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## Notes on the future of the western democracies

*José Medina Echavarría\**

What will be the future of democracy in Latin America? Medina Echavarría suggests an answer to this question based on an analysis of the controversy that in recent years has been waged in the European countries with respect to the prospects for their democracies. He does not think, of course, that their political processes are automatically reproduced in Latin America, but that in view of the similarity of certain conditions and problems, and the reciprocal contact maintained, some solutions are likely to be similar too.

After a rapid glance at authoritarianism and technocracy, the subject of the expansion of State intervention is introduced via an analysis of hypotheses advanced by Heilbroner and Bell. Hence Medina Echavarría penetrates to the heart of the matter—the crisis of democracy, as interpreted by conservative, liberal and marxist opinion; and he ends by applying the hypotheses in question to Latin America. In this last section, he alludes in particular to the relations between democracy and economic development, to the overload of demands and to the legitimacy of the principles of democracy, concluding with a reasonably optimistic hypothesis as to the future of democracy in the Latin American countries.

Following the article comments are included that were made to the author by colleagues from CEPAL and ILPES in the course of an internal seminar.

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## I. Motives of concern in Latin America

### 1. *De facto situations and their interpretation*

For the moment our sole concern is to record a *de facto* situation. According to the observers of Latin American political life—whatever their motivation—it would seem, to judge from the number and importance of the countries reviewed, that what virtually predominates in the region is a form of government described as authoritarian. True, the adjective does not give a precise idea of the shades of difference exhibited. There can be such a thing as power vigorously wielded which nevertheless does not merit such an epithet when it refrains from overstepping the constitutional faculties of a representative régime. The term authoritarianism therefore refers to the exercise of that stronger authority more or less to the exclusion of popular participation in public decision-making.

The fact once noted, its interpretation must follow: whether purely functional and scientific in intention, or guided by value judgements and put forward as a justification or a repudiation. How far the first of these approaches is strictly possible is of course a dubious question, which need not be touched upon for the moment.

What is of interest is merely to observe that the current interpretations are of two types, although not always mutually exclusive. One imputes the existence of authoritarianism to the deficiencies of the institutional system at a given moment, whether they are to be found in the political constitution itself or in its operational mechanisms, in particular the political parties. For some,

however, these negative factors in the political structure have become crucial when the State determined by that structure has had to face up to the tasks of modernizing the economy. In other words, the institutional defects have obtruded themselves when the time has come to attempt import-substituting industrialization or to advance beyond it. Consequently, the initially strictly political interpretation, without forgoing its political character, comes to coincide or merge with the purely or primarily economic interpretation in which interest is focused on the production and distribution systems; or, to put it more exactly, on economic development. And in this context the thesis commonly propounded is that economically backward countries cannot make up their leeway by following the democratic countries' traditional paths, and that they are therefore bound to pass through a period of authoritarianism, whether it results from a mobilization process set afoot by a doctrinaire group or a charismatic personality, or from an increase in the decision-making capacity of the executive sector of the hereditary State. The second alternative emerges as the more acceptable when it is contended that the intervention of the representative elements maintained by the State has been incapable of settling the conflicts of interests that are always stirred up by economic development, and that in default of the indispensable adoption of decisions, policy-making has been perpetually left to drift on a rudderless course.

Clearly, as the character of the authoritarian State varies from one country to another, both interpretations, if they are to be valid, must be completed by a detailed analysis of the historical and social processes that have taken

place in each case. But sometimes the sociological explanation may try to simplify this diversity by classifying structural conditions under types, as has been done from the standpoint of the dependency theory. However, these or other details in the content of the interpretation make no difference to the blunt contrast, in general outline, between the explanations offered. For the time being this is all that matters.

## 2. *Moot questions*

It is worth while to note at least that in the interpretations under discussion two questions remain ambiguous or problematic. In the first place, a government described as authoritarian is generally spoken of as technocratic too. The problematic element consists in the fact that the predominance of technocratic procedure is usually linked by the theorists of advanced capitalism with an extreme degree of economic concentration, and is therefore unlikely to be found where such concentration is much less intense. Should this prove to be a fallacy, a different explanation for the existence of technocratic tendencies would have to be sought. Again, the assertion that a government is authoritarian says nothing in principle of the extent of its intervention either in the economic or in the social field; what is more, authoritarian States can be cited which emphatically affirm that their activity is of a strictly subsidiary nature. Is this the fact, or even really possible? Generally speaking, the question to be asked in this connexion is whether every authoritarian position demands more extensive interventionism or, conversely, whether every increase in interventionism entails the authoritarian form of

government described above. A question which has an important bearing on something that will soon become obvious in what follows.

## II. Medium-term situation in the western countries

The *de facto* situation of a region in which, as has been said, authoritarian forms of government prevail may be the starting-point for a number of widely varying theses. In the present attempt to scan the future, the intention is not to weigh on their own merits the potential alternatives for the duration of these authoritarian régimes, but to examine their possibilities of continuity and change in relation to the vitality of the traditional political patterns of democracy in the countries outside the region which have the closest cultural contacts and connexions with those of Latin America. In a word, what is the presumable outlook for the great industrial democracies in the near future?

