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Review

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Notes and explanation of symbols

The following symbols are used in tables in the *Review*:

Three dots (...) indicate that data are not available or are not separately reported.

A dash (—) indicates that the amount is nil or negligible.

A blank space in a table means that the item in question is not applicable.

A minus sign (-) indicates a deficit or decrease, unless otherwise specified.

A point (.) is used to indicate decimals.

A slash (/) indicates a crop year or fiscal year, e.g., 1970/1971.

Use of a hyphen (-) between years, e.g., 1971-1973, indicates reference to the complete number of calendar years involved, including the beginning and end years.

Reference to "tons" mean metric tons, and to "dollars", United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

Unless otherwise stated, references to annual rates of growth or variation signify compound annual rates.

Individual figures and percentages in tables do not necessarily add up to corresponding totals, because of rounding.

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Review

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Social structures and democracy in the 1990s

*Marshall Wolfe**

This article gives a broad overview of the social structures on which democracy will have to be based in the 1990s. These structures continue to be heterogeneous, and the crisis has made them more unstable, as previous aspirations are falling by the wayside and most of the groups are living in conditions of greater insecurity and poverty, although some new possibilities of upward mobility are emerging, even among the most seriously marginated strata. The political parties and movements are in a process of evolution and are unsure of the forces they will be called on to represent and the validity of their traditional ideologies; for the most part, however, they have attained a higher level of realism and a willingness to temporize with a view to the consolidation of broad social pacts at the cost of a reduction in their aspirations and an inability to offer their followers an inspiring mythology.

The State is subject to tensions in three respects: as the symbol and permanent focal point of the national community; as the apparatus or public sector which has to fulfil a wide range of services and regulatory functions for society; and as a function of the credibility of the democratically elected political régimes which, it is assumed, will give concrete form to the ideal attributes of the State and will run its institutions and the public administration to that end.

The democratic régimes must convince society that they are capable of offering a real alternative which will lead to higher levels of well-being and equity. The most promising way of achieving this would appear to be free and rational political deliberation which accepts that there is a constant tension between the principle of democratic uncertainty and the legitimate effort to give the political process coherence and a sense of utility.

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I

The present challenge to pluralist democracy*

During the past half century the peoples of Latin America have experienced accelerating changes in their lifestyles and in their interactions with national societies, the State and the international order. Within a few years, overwhelmingly rural societies became predominantly urban, and the urban as well as the rural environments were transformed too. New opportunities for livelihood opened up in industry and services, although in most countries they did not keep pace with the growth and increasing spatial mobility of the labour force. A heterogeneous "urban informal sector", variously labelled and interpreted, expanded and diversified to fill the gap. Most of the young people gained access to at least rudimentary schooling, and entry into higher education became an uncontrollable flood. Mass communication media and "modern" consumption aspirations reached most of the population. Emigration to the United States and Europe became an increasingly accessible alternative for members of different classes with diverse motives. Interactions with public bureaucracies in their servicing, subsidizing, regulating and repressive functions became critically important to people who had previously had little or no direct contact with the State. Political participation repeatedly waxed and waned, with cycles of mobilization under populist auspices followed by frustration and forced demobilization. Intergenerational changes became so great that the experience of one generation lost relevance as a guide for the next.

Many studies have documented these changes and emphasized the difficulties they imply for the formation of classes with consistent political behaviour and expectations, for social cohesion, or for the achievement of hegemony by any agents trying to mobilize support for projects corresponding to broad national interests (see, for example,

*In writing the present version of this article, the author received the kind comments of so many members of ECLAC that it is impossible to thank them all individually.

Pensamiento Iberoamericano, No. 6, 1984; Labastida and del Campo, 1985; and Touraine, 1987). The changes were notoriously conflictive and inequitable, continually disrupting the expectations and allegiances of different groups. The political responses were to a large extent clientelistic or corporative, designed to protect individual or group interests irrespective of wider repercussions. The failure of State policies—whatever their pretensions—to overcome the marginalization or exclusion of large parts of the national populations became increasingly obvious. Nevertheless, up to the 1970s in some countries and the early 1980s in others, the changes proceeded in a context of economic expansion that enabled some groups to make major gains in incomes and status, encouraged others to hope for future gains, and permitted the State to expand social services and consumption subsidies of various kinds to the urban majority and to a lesser extent to much of the rural population. The gap between income levels of the rich and poor widened; the poor encountered new forms of insecurity and exploitation; urban concentration made poverty more visible; but for the most part poverty did not seem to become more extreme nor more prevalent. ECLAC and other institutions continued to criticize the real processes of growth and change from the standpoint of criteria of social injustice and squandering of human potentialities, warned of future contradictions, and proposed alternative, more equitable and more dynamic development styles and policies. Government declarations and plans along similar lines proliferated. However, the capacity of the forces dominating the processes to continue on their own terms and overcome political and economic threats seemed increasingly to rule out major structural reforms aiming at greater equity, whether through democratic or technocratic-authoritarian procedures.

Since then, social structures and the positions of individuals in them have continued to change as dynamically and contradictorily as before, but in a context of economic stagnation, declining levels of living, declining State capacity to respond to needs and demands, marked insecurity concerning livelihood, concentration of attention on individual and group survival

strategies, and perplexity or pessimism concerning the feasibility of any *national* policy for overcoming a crisis that has persisted for nearly a decade or even longer, depending on the country.

Pluralist democracy, in the sense of freely elected governments, has re-emerged in Latin America precisely when economic and social structural conditions for its exercise seem at their worst. This is due partly to the increasingly effective and broadly-based repudiation of authoritarian régimes, but partly also to the willingness of the forces dominating such régimes to leave to others the onus of coping with the crisis. It is more surprising that pluralist democracy has managed to survive and to some extent consolidate itself under these conditions. It is a truism that democratic participation and policies responding to popular demands are more feasible when an economy is expanding, so that the poor can gain without serious inconvenience to the rich and the State can capture a higher proportion of the national income for redistributive purposes. Latin American régimes took only limited advantage of this possibility before the crisis, and certainly never convinced the rich of its virtues, but since then ability to tax according to ability to pay has fallen sharply, and ability to use revenues for social purposes even more so. Throughout the 1980s the democratically elected régimes have vacillated between austerity policies that intensify poverty and undercut their own legitimacy, and heterodox initiatives that collapse because of insufficient control over the whole range of relevant factors and actors.

