



FOCUS ON ZIMBABWE

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With Zimbabwe continually in the news, we thought it might be useful to highlight some of the documentaries that have dealt with the political situation in that country. Some of them have been available for some time, while others are very recent acquisitions. When looking at them in context, it is very noticeable that the optimistic tone of the earlier films has given way to a more pessimistic view. While the land question features prominently, the films also reflect other issues, including the role of the trade union movement, freedom of the press and the Matabeleland killings.

No easy walk...Zimbabwe (1987) /
director, Bernard Odjidja.

A programme in a three part series that traces the road to independence of three African countries, this starts with extracts from the 1936 feature **Rhodes of Africa** and recounts the way the African population was deprived of much of its land, leading to the 1896 Matabele uprising against the colonial authorities. It discusses the founding and growth of various nationalist movements, eventually resulting in the banning of ZAPU and ZANU in 1962. This is followed by the UDI declaration and an account of the guerrilla war, the talks at Lancaster House and the 1980 elections, following which Robert Mugabe became prime minister of an independent Zimbabwe and committed himself to a policy of reconciliation. (52 min.)

Zimbabwe: something to sing about (1989) / directors, Nan Fromer & Mark Kaplan.

Since Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980, the government has tried to improve the lot of the peasant farmers, many of whom had previously been restricted to tribal trust lands or were forced to work for the large commercial farms. This film visits two areas where conditions have improved, one a mission farm which has now been subdivided into individually-owned plots, and the other a resettlement area, where farmers split their labour between collectively-owned land and family plots. A number of the changes have come about with assistance from the programme's sponsor, Christian Aid, and some of those involved talk about how they have benefited, as well as about remaining problems. (26 min.)

Reconciliation in Zimbabwe: the first ten years (1990) / director, Mark Kaplan.

When ZANU-PF came to power in Zimbabwe in 1980, incoming president Robert Mugabe expressed the hope that the country would be able to embark upon a policy of reconciliation between black and white, as well as between the various black factions. This film, made 10 years later, assesses to what extent this declared policy has borne results. After presenting a brief overview of the country's history and the second war of liberation, it approaches a number of individuals, amongst them former combatants and politicians.

Between them they discuss such issues as the integration of the armed forces, the redistribution of land and the retention of security legislation. (34 min.)

Keeping a live voice: 15 years of democracy in Zimbabwe (1995) / director, Edwina Spicer.

Produced some 15 years after Zimbabwe achieved its independence, this programme, produced for the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, reviews the country's political progress. It starts by requesting people to recall their involvement in the liberation struggle and then asks them whether the hopes they had for the future have been realised. Most of them profess to be disappointed and feel that their leaders have let them down. The film then embarks on an analysis of the major political events since independence, with most of the comments coming from ordinary voters and some human rights experts. It makes extensive use of newsreel material of the time and provides a detailed account of Zimbabwean politics since 1980. (83 min.)

Landscape of memory: soul in torment (1999) / director, Prudence F Uriri.

Though Zimbabwe achieved its independence in 1980, the ceasefire did not bring peace to the country. Soon afterwards, the government of Robert Mugabe sent its former Shona freedom fighters into Matabeleland, where they fought their former Ndebele comrades. For this programme the filmmaker travels to Mashonaland, where she interviews a former ZANLA member of the 5th Brigade, which was responsible for the killing of many Ndebele civilians, as well as members of the rival ZIPRA forces. She also visits Plumtree, in Matabeleland, where she talks to individuals who were on the receiving side of the atrocities. So far, the authorities have refused to apologise for or even explain the events of the early 1980s. (27 min.)

Dancing out of tune: a history of the media in Zimbabwe (1999) / director, Edwina Spicer.

When, in January 1999, journalists Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto of **The Standard** were detained and tortured by Zimbabwe's military police, there were wide-spread protests, both locally and abroad. However, local government intolerance towards alternative opinions was not a new phenomenon. Restrictive laws, used to suppress and control freedom of expression, were first employed by the colonial powers and then by the Rhodesian Front. This programme presents an overview of the ongoing confrontation between the country's independent newspapers and those in power. It focuses on a number of issues and also discusses the history of some of the most important publications. (56 min.)

Keep on knocking (2000) / director, Everisto 'Grey' Mwatse.

This two-part programme presents a history of the trade union movement in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, from the colonial period to the post-independence era. It starts with the efforts of the British South Africa Company to provide cheap labour for the newly emerging mining and agricultural sectors and then discusses the founding of the ICU, the first legally recognised black labour organisation. It explores the links that were established between the unions and the nationalist parties involved in the labour struggle, with the Zimbabwe

Congress of Trade Unions almost becoming a junior partner of the government in the immediate post-independence years. Today there is an ongoing conflict between ZANU-PF and the ZCTU, with the unions having joined the anti-government coalition. (53 min.)

Never the same again: Zimbabwe's growth towards democracy 1980-2000 (2000) / director, Edwina Spicer.

When Zimbabwe achieved its independence in 1980, the conciliatory words of politicians caused many people to believe that this would herald an era of peace, democracy and tolerance. However, this initial euphoria was dashed when serious rifts emerged between the political leaders of the liberation armies. Almost from the beginning, the ZANU-PF government demonstrated its unwillingness to accommodate the diversity of political opinion in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, in spite of official opposition and political intimidation, a broad coalition of democratic groupings began to emerge. This film focuses on attempts to democratise Zimbabwean society and highlights various political milestones along the way. (89 min.)

Hard earth: land rights in Zimbabwe (2001) / director, Mukundwa Francis Zvoma.

Over the years, the white settlers who came to Rhodesia legislated laws that gave them 80% of the country's best land. When,

subsequently, Zimbabwe gained its independence, these laws were repealed, but 75% of the land remained in the hands of some 4 500 white commercial farmers. Prior to the parliamentary elections of 2000, war veterans started occupying white-owned farms, claiming that the government was not living up to its post-independence promises of a re-distribution of land. Filmed during the initial land occupations, this documentary depicts the situation by visiting a number of farms and by speaking to representatives of the two opposing sides. (73 min.)

My land, my life (2002) / director, Rehad Desai.

Zimbabwe's land crisis has been a long time coming, but it came to a head in the period leading up to the 2000 general election, when much of ZANU-PF's political strategy was based on exploiting this emotive issue. Late in 2001, filmmaker Rehad Desai, who once lived in Zimbabwe, returned to try and establish what had gone wrong in the country that at one stage was regarded as a model African state. Traveling to Mashonaland, he spoke to a number of individuals caught up in the struggle, notably a white farming couple, the leader of a group of war veterans who occupied the farm next to them, and a farm worker caught between these opposing forces. In the process the film puts the whole land issue in some perspective. (52 min.)

2003

