

BOEKBESPREKINGS/BOOK REVIEWS

IAN LIEBENBERG, BOBBY NEL, FIONA LORTAN AND GERT VAN DER WESTHUIZEN (EDITORS)
The long march. The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

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The long march is the combined effort of no less than twenty-four contributors to produce a popular (non-academic) account of the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. In their introduction to the book the editors make it clear that unlike existing publications which deal with specific aspects of the liberation struggle, or with the politics of certain racial or national groups, *The long march* attempts to deal with a variety of movements, groups and institutions that took part and are still taking part in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. In keeping with this theme the editors only chose contributors who were either 'intimately involved in the struggles of these movements, or who have studied them extensively'.

As can be expected the book is unashamedly biased both in its selection of contributors and in its definition of whom and what constituted the liberation struggle. According to the editors they have restricted their survey of the liberation struggle to those movements/organisations that were directly or indirectly involved in the 'armed struggle'. Consequently, organisations and movements such as Inkatha, which according to the editors formed an integral part of the National Party's strategy of divide and rule, and whose whole existence was dependent upon the apartheid state, were not included in the survey.

Because of its interdisciplinary nature and because it is the product of so many different contributors, some of whom are well known and respected academics while others are not, the book is an odd mixture of mediocre as well as academically competent chapters. For example, while chapters five to thirteen as well as twenty-two and twenty-three are the products of sound analysis and research, chapters two, three, four and fourteen are generally weak both in composition and content. Chief among the latter is chapter two on the history of the SANNC (ANC) between 1912 and 1960 by Ian Liebenberg, and chapters three and four on the history of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) by Rocky Williams and Joe Slovo respectively. The chapter by Williams in particular is mediocre and unimaginative. One is left with the distinct impression that the author is not well informed on the history of MK. Perhaps a better choice of authors would have been either Howard Barrel, Stephen Davis or Tom Lodge, who have all written widely on the history of MK. Williams is clearly no authority on the subject.

The same applies to Ian Liebenberg's account of the history of the liberation struggle between 1912 and 1960. Although the title of the chapter refers to the period 1912 to 1960, only seven out of the chapter's thirteen pages actually deal with this period and then in such a brief and vague manner that it is largely useless as a source of information. A more competent contribution by Liebenberg is chapter twenty-two, which deals with the role of the labour movement in the struggle for liberation and which he co-authored with Fiona Lortan, a fellow researcher at the Centre for Constitutional Analysis at the HSRC in Pretoria.

Another mediocre contribution is chapter fourteen. Like chapter two it is also written in such a general manner that is it almost meaningless as a source of information. Since it seems to duplicate some of the information contained in chapter thirteen it should either have been incorporated into that chapter or have been left out altogether.

Chapter two, three, four and fourteen stand in such sharp contrast to the rest of the chapters in the work that one is left with the strong impression that while some chapters may have been produced specifically for the book others were not. Among the better written and researched chapters in the book are definitely chapters six and seven by Baruch Hirson on Trotskyism and the Trotskyist movement in South Africa, chapters eight and nine by Gert van der Westhuizen on the history of the Congress of Democrats and the Liberal Party in South Africa, chapters ten, eleven and twelve by Andries du Toit, Tom Lodge and Vincent Maphai on the history of the African Resistance Movement (ARM), the PAC (1959-1990) and the role of Black Consciousness in the Liberation Struggle respectively, chapter thirteen by Bobby Nel on liberation theology, as well as chapters eighteen and twenty-three by Keith Gottschalk and Kehl Shubane (in co-authorship with Pumla Madiba) on the UDF and civic associations in transition, respectively. As far as chapters sixteen and seventeen are concerned, the reader may be excused for thinking that they are largely unobjective glorifications of the roles that the Christian Institute of South Africa and the pro-socialist, pro-Trotskyist Marxist Workers' Tendency (MWT) played in the liberation struggle.

Besides the absence of a unifying theory, admitted to by the authors, the book is also clearly not very well edited. Admittedly, to successfully edit a book that contains contributions by no less than twenty-four different authors is clearly no easy task, but it should not serve as an excuse for shabby editorial work and the lack of coherent presentation. Since *The long march* was never perceived to be an academic publication it will be unfair to judge it as such, although some of its chapters are clearly no more of an academic than a popular nature. On the whole, however, the book, despite its many shortcomings, will no doubt find a ready market among many who have an interest in the country's liberation politics in particular and its political history in general.

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