

Sandbrook, Richard. *The Politics of Africa's Economic Recovery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 170 pp.

The objective of Sandbrook's latest book is to critique the liberal democratic, free enterprise model espoused by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Western states for the economic recovery of the African continent. He considers the argument that recovery requires a reduction in the size and economic role of monopolistic and inefficient states and their transformation into capable and accountable liberal democracies. The liberal democratic state, it is argued, would discipline politics and create the legal, administrative, and infrastructural conditions necessary for private capital accumulation.

Sandbrook agrees with the need to democratize politics in Africa since the absence of democratic political systems has allowed state elites to engage in rent-seeking behavior that has stifled growth. However, Sandbrook also believes that economic development requires an interventionist state which can implement strategies to make African economies more self-reliant and less dependent on exports to industrialized countries.

Sandbrook argues that an outwardly-oriented, export-based strategy can only succeed if there is high and sustained growth in industrialized countries in order to create demand for Africa's exports. In addition, there needs to be an openness in those developed countries to imports from the South. Since the North's sluggish growth and protectionism of the early 1990s shows no sign of abatement, however, a "self-reliant strategy, under the aegis of the reconstituted and democratized development state" constitutes the brightest prospect for African prosperity, Sandbrook maintains.

Nevertheless, he believes the free enterprise model is needed as short-term strategy because African states have decayed and become predatory. Enhancing government accountability and reducing the economic role of the state can provide the breathing space in which state apparatuses can be revitalized and reoriented. Governments have not been able to design and implement complex economic policies, maintain essential services, or engage in strategic planning because they are burdened with overseeing a plethora of regulations, controls, services, and public investments.

Sandbrook's analysis of the reasons for Africa's economic stagnation differs from that of the World Bank and the IMF. In his view, the workings of the global economy, not domestic policy failings, has played the major role in Africa's economic crisis. Flat world demand for Africa's primary commodities, the ability of other regions to capture shares of already meager world markets, and the development of substitutes for Africa's products has led to Africa's economic slump.

Therefore, the open, export-oriented policies of the World Bank and the IMF are misguided because they keep African economies tied to the sways of international market forces.

The book's major flaw is that Sandbrook fails to explain why a pro-active developmental strategy should work. Support for his argument is limited to identifying the faults of the current structural adjustment program and describing in general terms the activities of the pro-active state. Asserting that free market policies of the World Bank and the IMF hurt Africa does not substantiate the theoretical validity of the pro-active developmental strategy. Further, he does not illustrate his program in practical terms.

Sandbrook's argument is not discussed within a theoretical framework. For instance, he attacks open trade because it threatens local industry, but does not address its effect on inflation. An examination of free trade within a paradigm that ties together the complex factors that affect a country's economy, and an accounting of the benefits and disadvantages of an import substitution regime, would allow the reader to place Sandbrook's criticisms and recommendations in context, and to have more confidence in them. As it stands, the reader is not sure if Sandbrook is looking at the whole picture.

Sandbrook does not repudiate the statist development strategies of the past which some regard as the cause of Africa's economic problems. One has to ask if Sandbrook, due to the ambiguousness of his strategy, and the framework of his analysis, has simply reformulated ideas that were *de rigueur* in the first post-independence decade.

Most of the book's content is superfluous. For instance, Sandbrook's extensive discussion of the practical difficulties that are involved in the implementation of a structural adjustment program does not aid the debate as to what lengths the state should go in reinforcing the marketplace once a free market development strategy has been introduced. It diverts the reader's attention away from the real issue being discussed: the merits of the two different development strategies.

Despite its faults, the book is useful to the reader who is trying to familiarize her/himself with issues concerning political economy in Africa.

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