Stable democratic systems call for the presence of political parties with broad support, expressing coherent interests of classes or groups but disposed to enter into realistic compromises and restrain their followers. They also call for a wide range of sectoral and local organizations interacting with the State, making demands on it and defending their members against its excesses, but at the same time relieving the State of responsibilities that it cannot meet with tolerable efficiency and flexibility. The present fluidities, contradictions and insecurities throughout the social structures make the emergence and consolidation of such requisites for democracy even more problematic than before.

At the same time, the failures of the military-authoritarian and one-sidedly market-oriented régimes to cope with the crisis, and the simultaneous loss of credibility of the "real Socialist" model have given pluralist democracy a breathing space. No plausible alternative for the ordering of public choices is in sight, and the most likely outcome if democratic régimes fail is disintegration of the social and political structures into anomic "wars of all against all" —of which ominous symptoms are visible in some countries. Partisans of democracy can take grim comfort in Winston Churchill's maxim: "Democracy is the worst system of government— except for all the others".

Pluralist democracy probably cannot remain indefinitely restricted to electoral choices between parties or coalitions, with the reality of the choice negated by the inability of the resulting régime to escape from crisis management and from multiple vetoes exercised by economic élites, the military, and lending agencies. The next question to ask ourselves is whether the public debate and freedom of organization associated with the present stage can lead to broader democratization of the societies and greater innovativeness in overcoming the seemingly insuperable obstacles.

The crisis of the 1980s and the authoritarian excesses that preceded it have transformed intellectual discourse on politics in Latin America.

Attention has turned from explanations of the inevitability of authoritarianism or of revolution to means of making democracy more viable and more relevant to the needs and cultures of the participants. Spokesmen for different schools have become more disposed to listen to each other and to seek common ground. Dogmatism and exclusivist utopias have receded. The "hyper-autonomy of the cultural actors" noted by Alain Touraine (1987, pp. 118-124) has become somewhat more restrained and the "professional critical tendency" has gained over the "committed prophetic tendency". Researchers have contributed to a picture of the relationships of social structures, cultural influences and political behaviour which is more convincing and assimilable by public opinion than before. Regional forums for debate and institutional settings for political as well as social and economic research have become stronger in spite of the scarcity of resources. The proliferation of essays citing each other and examining democracy in the light of an international arsenal of social and political theory might leave an impression of intellectual élites interacting with each other. However, parts of the discourse are penetrating the mass media and the visions of political leaders, while some political theorists have entered the political arena with considerable success (the bibliography lists several collections of essays and research reports on this subject).

II

Changes in social structures and the precariousness of social cohesion

The researches and debates suggest the following unavoidably oversimplified evaluation of the different collective actors or components of the social structures in relation to the prospects for pluralist democracy:¹

¹Ghai and Hewitt de Alcántara (1989) present particularly interesting hypotheses on present directions of change in different social classes, some of which have been introduced in the following pages.

1. *Economic élites*

Changes among the groups previously dominant in the economies and societies have been diverse, but the elements best able to cope with the crisis have been those who are least identified with production for the domestic market and are in a position to protect themselves against inflation as well as taxation by keeping their resources in hard currencies abroad and by investing flexibly

at high interest rates or by affiliating with transnational enterprises. In some countries, the drug traffic has also become a notorious source of direct and indirect gains which greatly exceed those to be had from legitimate enterprises and are moreover impervious to the crisis. These groups have been able to increase their consumption, largely of imported goods, in the midst of shortages of foreign exchange and impoverishment of the majority. The strengthening of such economic élites, whose interests and cultural standards are transnational, obviously clashes with the consolidation of pluralist democracy in countries with open and basically capitalist economies. Their lifestyles are a provocation to the rest of the population (in the double sense of a stimulus to consumerist imitation and an irritant) and a major factor behind insufficient national ability to accumulate and invest. They are not disposed to make sacrifices for the national interest, whether because of skepticism concerning the efficacy of government policies or indifference to the general welfare. In general, they intervene in politics through intermediaries rather than as open contenders for office, and their political purposes combine shrinkage of the State's role with use of State power to protect their immediate interests. The nature and location of their assets prevent the State from taxing them or, as a last resort, expropriating them, as could be done in the case of landholdings and industries. The inducements they would require to repatriate their wealth and invest in production might be too high for a democratic State to offer.

Of course, this is not the whole story. Important components of the economic élites would benefit from strengthening of domestic markets and from social cohesion supporting stable expectations, and they have shown considerable dynamism in expanding and diversifying export production. Many export-oriented entrepreneurs are just as interested in mutually supportive relationships with the State as have been the industrialists seeking protected domestic markets, and are not captivated by neoliberal ideology. Compatibilization of their basic interests with those of other groups through the political process is feasible in principle, and this objective underlies the recurrent efforts at social pacts. The content of the bargains that might be

struck depends too much on differing national situations and on the capacity of the State for it to be discussed here. For the present, unfortunately, the fact that major resource owners are partly divorced from national interests and policy decisions, in combination with the debt burden, can practically paralyze the capacity of democratic régimes to respond to popular demands.

