John Sender and Sheila Smith The Development of Capitalism in Africa (London: Methuen, 1986).

It had to happen sooner or later. Someone was going to write a book on Africa purporting to substantiate the Bill Warren thesis of imperialism as pioneer of progressive capitalism. Sender and Smith have taken this task upon themselves. Significantly, one of the authors, is editor of Bill Warren's work.

The first chapter is a straightforward, if somewhat pallid rendition of Bill Warren's tendentious reading of Marxist's position of what capitalist accumulation and its world-wide dynamism are. It is written as if Warren's thesis has not been seriously challenged and there is therefore no attempt to re- argue Warren's case in light of the critique.

The leit motif of the book emerges in the second chapter and this is that trade in the colonial period had effects which were "extraordinarily far-reaching". Parenthetically, the mobilization of virtually every verbal accolade to the dynamism of colonialism recurs throughout the book with a frequency that betrays the authors own disbelief in the credibility of their case. Thin on theoretical substance it relies on cavalierly deployed "facts" to counter all those on the left who have somehow not held the Warrenite vision.

First, the authors seek to establish that colonial trade had both backward and forward linkages contrary to claims by the Barans, Hirshmans and Rweyemamus, that the colonial export economy was an enclave. To prove their claims of extensive backward linkages of the colonial export economy, the authors include any production unit - a soap factory here, a saw mill there, a groundnuts plant in Senegal, a tea factory in Uganda - as evidence of the dynamic links that the export economy had with the rest of the economy. The demand for 700 hoes for rice growing in Tanzania over a decade is thrown in for good measure. The case on forward linkages is even weaker. After exactly two paragraphs of "evidence" the authors tell us that the scale and range of forward linkages from the expansion of exports "must be regarded as impressive both in absolute terms and in comparison with the negligible spread effects associated with pre-colonial (sic) trade" (p. 29). The reason why the authors seem to believe that their bits and pieces of evidence is telling is because they have self-servingly created a veritable strawman against whom any sign of capitalist relations (wage labour or land markets) or any "linkage" generated by the export sector (bakery producing wage goods, a tea processing factory, a railway line carrying ore) can be used to clinch the argument. To suggest, for instance, that the establishment of soap and furniture factories, brickworks, printing presses, saw mills, flour mills, oil mills, rice mills, breweries, pre-cast concrete, cotton weaving and the 700 hoes refutes Rweyemamu's claim of the perversion of the accumulation process in colonial Tanzania is patently foolish. The point of contention has never been that the export economy failed to spawn such activities but rather that these linkages were extremely weak when compared to the "historical trends" established by such authors as Hoffman, Hirshman etc. and the historical input-output structures of various economies at similar levels of development.

A simple piece of evidence of the dynamics of the export economy would have been the share of manufacturing value added in GDP or the share of wage labour in the total economically active labour force or some composite index of these. However, such evidence (and it is available) would have been cold comfort for the authors and so they nimbly sidestep it to harass the reader with unassorted account of factories scattered across colonial Africa.

The story on changes in relations of production in agriculture is told in similarly extolling terms. Here the authors conclude, once again after the presentation of the barest evidence, that "the historical outcome in many areas in Africa is not in doubt: rural relations of production changed rapidly and radically" (p. 28). As for the process of proletarianization we are simply informed it was "phenomenal".

The Africa that emerges from this account is one endowed with dynamic exports sectors, with extensive and wide-ranging linkage effects and with a population large shares of which are wage earners in capitalist enterprises - both foreign and domestic. If this is not a recognizable image of this our very palpable underdeveloped Africa on the eve of independence, it is largely because it is a polemical fiction created by the authors for the express purpose of sustaining a thesis - in this case the Bill Warren thesis on "progressive capitalism".

In the fourth chapter, the post-independence era is presented as a "decisive" quantitative and qualitative shift in the possibilities of state intervention which is crucial for industrialization by import-substitution, a condition which is "central to accumulation in late industrializing countries". It is not clear why this should be the case given the encomia lavishly heaped on colonial accumulation.

Surely if the colonial export economy had yielded "phenomenal" rates of proletarianization and "rapidly and radically" transformed rural Africa and had produced "impressive linkages", independent states would be hard put to perform better. In any case, without indicating clearly in what way independence has made a difference and given the position of nationalism in the authors' demonology, we are informed that the expansion of the forces of production in many post-colonial African economies has been "extremely rapid" (p. 67). Characteristically, the authors conveniently fail to see that "rapid" industrialization was largely a reflection of the extremely low starting point inherited from their dynamic colonialism and involved the most elementary forms of industrialization that colonialism had hitherto blocked. It is no wonder that these "extremely rapid" rates of accumulation took place in the decade immediately after independence and their duplication has proved extremely elusive since.

