ForeWord Reviews

The Guardian: The History of South Africa's Extraordinary Anti-Apartheid Newspaper
James Zug
Michigan State University Press
978-0-87013-810-2
(October 2007)

The United States has never seen a newspaper like South Africa's *Guardian*, nor has it had the need for one. The *Guardian* was a paper serving workers whose paltry wages offered them little more than the slender hope of surviving from one day to the next.

The paper itself had little hope beyond continuing to exist, a hope that diminished as years passed and relations with the Rhodesian government deteriorated to the point that its very presence became an affront that could no longer be tolerated.

That the *Guardian* was communist is beside the point. It was born and flourished in a place where it was sorely needed and where it served and gave hope to the most oppressed members of the lower classes.

It was communist at a time when communism attracted young idealists and its editors and writers retained their idealism through years of dispiriting setbacks. Many working-class readers had to skimp on necessities to save the pennies needed to buy a copy.

Zug began researching his subject seventeen years ago, and his thoroughness reflects more seemingly nonessential detail and color than a reader might expect from a work of history published by an academic press. But what elevate this book is largely Zug's judicious handling of this detail and his writing ability in general, as well as his passionate admiration for the heroic journalists who served in the *Guardian*'s ranks. He recognizes the need to introduce readers not only to the *Guardian*'s editors and wealthy backers but also to figures of lesser importance in the newsroom whose own passions and deeply held convictions must be understood if they are to make sense of the motivations of highly talented, dedicated journalists who devoted their lives to low-paying jobs in squalid surroundings with no prospects for advancement.

The end came at last in March 1963. After decades of unrelenting harassment, Pretoria finally crushed the life out of the *Guardian* by arresting its entire staff and making it a crime punishable by three years' imprisonment merely to possess a copy of the officially proscribed newspaper.

Harold Cordry