2. *Middle strata*

Some groups among the middle strata have been able to cope with their problems through individualistic strategies similar to those of the élites, or through emigration outside the region. A good many professionals and managers, starting with some capital and relevant experience, have been able to start successful small businesses. Particularly among the salaried middle strata, however, the general trend seems to have been toward greater insecurity, shrinking incomes, and a widening gap between realities and the expectations of modernized consumption and upward intergenerational mobility that became entrenched during the years of economic expansion. During the 1950s and 1960s many observers looked on the rise of the middle strata with excessive complacency as a basis for democratic progress. This view was followed by probably excessive depreciation as the real middle strata, impelled by the educational system and the mass media toward public employment and consumerism, found themselves pushed into authoritarianism by manipulated fears of populist or socialist mobilization of the masses. They are now left stranded by the "concentrating and excluding" style of development proposed as the way out of the crisis.

Pluralist democracy can hardly survive without the active participation of major elements in the middle strata and at least the passive acceptance of the remainder. The intellectual groups creating and disseminating the present discourse on democracy belong mainly to these strata. A key question is whether, and to what extent, the middle strata will be able to keep within bounds their predisposition to seek particularist advantages from democratic political systems. This predisposition must have been intensified by their present plight and their fears of any

downward redistribution of incomes and State services, since the State finds it easier to curb their entitlements than those of the rich.

For present purposes, one component of the middle strata deserves special attention, namely, that which embraces the technocrats, professionals and bureaucrats in the public sector; they will be discussed again below, in relation to the capacities of the State. Up to the 1970s, in different countries, they were among the most vigorously growing components of the middle strata, and the main source of employment for the rising output of graduates from the universities. Political purges and debureaucratization campaigns periodically change their composition at the higher levels and introduce insecurity, but have not stopped their overall expansion. During the 1980s they have in most countries maintained their numbers or even increased them, in spite of the State's shrinking resources, but at the price of sharp reductions in their incomes and declining working conditions (Tokman, 1982, pp. 413 and 414). This naturally generates neglect of official duties, corruption, and a search for additional sources of income that amounts to a kind of "informalization". It also strengthens corporative self-defensive propensities, as political régimes and public opinion sharpen old stereotypes of public employees as a burden, an oversized, over-expensive and unresponsive instrument for providing services or accomplishing State policies. This situation motivates public employees to try to strengthen alliances with clientele in the societies, but such alliances require the ability to provide real services to the clientele, and this ability is now quite weak.

The higher-level professionals or technocrats in the State apparatus face somewhat different contradictions and sources of insecurity, along with the general lack of resources to carry out the policies they are supposed to be administering. Their self-confidence, together with the confidence of the political leadership in their expertise, have presumably been weakened by the crisis and their previous inability to foresee or forestall it, but the State's dependence on expertise to manage the crisis has become greater than ever before.

Even if the bureaucracies can protect their levels of employment, they can no longer absorb much of the output of higher education, and this

presents additional unknown factors for the future of democracy. During the 1980s, student movements have shown relative restraint in taking advantage of the opening of democratic freedoms that followed the extreme repression to which many of them were exposed during the 1970s. However, it is not at all clear what their longer-term response will be to a blocking of aspirations to upward mobility, combined with waning of the revolutionary utopias that inspired many of their predecessors in the universities. One probable consequence for the minority of youth able to enter private universities offering higher-quality professional education would be a greater propensity to seek opportunities abroad, thus contributing to the transnationalization of the better-off. For the majority, whose qualifications have in any case been devalued by the deterioration and overcrowding of the public and cheaper private universities, the prospect is for a kind of marginalization through improvised self-employment or low-paid jobs in commercial or other services, and possibly for a new wave of participation in social movements of the disadvantaged. Past experience shows that such participation can be both invigorating and disruptive for the movements and the democratic political system.

3. *Urban wage workers*

Industrial and related workers have undergone shocks even more severe than those experienced by the salaried components of the middle strata, combining material losses in incomes and levels of consumption with intensified insecurity concerning their place in society and their future prospects. The drastic cuts in real wages of up to 50% and the static or declining numbers employed in modern industries in the context of a continually growing urban labour force are well known. The dividing line between such wage workers and the "informal sector", never entirely clearcut, has become even more indistinct. Working-class families have had to combine multiple sources of income, including various forms of self-employment; women and children have had to contribute to family livelihood by taking whatever opportunities offered themselves.

The ability of most trade unions to protect their members' interests and intervene in national policy-making, after partial recovery from the repression suffered during the 1970s, has declined along with the numbers of workers in occupations that were previously strongholds of militant unionism. The most dramatic case is the eclipse of the Bolivian miners—core of a union movement that since the 1950s could often challenge the State itself—as a result of the decline in employment in the State mining corporation, from more than p. 32).

Probably just as important for assessment of the prospects for pluralist democracy has been the weakening of convictions concerning the "vanguard role" of the "proletariat". Up to the 1980s, most of the ideologists and political party leaders claiming to represent the working class, along with much of the trade union leadership, assumed that this class would continue to grow in numbers, organizational strength and class consciousness, and eventually become the central actor in a socialist transformation of the societies. "Developmentalists" also assumed an increasingly important role for the organized working class, without endorsing the revolutionary conclusion. The extent to which the working class itself internalized this outlook is not clear, but it has undoubtedly been a major source of hope and self-confidence. For the most part, the major working-class mobilizations in Latin America followed populist or corporative rather than socialist orientations. As Marxist interpretations of the role of different classes and acceptable class alliances changed and became more diverse, political usage of the term "proletarian" came to amount to little more than a label through which different factions of non-proletarian intellectuals and activists asserted the correctness of their strategies.

However, the conviction that the proletariat has a foreordained role and right to the central position in alliances has been an important constraint on the formation of coalitions of democratic political forces and on the capacity of class spokesmen to interact with organizations based on the middle strata or the peasants as allies with equal rights to shape policies. Present realities have disintegrated such exclusivisms. The highly visible difficulties of the "real Socialist" countries, which up to the 1980s offered plausible

alternatives to a capitalist future and were sometimes direct mentors of working-class parties, have undermined previous dogmas. So have the trends away from working-class self-identification of the social democratic régimes of Western Europe.