The account of post-independence economic performance consists of something like this: Take the annual reports of the World Bank since 1960, the modal year of Africa's independence, select a number of countries and some "social indicators", "marxify" the language of the Bank's accounts of success and failure. And, voilà, you have a "marxist" analysis of Africa's accumulation ordeal since independence appearing as a success except in those countries pursuing the wrong macro-economic policies. However, World Bank reports have, until the recent domination of the monetarists, been more cautious in the use of figures. The Bank would not be as foolish as to treat as success increases in output in cereal production without referring to population changes. The very sources that these authors use show that with the exception of only six countries (Malawi, Swaziland, Burundi, Cameroon, Rwanda, Ivory Coast) output increases in agriculture has fallen behind population growth. They also show that for close to half of African per capita growth rates have been negative. Such has been the true nature of "the impressive overall growth of agricultural output".

Failure to grow is, in the spirit of the World Bank orthodoxy blamed on failure to promote exports. The authors' ignorance of the African experience emerges glaringly when they pick on Ghana as an example. They seem totally unaware that Ghana's pessimism about export prospects was not due to some crazy nationalist notion but a result of some rather painful experience. The Nkrumah regime with all its nationalist credentials intact, actually doubled its production of cocoa between 1957 and 1965 only to find itself receiving less absolute revenue from exports. Even the World Bank has become less sanguine about the export prospects of the poor countries. Ivory Coast is today being penalized for its success in export promotion. The authors praise those countries which have increased their export incomes despite declining barter terms of trade. At the risk of being considered squeamish by the authors we must point out that in one case - Malawi - this has taken place by lowering the living standards of the workers during the entire export "boom".

Why have Africans failed to follow the correct path of export oriented growth? The authors argue that the main culprits are the "ideological tenets" held by some unnamed composite character made up of Samir Amin (who is not listed neither in bibliography nor in the index but a known Sheila Smith's bête noire) Fanon, the Latin American "Cepalistas", the Dependencia school and the "political hegemony of nationalism". This composite character is against export orientation and pursues import substitution in a totally reckless manner.

This composite monstrosity is the true enemy of the working class who, according to the book's blurb, are placed in the forefront of the analysis. As it turns out the placing of the working class at the forefront is no more than a head count of wage employees who seem to have no political role other than teleologically and paternalistically assigned to them by the authors. Struggles by workers against unfavourable trade relations, transfer of surplus by TNCs, world recessions, perpetuation of colonial forms of exploitation, imperialism etc. is dismissed as merely a ploy by the national bourgeoisie to "deflect criticism by resort to anti-imperialist rhetoric and to blame scapegoats for economic failure". Consequently any participation by workers against these aspects of the system is considered utopian and an unfortunate capitulation to nationalist mystification. Class conscious workers would presumably be those who welcome their countries exploitation by transnational capital as a necessary precursor of the socialist revolution, assuming that even that ever becomes necessary, given the dynamism and democratic thrust ascribed to capitalism. What the authors have placed on the forefront are not the blood and flesh-working class of Africa's "effective reality" but a teleologically defined working class perfunctorily dragged in at the end of the authors analysis to cheerfully assume the warrenite burden of "progressive capitalism". The African workers have to contend not only with nationalist obscurantism against which Sender and Smith rave, but also against the partenalism and the proletariat messianism of a "left" that has joined the right in its interpretation of Africa's underdevelopment.

Capitalism is a dynamic system. This it has proved time and again. It is therefore a question of profound theoretical and practical interests that in some parts of the world the dynamism of the system was blunted. Accolades to capital in general will not do to answer this question nor will mindless empiricism of Smith and Sender conceal the fact of underdevelopment in Africa. In trying to argue against the "development of underdevelopment" school Sender and Smith throw away dialectics and are left with an equally linear, albeit, more ridiculous view of capitalism in the periphery.

The significance of this book lies not in its scientific value (which is meagre) but in the fact that it is part of a genre of current writing on Africa that is intended to unburden the erstwhile colonial masters of any sense of guilt they may have felt about the pain, suffering and dehumanization they inflicted in their past doings on the rest of humanity. In this new spirit nationalism is discredited as simply obscurantist and the venality of some of the purveyors of this nationalism is used to completely absolve the object against which this nationalism was directed - imperialism. The book is part of the cultural and intellectual atmosphere which sustains nostalgic films about the colonial past, nourishes laudatory accounts of the economic role and civilizing mission of colonial rule and makes bashing of "nationalism" à la rigueur. It is the economist's version of "Out of Africa".

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