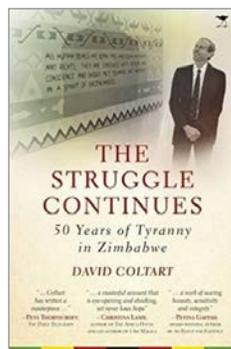


## The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe

By David Coltart  
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Reviewed by  
Robert Forsyth

At a time when in this country the human rights industry has somewhat gone to seed, it is salutatory to be reminded how important human rights really can be and what happens in a country when they are seriously abused, like Zimbabwe. David Coltart's book does just that. Coltart himself will be known to many *Policy* readers from his appearances at CIS's annual conference, Consilium, and as the 2010 Acton Lecturer on Religion and Civil Society.

However, *The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe* is both an inspirational and frustrating read. Inspirational because of the unrelenting courage and faith of the author himself. Frustrating because this detailed and at times harrowing account of over 50 years of his struggle for the well-being of his beloved Zimbabwe ends unresolved. Democracy remains unachieved. Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party are still in power. Despite some achievements towards liberty, by the end of the book if anything, things have gone backwards. Hence the title, which Coltart intends us to take literally and which, ironically, he borrowed from Mugabe's own ZANU-PF battle cry, 'The Struggle Continues'.

Because this is an autobiographical political history, Coltart chronicles his own developing thoughts and deeds as well as telling the story of Zimbabwe. We see the naive ten year old much impressed in meeting Prime Minister Ian Smith soon after UDI; that is, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence of Rhodesia in 1967. (Chronicling the story of Zimbabwe apparently involves an inordinate number of acronyms. Thankfully at the back there is a list of all 115 of them used in the text.) We see the slow disillusionment of the young

policeman involved in a developing guerrilla war. We see the law student in South Africa in 1981 receiving a personal telegram from Zimbabwean Prime Minister Robert Mugabe urging him to return home 'to assist us to achieve our objective of establishing a prosperous and harmonious and humane society in this country' (p.123). It is only a few years later as a new legal practitioner and secretary of the BLPC (Bulawayo Legal Projects Centre) that Coltart becomes aware of the tragedy overtaking his country as he learns of the murderous violence of the 'Gukurahundi', in which the North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe army killed tens of thousands in the western part of the country, presumably on the orders of the Mugabe government.

The narrative settles down to describe the ongoing story of post-colonialist Zimbabwe under a corrupt and power hungry ZANU-PF as well as Coltart's own involvement as a lawyer seeking to defend his clients and the rule of law itself. In the relatively peaceful period of the early 1990s, despite electoral violence and the attempt to create a de facto one-party state, Coltart finds himself drawn to public opposition to the regime by calling for both economic and political liberalisation. He becomes involved in forming a think tank that creates a political party, which in turn is annihilated in the 1995 election.

David Coltart returns to politics in the turbulent period after the late 1990s when civil war veterans' demands for land and compensation led to economic collapse and unilateral land acquisitions. He becomes actively involved in the debate over the need for constitutional reform. The deeply flawed constitution with its inadequate separation of powers had given too much power to the Zimbabwean presidency which is, in Coltart's view, 'at the root of Zimbabwe's crisis of governance' (p.253). Sadly, Coltart eventually finds himself opposing an even worse new constitution drafted by ZANU-PF, although in the rare free vote that followed he, for once, was on the winning side.

At the same time, he actively enters the political fray by running for election as a candidate for the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) and in the 2000 election wins a seat in the Zimbabwe parliament as member for Bulawayo South. He wins again in 2005 and then in 2008 wins the Senatorial constituency

of Khumalo as his old lower house seat had been broken up and gerrymandered. Remarkably Coltart finds himself as the Minister for Education, Sport and the Arts in a ZANU-PF-MDC Government of National Unity. This means that he serves as the only white man in cabinet and with the very same president Robert Mugabe who has publicly threatened him more than once. However, it is not to last. In the 2013 election, notable for its well-planned electoral fraud and intimidation, Coltart loses by 19 votes. He writes of that moment, 'Some of my campaign team burst into tears, but I experienced a remarkable and inexplicable peace' (p.577). Freed from political demands he at last writes his memoir, *The Struggle Continues*.

No review can capture the detail of the decades-long story that David Coltart so carefully lays out. A few comments are in order.

First, it would be a mistake to think of *The Struggle Continues* as a simple tale of good versus evil. Coltart is hard on himself and the time of white rule as well as on post-colonial Zimbabwe and its rulers. Even Robert Mugabe has unexpected positive moments. Coltart describes his relationship with him as 'curious and unpredictable' (p.549). Mugabe is the man who once had said there was no place for David Coltart in Zimbabwe other than in prison, and most likely at least once tried to have him killed. And yet it is Mugabe who publicly praises Coltart for his work in education, backs him in a dispute in cabinet, and makes a genuine enquiry about his daughter who had been mauled by a lion.

Second, one of the more depressing aspects of the narrative is not so much the 50 years of Mugabe's ZANU PF misrule and abuse of power, as it is the failure of what for a while looked like a genuine alternative opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Coltart was involved with the MDC from its beginning in 1999 and served as a member of parliament under its banner for many years. However, after years of fairly fruitless struggle against the brutal ZANU PF regime, differences in personalities and, most importantly, ambivalence over the use of violence led to a MDC split in 2005. It is a low point for Coltart who writes in a chapter he graphically titles 'A Hellhole in the Wilderness', 'Even in the darkest days of 2000, I felt that good would prevail over evil, eventually. Now with the

MDC sullied [with violence] and divided it was harder to proclaim this with the same conviction' (p.445). The two MDC parties finally end in disintegration and impotence by 2013.

Third, in Coltart's judgment one of the chief causes of Zimbabwe's woes is the tragedy 'that hero worship has become deeply ingrained in Zimbabwean political culture. The word of an individual means more than the constitution, more than age old wisdom'. He adds rather ominously, 'This culture may well outlive Mugabe.' Coltart sees this problem stretching right back into the 19th century. As he had said to a group of judges in 1997, '[Cecil] Rhodes begat [Ian] Smith and Smith begat Mugabe' (pp.599-600).

Fourth, despite all that happens, one of the most striking features David Coltart brings to this book, other than his courage, is his remarkably persistent hope for his country. Much of this is undoubtedly due to Coltart's Christian faith which permeates the book, though in a quiet, self-effacing way. Coltart never preaches to the reader, even though once or twice he will quote something from the Bible that has been most meaningful to him in the long and dangerous struggle. At the end Coltart even wonders if the Old Testament prophet Isaiah's words to an outwardly religious but strife-filled ancient Israel might be also true of present-day Zimbabwe. 'Here's the rub: can we expect a just God to respond to an outwardly religious nation whose "fasting ends in quarrelling and strife"?' (p.599). Coltart also invokes atheist Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen on the connection between good governance and sustainable long-term development to support what he calls 'Isaiah's remedy written thousands of years ago'.

At the very least, *The Struggle Continues* serves as a warning of the terrible damage bad government can do to a country, and an inspiring example of the courage and selflessness of those who struggle for something better.



**The Right Reverend Robert Forsyth is a Senior Fellow at The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS). David Coltart will**

**appear at CIS for a book event on August 10. See [www.cis.org.au](http://www.cis.org.au) for further details.**