The overall implications for pluralist democracy are too contradictory and indeterminate for adequate discussion here, but several of the studies cited above have tackled them with the attention to national differences that they require. Some political leaders and ideologists, in the midst of very difficult situations and sometimes personal danger, are trying to rethink the lessons of the recent past and the future of the working class within settings so far removed from their previous expectations. Working-class organizations—unions as well as political parties—retain a considerable ability to mobilize wider groups, including parts of the middle strata as well as the urban and rural poor, for mass protests against austerity policies and against denial of democratic rights. Their position in the productive process continues to give them a greater propensity to broad organization and confrontation with major questions of economic and social policy than other disadvantaged groups. Insecurity and the discrediting of past illusions do not necessarily mean the loss of convictions concerning the possibility of a juster social order, and if leadership proves equal to the challenge they might stimulate greater innovativeness in pursuing this utopia. Closer approximation to the living conditions and survival strategies of the urban poor might result in a diffusion of organized working-class influence as well as the blurring of working-class identity. The crisis stimulates militancy along trade union lines in parts of the salaried middle strata, such as teachers and bank employees, as well as rapprochements with relatively new social movements mobilizing women, ethnic groups, and environmentalists.

4. *The urban remainder*

When one comes to the rest of the urban population (in some cases now the majority): the "poor", the "sub-proletariat", the "informal sector", the "marginalized", according to various

attempts to label and classify them — the numerous sources of information and speculation remind one of the story of the blind man describing the elephant. These groups were heterogeneous before the crisis of the 1980s, and are more so now. The most general trend among them has undoubtedly been toward deeper impoverishment, as their numbers have increased, along with overcrowding in their settlements, shrinking opportunities for wage labour, inflation outrunning incomes, and curtailment of State services and subsidies. At the same time, they have become more complexly integrated into the economies and the political systems than before. At least in some settings they have displayed greater adaptability in their responses to crisis and in the local practice of democracy and reciprocity than have other components of the population. The decline of production in the "modern" consumer goods industries, of capacity to import, and of consumer purchasing power have given more scope to small unregulated industries producing cheap goods for the domestic market, including the market within the informal sector itself. The same trends have probably motivated large enterprises, including some transnationals, to make more use of the informal sector for piece-work production and for marketing of products through street vendors. And in a paradoxical seizing of new opportunities linking the most marginal strata with the most important new sources of capital accumulation, some groups have been able to rise out of poverty through participation in the drug traffic.

The previous networks of neighbourhood self-help, which have a long and well-documented history, have evolved and probably grown stronger under the spur of necessity, and have been helped toward greater self-confidence by various external allies. The reemergence of political democracy and competition for electoral support, and in some cases participation with other classes in mass mobilizations against oppressive régimes, have enabled parts of the groups in question to make their needs heard and to relate themselves to national issues, after years of forced exclusion.

These tendencies have encouraged some currents of opinion to detect the seeds of a new social and economic order, whether communit-

arian or individualist and market-guided, but in both cases freeing itself from domination by bureaucracies and also from discredited prescriptions for "development". Some supporters of variants of this position have offered blueprints for progress calling for participation by a self-restraining de-bureaucratized State inspired by new values and conceptions of development.² Others look rather to a withering away of the State, along with existing patterns of economic and social relationships, through the autonomous evolution of social movements or a "new majority" and view the present crisis as a positive contribution to this process (Esteve, 1988 and Quijano, 1988).

For the present, no generalization can be made with confidence. All of the interpretations may have a limited validity, like the blind man's description of parts of the elephant. Among the urban poor, solidarity and anomic individualism will no doubt continue to coexist and evolve conflictively throughout the foreseeable future. As in other social strata, authoritarian and clientelistic cultural propensities will contend with strivings toward equity and self-determination. The communitarian anti-State prescriptions for direct democracy and reciprocity are likely to remain secondary (although politically relevant) influences in the evolution of the urban majorities. Paternalistic-bureaucratic solutions to their problems will be neither effective nor compatible with democratic values, but one cannot draw a consistent dividing line between such pseudo-solutions and indispensable State support for basic services and measures to relieve critical poverty. The question then comes to the fore whether and how the heterogeneous urban lower strata can formulate and represent their interests in an organized way, negotiating with the State and other social groups so as to overcome the extreme discrimination or exclusion they now experience. The present discussion will return to this question later. The urban majorities during the 1980s have shown more forbearance than might have been expected in the face of austerity policies applied by democratically elected régimes under external pres-

² Communitarian and market-oriented variants of blueprints addressed primarily to the State are represented, respectively, by *Development Dialogue*, No. 1 (1989) and de Soto (1987).

sure. Major outbreaks of violent protest have been few, considering the provocations. The fears current among the better-off urban strata, which see the poor as a menace of barbarism and chaos, have not been realized, although sharp rises in criminal behaviour, particularly among the youth, keep such fears alive. However, tangible reasons and means for the poor to support and participate in pluralist democracy at the national level cannot be delayed indefinitely.

5. *Peasants and rural workers*

The rural population has for some time been complexly linked to the urban one through the currents of migration, the penetration of mass communication media, and increasing dependence on national markets. These links have naturally undergone traumatic changes during the 1980s. Some groups of small landowners have gained through better terms of trade for domestic food products and more State support for peasant agriculture, but landless rural workers have generally lost, through higher food prices and greater competition for jobs. Cityward migration as an escape from rural poverty has become less attractive, although not enough to stop it. Remittances from migrants that previously subsidized many rural economies have probably dwindled, and reverse migration from the cities to the countryside has probably increased.

