see fit to provide.

Notes

- ¹ See J Lively, *Democracy*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975; A Arblaster, *Democracy*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994; and R A Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989, esp ch 23.
- ² B Gills, J Rocamora & R Wilson, 'Low intensity democracy' in Gills, Rocamora & Wilson (eds), *Low Intensity Democracy. Political Power in the New World Order*, London: Pluto Press, 1993, p 5. The writer's attention was drawn to the notion of low intensity democracy and its possible application to Zambia by Carolyn Baylies.
- ³ S P Huntington: *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, O K: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991, p 311; L Diamond, 'Economic development and democracy reconsidered', *American Behavioural Scientist*, 35(4/5), 1992, pp 486, 488. See also A. Pourgerami, *Development and Democracy in the Developing World*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991, p 9.
- ⁴ Data from World Bank, *Zambia: Prospects for Sustainable and Equitable Growth*, Washington DC: World Bank Country Economic Memorandum, 1993; and T Addison, *Zambia—Selected Policy Issues in Poverty Reduction* (mimeo, Warwick University, October 1993).
- ⁵ J Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952, p 269.
- ⁶ M M Burdette, *Zambia. Between Two Worlds*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988, p 167.
- ⁷ Sam Ghipungu in *The Post*, 24 January 1995.
- ⁸ The 1964 Barotse Agreement was abrogated by the UNIP government in 1969.
- ⁹ E Burke, 'On the present discontents' in, *Edmund Burke on Government, Politics and Society*, B W Hill (ed), London: Fontana, 1975, p 113. G M Pomper's succinct 'Concepts of political parties', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 4(2), 1992, p 144 notes that Burke's definition is not an accurate general description of parties, and prefers the Madisonian version which speaks of a number of citizens being united and actuated by some common impulse of passion or interest, adverse to the rights of others or the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.
- ¹⁰ B de Jouvenel, 'The essence of politics' in his *Sovereignty*, trans J F Huntington, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957, p 17. On the factional nature of Zambia's party politics see P Burnell, 'Building on the past? Party politics in Zambia's Third Republic', *Party Politics*, 1(3), 1995, pp 397–405.
- ¹¹ *The Post*, 2 August 1994. This twice weekly paper has a circulation of up to 30 000 copies. In August 1994 four of its most prominent reporters, including the managing editor, were charged with criminal libel and released on bail. By December five staff were facing a total of 11 criminal charges.
- ¹² See F J T Chiluba, *Democratisation in Zambia*, M Phil thesis, University of Warwick, 1994, especially ch 1,8 and 9. One of President Chiluba's favourite books after the Bible is the *Second Treatise of Government* by the 17th century English liberal philosopher John Locke.
- ¹³ J D B Miller, *The Nature of Politics*, London: Pelican, 1965, ch 1.
- ¹⁴ See for example G White, 'Civil society, democratization and development (I): clearing the analytical ground', *Democratization*, 1(3), 1994, pp 375–390 and L Diamond, 'Rethinking civil society', *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (3), 1994, pp 4–18.
- ¹⁵ Fackson Shamenda, who is Chiluba's successor as head of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions, has accused "criminals" from the previous establishment' of taking over government and abusing their positions: 'It is the same bloody crooks who are being recycled. They want power for themselves ...', *Weekly Post*, 24 December 1993.
- ¹⁶ *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 28 November 1993; B Liatto-Katundu, 'Women's lobby and gender relations in Zambia', *Review of African Political Economy*, 56, 1993, p 79.
- ¹⁷ G White, 'Civil society, democratization and development (II): two country cases', *Democratization*, 2(2), 1995, pp 64–71; K Panter-Brick, 'Prospects for democracy in Zambia', *Government and Opposition*, 29(2), 1994, p 232.
- ¹⁸ C Graham, *Safety Nets, Politics and the Poor. Transitions to Market Economies*, Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994, p 172.
- ¹⁹ A Kohli, 'Democracy and Development' in J P Lewis & V Kallab (eds), *Development Strategies Reconsidered* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Books, 1986), pp 171–172; Huntington, *The Third Wave*,

pp 36–39. See also Doh Chull Shin, ‘On the third wave of democratization’, *World Politics*, 47(1), 1994, pp 153–154, 161.

²⁰ M Bratton & B Liatto-Katundu, ‘A Focus group assessment of political attitudes in Zambia’, *African Affairs*, 93 (1994), pp 562–563. Democracy and not just the MMD government is being blamed for the failure to bring mass prosperity, because many ordinary citizens still see the party in office as being coterminous with the state. This state of affairs reinforces the argument in this paper for one or more strong opposition parties to pose a clear alternative to MMD.

