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Africa, Human Rights, and the Global System: The Political Economy of Human Rights in a Changing World

BOOK NOTES

AFRICA, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE GLOBAL SYSTEM: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN A CHANGING WORLD; Edited by Eileen McCarthy-Arnolds, David R. Penna, and Debra Joy Cruz Sobrepena; Greenwood Press; Westport, CT (1994); ISBN 0-313-29007-5; 272 pp. (hardcover).

This book is a compilation of papers from a conference entitled "Africa and Global Human Rights." It examines the development of human rights and economic and political systems. It utilizes the political economy approach, recognizing the interrelationship between political and economic systems in the protection of human rights.

The first section looks at the development of Africa, exploring the problems of developing a conscious human rights agenda. Human rights have largely been suppressed during the liberation struggles in order to create a unified sense of nationalism. Many of the social and economic problems that previously existed continue to confront the liberated societies. These problems hinder the promotion of a human rights agenda. However, signs of an increasing demand for democratic participation are emerging.

The second section explores the responsibilities the international community has to protect human rights in the developing African nations. It also looks at ways in which the international community can play a role in the protection of human rights. This includes a moral obligation to eradicate poverty, an obligation to intervene in order to stop egregious human rights violations, tactics used and challenges faced by NGOs, and a need for cooperative regional efforts to implement the right to development.

The third section explores challenges to human rights advancement imposed by internal government structures. Individual liberty is limited when the society is unable to effectively challenge the government. This is particularly difficult when all power is accumulated in one party. When economic development takes priority over all other policies, individual rights have been suppressed. Academic criticisms of economic policies stemming from IMF and World Bank policies have led governments to suppress academic rights of both students and professors. Without economic development policies creating a broader distribution of wealth, political changes remain largely ineffective.

The book ends on a relatively positive note with examples of

successful attempts to protect human rights that could be used as future models. For over 100 years Botswana has protected rights to personal security and political participation. This can be attributed to institutional systems protecting the underlying facets of these rights. Many modern structures and practices are rooted in the pre-colonial era. Consequently, it is necessary to understand the historical and modern societies in order to effectively protect human rights. Ending with that article, it emphasizes the important role of political and economic systems in the protection of individual human rights.

Gail Buhler

GEORGE, SUSAN, and FABRIZIO, SABELLI, FAITH & CREDIT: THE WORLD BANK'S SECULAR EMPIRE; Westview Press; Boulder, Colorado (1994); ISBN 0-8133-2607-9; 282 pp. (pbk).

One of the most powerful and influential entities at large in the world today, both economically and politically, is the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which along with the International Development Association (IDA), composes what is commonly referred to as the World Bank. Yet, this awesomely powerful institution is, as the authors Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli have observed, simply unknown to many.

Faith & Credit: The World Bank's Secular Empire, sets out to lift the fog and mystery surrounding this institution, and indeed, provides illumination with startling clarity. George and Sabelli address this supranational agency in terms of its impact on the international economic and political order, focusing on its role in the changing relations between the so called Northern Developed Nations and the Lesser Developed Nations of the South, and specifically, upon the Bank's own internal culture which guides both its decisions and its responses.

In examining the Bank's influence and underlying ideology, George and Sabelli draw upon analogies to the medieval Church and fundamentalist religions. Regardless of one's own views on the latter, the analogy assumes striking credibility as the book unfolds. As the authors observe:

Religion cannot, by definition, be validated or invalidated, declared true or false — only believed or rejected. Facts are irrelevant to belief: they belong to another sphere of reality. True believers, the genuinely pure of heart, exist in every faith, but the majority generally just goes along lukewarmly out of cultural habit or material advantage. When, however, the faith achieves political hegemony as well, like the medieval church (or the Bolsheviks, or the Ayatollahs), it is in a position to make people offers they can't refuse, or to make their lives extremely uncomfortable if they do.

Faith & Credit asserts that the World Bank, like the medieval