Rural social organizations have in a good many cases revived or become better able to take advantage of democratic openings, to enter into political alliances, and to negotiate with the State. Peasants and rural workers are now dealing with export-oriented agricultural entrepreneurs and commercial intermediaries quite different from the traditional landlords, although not in general less exploitative or readier to concede bargaining rights. The old unresolved issues of land monopolization and tenure reform reappear in new settings, as landless peasants move into the tropical interior and contend with large exploitative enterprises as well as with the previous inhabitants. Even forest-dwelling tribes, until now the most defenceless of the rural groups, have become able to find external allies and make their

grievances heard internationally as well as nationally. To a large extent (albeit with obvious differences within and between countries) rural isolation and unchallenged domination by landowners and caciques has been superseded. On balance, however, the 1980s have brought rural people in much of Latin America even greater insecurity and exposure to violence than heretofore. Attempts at organized and autonomous political participation still encounter intimidation by private as well as public armed forces, or degenerate into endless conflicts in which rural people become pawns of contending forces—guerrillas, drug traffickers, police and military—disrupting livelihood and community ties and practically depopulating some zones. Coca cultivation, through which peasants in some countries have raised both their incomes and their organizational solidarity, has notoriously become a major factor in the spread of intimidating violence.

Throughout Latin America, the rural population, while generally maintaining its absolute numbers, has become a minority in relation to the urban population. The prospects of incorporating rural groups—culturally or ethnically distinct and accustomed but not reconciled to exclusion from “national” affairs—into a pluralist democratic order is thus less formidable than it seemed in the past. The threat or promise of social transformation through peasant revolution has practically disappeared except in a very few countries. The rural population has become more integrated into the national societies, although this integration is on very disadvantageous terms and is far from complete. Rural changes may continue to be more violently conflictive than urban ones, but the main immediate requisite for full rural participation in pluralist democracy is an effective and supportive State presence, offering means for conflict resolution other than the law of the strongest, as well as basic education and health services and help in coping with technological change and market relationships. This, of course, is what democratic governments have been aspiring to provide, and the general reduction of State resources and administrative capacities has probably affected their rural presence even more adversely than their other functions.

6. *Social structural fluidity and democratic politics*

The groups or classes described above are now groping for political expression through parties and movements that are themselves experiencing identity crises, in many cases emerging from years of repression, insecure as to the forces they can expect to represent and the relevance of their traditional ideologies. Leadership from the 1950s and 1960s has to interact with young activists whose generation has experienced a simultaneous disintegration of expectations for insertion into employment and the continually changing impact of the international youth culture. The political parties have to incorporate or compete with new kinds of organized move-

ments seeking to achieve priority for protection of the environment, the rights of women, or the legitimacy of minority cultures. In the effort to put together majority coalitions the parties are forming combinations that would have been unthinkable in the recent past, but the resulting majorities are inevitably precarious. The competitive introduction of sophisticated marketing techniques makes electoral choices more confusing or illusory. The conjuncture is no doubt stimulating greater realism and innovativeness in parts of the political leadership. However to the extent to which the crisis forces this leadership, once in office, to apply policies repugnant to its values and promises, it generates extremely unstable electoral behaviour, with votes expressing mainly repudiation rather than preference.

III

The State and democracy

How can the proponents of pluralist democracy, grappling with the fluidity of the social structures and of political organizations in settings of crisis, justify popular confidence in its future? Part of the answer must lie in a strengthening of the State, a renewal of responsibility for tasks that only the State can accomplish, and this very general proposition opens up one of the more polemical areas of political discourse. A discussion of the responsibilities of the State in relation to the questions discussed above must try to keep in balance three different dimensions of the "State":

1. *The State as symbol of nationhood*

As the permanent expression of a national political community, the State demands the loyalty of members of the community, acts as final arbiter of class and group conflicts, monopolizes the legitimate use of force, etc., according to well-known formulas. Ideally, in pluralist democracies majorities would decide what the State should do or refrain from doing, within generally accepted and codified rules protecting the rights of minorities. In Latin America the State

has historically asserted wide autonomy in relation to society, extending even to State manipulation or creation of collective social actors, but it has been paradoxically weak in representativeness and accepted hegemony. Attempts to mobilize the "nation" behind the State have contributed to populism and the aggrandizement of the military as symbol of the nation and guarantor of the State. In Latin America, the State has gained strength in recent decades through the weakening or elimination of local power centres and oligarchies and, more ambivalently, through widening expectations in most of the population that solutions to problems of livelihood and protection against injustice depend on the State.³ The processes of democratization have strengthened State legitimacy and the failures of populism and military authoritarianism have generated some degree of immunization against temptations to advance minority interests through capture and voluntarist manipulation of the State.

³Cardoso (1984), p. 28 *et seq.*, discusses the strength of these expectations and the contradictions in them.

At the same time, the State as the expression of nationhood is threatened from two directions. Internally, social structural mutations during and before the crisis, with shocks to previous expectations and the emergence of new opportunities for advancement divorced from or contrary to the legal framework and the general welfare, have made relations between the State and society more contradictory and precarious.

Externally, the State has become more visibly dependent not only on the vicissitudes of the world economic order but also on the direct dictates of the international lending agencies. As was indicated above, parts of the élites have become more "transnationalized" both ideologically and in their material interests, prepared to transfer their funds and their expertise if national prospects are unpropitious or government policies affect them adversely. Even movements focussed on social, cultural, human rights and ecological questions have become dependent on transnational circuits. These circuits have also become critically important—as sources of funds, forums for interchange of ideas, and refuges from repression—to participants in political research as well as political action.

Altogether, confidence in the nation-State is eroding under the suspicion that such States, whatever their leadership or policies, are becoming irrelevant or impotent. In its impact on the credibility of the State the crisis has meant more than a loss of 10 years of "development" or reversion to the level of the early 1970s. While the better-established nation-States of Europe have been able to respond to new challenges by closer union the States of Latin America have seemed unable to do so, beyond the level of rhetoric and conferences. One reason has been the uneasy coexistence of formally democratic States side by side with those controlled by authoritarian régimes, with the former implicitly questioning the legitimacy of the latter, and the latter affirming their legitimacy by resorting to traditional national rivalries. The present predominance of pluralist democratic régimes should make closer union possible as well as necessary, but obviously a great deal needs to be done before this can shore up the credibility of the State as an effective expression of political community.

2. *The State as "public sector"*

States constitute aggregations of institutions and bureaucracies with their own forces of inertia and momentum. Up to the 1980s, public sector institutions in most countries, in spite of political purges and other vicissitudes, were gradually becoming "modernized", entrusted with wider responsibilities, and staffed by better-qualified functionaries. The enhanced capacity of the public sector to manage the economy and provide social services was commonly pointed to as one of the more positive aspects of "development", a means of making this disorderly process more dynamic and more harmonious in the future. It became evident, however, that even under authoritarian régimes parts of the State apparatus were becoming increasingly detached from central control. They evolved their own techniques for self-defence and expansion, and became more closely linked to interest groups in the private sector or to external interlocutors (governments, intergovernmental organizations, transnational enterprises, professional peer groups) than to the State as arbiter of national policy (Martins, 1984 and Graciarena, 1984). The educational upgrading of public employment became entangled with its inflation in order to absorb the output of the universities. In the fragmented autonomization of the State apparatus the military became even more of a special case than before, with their own political culture and conception of the State and their unrivalled capacity to impose their own criteria on the State and society.

With the crisis of the 1980s and the shrinkage of public resources, governments, whatever their policy stance, cannot afford the bureaucracies they have acquired piecemeal. Thus they cannot avoid striving to make the State apparatus less costly, more flexible, more responsive to central directives as well as to democratic principles, and more concentrated on major immediate needs rather than spread over a multiplicity of programmes originating in separate past initiatives. Simplification of regulations and controls in order to stimulate private initiative and reduce the costs of the "nursemaid State" is obviously desirable but hard to achieve in the midst of crisis and conflicting demands.

Democratic régimes cannot afford to reduce public employment drastically in the face of the plight of the middle strata, but neither can they afford to maintain salaries and resources so that the public services can meet their responsibilities. The result, as was stated above, has been demoralization and "survival strategies" among public functionaries that further discredit State authority.

3. *State and régime*

Lastly, one comes to the government or political régime as the expression of dominant forces in the society or of a compromise between different forces, expected to convert into reality the ideal attributes of the State and harness the public sector institutions and bureaucracies for this purpose. Many studies in Latin America and elsewhere have demonstrated how governments are hampered in these tasks by the traits of the State apparatus, the nature of political support or resistances from within the societies, and their own ideologically biased versions of reality. "Expert" advice on what must be done, and how it should be carried out, invariably exceeds the political leadership's ability to digest, select, and act on it. Democratic leadership, in particular, must continually try to balance contradictory principles for action; to feel and inspire confidence in the correctness of its policies while remaining open to criticism; to seek policy consistency while being prepared to compromise so as to broaden political support; and to undertake urgently needed and controversial actions while respecting rules of the game that enable adversaries to block or distort such actions. If the political leadership accepts the full implications of pluralist democracy it must also accept permanent uncertainty as to the outcome of its policies and their endorsement by the society.⁴ At present, the contradiction between political

conformism or realism in the sense of recognition of narrow constraints on State action, on the one hand, and apprehension that major changes in economic policy and the role of the State cannot be evaded, on the other, is particularly acute. A number of object-lessons throughout the world have demonstrated the depths of economic chaos and political ungovernability to which countries can fall either through evasion of choices or through voluntarist strategies that disregard limited control of relevant factors.

A few principles for State action within a pluralist emocratic framework can be proposed.⁵ Their applicability obviously depends on confrontation with ational peculiarities, potentialities and constraints. All of them imply political costs as well as benefits and contain possibilities for perverse results:

a) *Restraint and choice in State interventions*

Strengthening of the State requires self-limitation and simplification of its interventions. The struggle to accomplish this may in itself strengthen the State by forcing the political leadership to assess the justifications and organized interests behind the whole range of State activities. Under present conditions, if democratic régimes do not undertake this effort, they face further loss of control over semi-autonomous public institutions and further deterioration in the quality of services to the public. The elimination of overlapping or contradictory regulating and permit-issuing functions of public agencies (one of the main irritants in relations between the State and the public) would by itself strengthen the legitimacy of the State in enforcing regulations really needed to protect public health and safety. Moreover, restraint in State interventions is in keeping with promising initiatives for innovative co-operation emerging within the societies.

⁴Democracy means that all groups must subject their interests to uncertainty. It is this very act of alienation of control over outcomes of conflicts that constitutes the decisive step toward democracy. If one set of policies is seen as superior for the welfare of the society and this set of policies is assumed to be known, then it seems irrational to introduce uncertainty as to whether this set of policies will be chosen. Even in an economic crisis, when the economic policy of a particular government is recognized to have

been mistaken, some other policy always appears to authoritarian bureaucrats as uniquely destined to improve the situation. Recognition of past mistakes does not constitute a demonstration that the authoritarian system is inherently flawed but only that past mistakes must be corrected and a new, proper policy must be followed." (Przeworski (1986), pp. 60-61.)

⁵Principles and pitfalls for democratic régimes are discussed in more detail in Wolfe (1985).

At the same time, this desideratum confronts contradictions with democratically expressed demands and convictions concerning social rights, as well as less legitimate clientelist, corporative and bureaucratic tactics that are entangled with them in democratic or other political processes. Political parties will naturally compete with each other and must be able to offer something to the electorate, beyond the mere promise that correct economic strategy will eventually benefit everybody. Different sectors of the population have concrete expectations from the State as protector and arbiter, based on its past activities. Doctrinaire dismissal of these expectations can result in damaging pendular swings between the extremes of the interventionist State and the privatizing neoliberal State. The activities easiest for a government to relinquish are those directed to the needs of the least organized and poorest sectors of the population. The pursuit of self-limitation of the State thus calls for public deliberation on the specific issues and the presentation of realistic, socially equitable alternatives for performing tasks that the State relinquishes. While pluralist democracy can be compatible with many degrees and kinds of State intervention, decisions on what the State should do cannot rest entirely on criteria of efficiency —or, for that matter, of equity. It is probably futile to urge a complexly stratified society to "make up its mind" as to what it wants.

b) *Decentralization*

Transfer of many State responsibilities to regional and local elected authorities as well as non-governmental organizations and neighbourhood associations is not only desirable but also unavoidable in view of dwindling central resources and rising demands for regional and local autonomy. Here too, however, contradictions appear. Governments naturally want to hand over responsibilities and costs while keeping control over what is done locally. The desideratum of sufficient autonomy to permit local bodies to gain experience and self-confidence through trial and error clashes with the desideratum of national standards for services, State guarantees of rights, and safeguards against the capture of local bodies by self-serving cliques and caciques. The local bodies will continue to want

and need subsidies from the State, while the State will be reluctant to transfer control even over local sources of tax revenue. Contradictions such as these persist even in the countries with the firmest traditions of pluralist democracy and the best institutionalized systems of public administration, with continually shifting balances between centralization and local autonomy, subsidies and forced self-reliance, centrally enforced standards and local resistance to such standards. In maintaining a tolerable balance and keeping inequities and inefficiencies within limits, the courts, the national legislatures, and the mass media are key actors whose interventions make national/local relationships even more complex.

c) *Democratic rehabilitation of the bureaucracy*

The capacity to undertake, reform or abandon given policies depends, among other things, on better understanding of class and group interests, organizations, ideologies and self-defensive tactics of the State's technocratic and bureaucratic agents. At present, as was stated above, the agents in technocratic and planning roles face unprecedented responsibilities yet are deprived of their previous confidence in development theories and have to interact with political leaderships uncertain whether to treat them as saviours or scapegoats. The middle and lower strata of public employees have become insecure to the point of demoralization. Researches into bureaucratic culture warn against excessive expectations of making bureaucracies into optimal instruments of State policies, but governments cannot afford to relinquish the pre-crisis advances toward bureaucracies with internalized norms, experience and technical competence.

The present problem has two main aspects, neither of them susceptible to simple short-term solutions: First, the public employees needed by the State will have to recover confidence in their own roles and at the same time adapt themselves to scarcity of resources and to the conflictive democratization of the societies. Second, and even harder to prescribe for, a high proportion of middle-level public employees and aspirants to public employment will have to find different means of livelihood. Various partial solutions can be proposed, such as aid in the establishment

of small businesses and retraining for social programmes to be implemented by the national or local governments, but democratic régimes will be wrestling with the bulk of the problem as long as the economies remain unable to absorb the output of the educational systems. Public employees are legitimate participants in pluralist democracy, with even more acute problems of reconciling corporate interests and societal interests than most other groups. Democratic political leadership can hope to bring their roles into somewhat closer correspondence with the interests of society as a whole through dialogue with their representatives and through mutual awareness that the *status quo* is not viable.

d) *Financing of the State*

During the earlier stages of expansion of the State apparatus and State activities, the necessary financing was achieved partly through growth of the export sector and of taxes on exports, and partly through internal taxes that were relatively easy to collect but generally regressive, such as sales taxes. As these sources became insufficient and the State's ability to collect taxes deteriorated rather than improved, governments resorted increasingly to inflationary practices and then to borrowing abroad. Under conditions of depressed internal markets previous sources of revenue cannot be increased very much: inflation has become one of the main sources of popular unrest and government discredit, and substantial borrowing abroad is no longer feasible. Therefore, democratic régimes must try to achieve whatever level of income they require by establishing tax systems that bring in more money, are socially equitable, and do not unduly inhibit private initiative. For reasons already indicated, this will be a peculiarly difficult effort, requiring not only reform of the tax laws and an efficient, incorruptible enforcement mechanism, but also achievement of a reasonable degree of confidence among the taxpayers that the State will make good use of the revenues it receives.

e) *Foresight and flexibility*

In spite of the many efforts to formulate long-term and comprehensive development strategies, State actions in Latin America, as

elsewhere, have remained largely fragmentary and reactive —to short-term opportunities as well as to crises. The indiscriminate welcoming of loan funds from abroad during the 1970s and the crisis management policies of the 1980s are obvious examples. It is not surprising that the participation in policy-making of different sectors of the population has been similarly reactive, to the consequences of State policies or to trends outside the control of the State. With widely differing ability to make their demands heard, each group has resorted to the tactics within its reach. Many of these tactics further weaken the State's capacity to act coherently: curtailment of investments and export of capital from one extreme of the social spectrum; general strikes, spontaneous uprisings against impoverishment, and extreme swings in voting patterns from the other.

Democratic régimes must be prepared, particularly in times of crisis, to live with a good deal of reactive behaviour and respond as best they can to demands that cannot be satisfied in the short term. Ideally, of course, the State, the political parties, the critical intellectuals, and the heterogeneous social movements could all benefit and reinforce each other in exercising more foresight, preventing or providing for problems rather than embarking much later on costly and generally ineffective remedies, or demanding remedies that a long chain of actions and failures to act has made the State unable to provide. This obviously applies to the questions of environmental degradation, destructive land settlement, chaotic urbanization, lagging scientific and technological innovation, and many others, as well as the problems of indebtedness, forced austerity and impoverishment now in the forefront of attention.

Warnings on the future consequences of highly visible trends have not been lacking since the 1950s. Such warnings could not prevail, however, in the face of dynamic economic growth, struggles to take advantage of that growth, and ideological schemes that postponed solution of all other problems until after definitive achievement of development or revolution. Over the years, understanding of the problems and their interrelationships has certainly become more profound and more widely disseminated, but this is small comfort.

Experience has demonstrated that comprehensive development strategies, once they enter the political arena, are applied only in part—because of differential resistance from groups in the private sector and the State apparatus, because resources and administrative capacity are insufficient to do many things at the same time in a co-ordinated way; because political leaders find parts of a strategy more attractive and likely to mobilize support than others, because proponents of some programmes are more aggressive and persuasive than others, etc. This happened to the structuralist strategies of the 1950s and 1960s and also to the later neoliberal strategies. It is not a sufficient justification for the proponents of a given strategy to argue that it would have had better results if it had been more consistently applied. Can régimes and their interlocutors in the societies find better means of exercising foresight without excluding "politics" and the uncertainty principle?

f) *Planning*

This brings us to the question of planning. The prescriptions for comprehensive, rationalistic and reformist development planning, which left an abundant heritage of national planning bodies and training institutions, clearly did not generate sufficient foresight, consensus or State capacity to influence the future. They have undergone harsh evaluations from some of their practitioners as a "liturgy . . . with resonance both messianic and utopian". "The voluntarist illusions of planning in the service of social change . . . today lack all viability". Planners have been advised to fix their sights on "harmonizing as far as possible the interests and the demands of the social forces in conflict, in an effort to reduce uncertainty in their future evolution", recognizing that "the success (and the viability) of current political projects will depend essentially on the degree of hegemony of the dominant groups over the society as a whole, on the level of compatibility of the respective political project with the rationality dominant in these systems, and with the basic trends dominant in the world economy of which they form part" (de Mattos, 1988).

This position limits planning to diagnostic and educational functions at the service of the

State, with modest pretensions to rationalize conflicts, evaluate the efforts of social actors to bring questions to the attention of governments, and propose relevant reforms. This is certainly more realistic than the conception of planning as a means of transforming State policy through the application of esoteric tools while evading the question of power, but it does not confront the sorry consequences of the dominant rationality and the doubtful compatibility with national interests of the trends dominant in the world economy. The major value of present planning bodies to democratic régimes might lie in their installed capacity for research, criticism of conventional wisdom, and generation of heterodox proposals for coping with dominant trends. In any case, conformist planning at the service of the State should interact with counter-planning by intellectuals outside the State apparatus—uncommitted to the prevailing hegemony and uninhibited in trying to act as agents of social change—as well as planning at the service of the political parties and other movements. Education in planning, for all its illusions, has helped to produce a body of candidates qualified for these roles.

In this sense, planning merges into the debates and researches over political systems and styles of development (or alternatives to "development") that have been under way since the 1960s and that are now reviving cautiously after a period of eclipse. The earlier proposals refused to accept the inevitability of the reproduction in Latin America of the "consumer society" of the advanced capitalist countries, on the one hand, or the "real Socialist" model on the other. They expressed a confidence in the potentialities of autonomous choice at the national level and "de-linking" from the world economic order that later events have dissipated. They undoubtedly combined a "liturgy" of technocratic utopianism with participatory and equalitarian ideals. Many factors have since made it harder to think about choices for the long-term future. However, if pluralist democracies are to be altogether subject to the economic Kingdom of Necessity, why should people participate and defend them? Four questions, in particular, argue against agnosticism toward the long-term future. In relation to all four questions, governments and social movements are undertaking

necessary initiatives in spite of the crisis, but are quite aware of the wide gap between these piecemeal initiatives and convincing answers:

— *The environmental question:* Are present trends of resource use and industrialization really viable and compatible with human survival over the long term? If not, how can they be transformed and what agents can undertake to direct the transformation?

— *The equity question:* If the patterns of distribution—the juxtaposition of extreme wealth and extreme poverty—are ethically intolerable as well as inhibiting to development, as governments and peoples have affirmed for years, what can be done to change them, how far, and by whom? Why does distribution in Latin America continue to be more inequitable than in other world regions in spite of the rhetoric and the proliferation of programmes?

— *The meaningful activity question:* If even the most optimistic production and employment projections do not offer hope of incorporating a large part of the continually growing labour force, and if modernization processes and considerations of economic efficiency set limits to employment expansion, how can the “superfluous” part of the population find livelihood and bases for a sense of belonging to and participating in the social order? Can a conception of “meaningful activity for all” replace “full employment” as a long-term objective?

— *The cultural question:* Should the societies of Latin America accept as inevitable the cultural homogenization diffused from the central consumer societies? If not, how can they affirm their own cultural identity and enrich their internal cultural diversity while respecting the free choices of their people and the necessary active participation in world cultural and technological advances?

Debates on such questions are inherently conflictive. They may generate greater realism and mutual understanding, but never full consensus. Their terms are bound to change as the

settings change, eliminating some possibilities and opening others. For the present, what can be hoped for is that the debates will continue and draw in the general public, with innovativeness and time horizons beyond the limits imposed by crisis management.

The ideal of “participatory planning”, involving the State in dialogue with the whole range of collective social actors and leading to social pacts enjoying broad consensus, deserves support tempered by realism. The extent to which the contending forces can really derive coherent projects from such initiatives, and the extent to which the interlocutors can commit their supposed followings remain questionable, particularly as long as the discussion has to centre on the sharing of sacrifices without any assurances that the sacrifices will really be rewarded. These initiatives, like the earlier conceptions of planning, risk becoming ritualistic means of postponing difficult choices and responses to group pressures, with concrete proposals for State action emerging only after they have ceased to be politically or economically viable. Nevertheless, the efforts cannot be abandoned. They have an important educational function, as long as they direct their sights beyond the short term, even if the social pacts rarely maintain themselves for very long.

Participatory planning and social pacts suppose the formation and effective functioning of consultative bodies supplementing representation through political parties and legislatures. Such mechanisms should help to reveal the full implications of given policies and the strengths of the backing and resistance they will encounter. They should help to bring out into the open pressures and tactics for influencing policy that would be present in any case. The obvious drawbacks lie in the unequal capacity of different groups to formulate and represent common interests, and in the likelihood of new manifestations of policy segmentation, as different organized interests consult with different components of the State apparatus to shape the policies that affect them most directly.

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