In the case of a prognosis of this type, two essential points should be clarified beforehand. In the first place, it does not postulate a type of determinism of which the mere enunciation would show it to be erroneous. That is, there is no question of believing *a priori* that what happens in one direction or another in the experience of the great capitalist democracies must necessarily be reproduced completely, and without modification, in the political systems of the Latin American countries, or that the reactions of the latter can take no other form than imitation or immediate reflex. All that is postulated is greater interdependence and reciprocal contact among a number of countries undergoing

similar processes, and the consequent spread of similar conditions throughout the whole group as the solution of their problems makes for stabilization. Thus nothing forced or purely mechanical is involved. The second essential is to clarify the *raison d'être* of certain propensities in futurological research. The aim of such research is to anticipate trends and formulate projections of every kind, and great importance is of course attached to those of a strictly technological character; but undoubtedly its keenest concern is for the future lot of humanity, and accordingly for the extent to which the values that are still considered essential to civilization are destined to flourish or to founder. The horizon of the human condition could be the predominance of absolute dictatorship, but it is not denied in principle that man may be capable of conserving, in differing degrees, the liberal and democratic elements to which he still aspires, whatever the picture presented by the technological scaffolding and the economic structures which it largely determines. And although no forecast can disregard the real trends of the material factors—as will next be shown—it is equally true that a task of this sort is meaningless unless its ultimate objective is to presage what may become of human life with all its aspirations and sufferings. Will it be possible for liberal democracy to survive in economic and

technical conditions very different from those hitherto prevailing? The question retains its theoretical validity as a problem, whatever pessimists or optimists may feel about it.

Nobody can think it unjustifiable that declared anxiety about the efficacious operation of democracy should exist in certain countries whose history has hitherto marked them out as models of democratic practice and doctrine. This anxiety itself indicates that it must stem from people with a manifest interest in preserving democracy; that is, from intellectuals and politicians who in this sense reveal themselves as conservative, since the flaws and impending dangers they point out, the limitations and perils they denounce, are not altogether attributable to a doctrinally unfavourable angle of vision. In the present article it was thought best to begin by methodically seeking the support of studies written in a conservative spirit, although at the appropriate stage due attention must be paid to left-wing criticisms, including those of both the traditional and the so-called "new" left, sometimes more stimulating than the former in its vagaries. What is the view taken of the "governability" of the great capitalist democracies over the medium term? An expression which is far from self-explanatory, and consequently somewhat infelicitous. For the point to be ascertained is not whether democracies lend themselves little or hardly at all to being governed — by whom, in this case? — but rather whether the countries that have long been living under a democratic régime can be more efficiently governed than at present. What is being tacitly asked is whether in such countries a stronger government can or cannot be looked for; which implies, to put it the other way round, that in them

the reins of government are slack or not held firmly enough. What are the reasons underlying this bloodlessness on the part of authority and the consequent demand that it be given a stiffening tonic? This was the line taken in a joint study by a "Trilateral Commission" — a title justified by the aim of exploring the problem on what are obviously its three most decisive fronts: the United States, Europe and Japan. The adoption of the text in question as a basis or point of departure at this stage of the present essay seems recommendable not only on account of those dimensions and the personal prestige of its authors, but also — as was said before — because their position is conservative rather than revolutionary. In their study, as in others like it, the future viability of democracy is repeatedly linked with economic development. Accordingly, before entering upon a somewhat more detailed examination of the subject, attention should be drawn to a common premise which in these pages too is definitely an underlying hypothesis: the assumption that over the medium term a convulsion of the capitalist world even comparable to the traumatic crisis of the year 1930 does not appear to be likely. Expressed in positive terms, the hypothesis supports the certainty that for the next twenty-five years at least the system will still be capable of sustained growth, as maintained in the recent report by W. Leontief.

Given such a hypothesis, however formulated, the following are the two most general forecasts which must reasonably be taken into account. It is expected, on the one hand, that during the next few years all the countries of the West will experience a steady expansion of State intervention in the economic field; and that in the political

field, for these and other reasons, the traditional democratic régime will be faced with serious challenges, not, however, different in kind from those they have already encountered in recent times. The next step is to consider, in very concise outline, the principal points at issue.

### 1. *Expansion of State intervention*

Setting any revolutionary position entirely aside, from relatively conservative points of view the theory of the increasing expansion of State interventionism in economic life is nowadays presented mainly through two kinds of analysis, if not incompatible, at least based on different lines of argument.

#### (a) *Increased planning requirements*

The first, represented by R. L. Heilbroner, asserts that if the continuity of the "business civilization" is to be maintained in the next few years, planning will be called upon to play an increasingly predominant rôle. For over the medium term all the capitalist economies will predictably have to cope with certain problems: (i) correction of the generalized distortions that they tend to produce; (ii) correction, likewise, of other distortions or disturbances of a localized type; and (iii) reaction to the threats that are making themselves felt in the natural environment. How these inescapable planning requirements—and the consequently stronger influence of the State on economic life—will affect the democratic system of government is a matter that Heilbroner does not discuss. The only point of interest to us at the moment is his basic contention, in response to other more conservative politicians and intellectuals, that if the capi-

talism of today is to survive the only course open to it is to step up planning. Through what political mechanisms this can be done does not seem to be of immediate concern to him; which perhaps allows one to assume that the expansion of State intervention can be effected through democratic institutions. For the moment this is all we need take into consideration; and accordingly it is unnecessary to go into what the author thinks about the more distant future of the system, unless it be to note that even in face of the possibility of its complete transformation he reaffirms, not without a touch of melancholy, the value represented by the autonomy of the individual as the supreme value of western tradition.

#### (b) *The State as Public Household*

This same futurological conclusion that State intervention will presumably be expanded in time to come is also reached by another economist, notoriously conservative or right-wing, via a very original and suggestive analysis. We refer to Daniel Bell, confronted in his turn with the supposed crisis of capitalism. There is nothing new about such a presumption, since for years past currency has been given to different versions of the idea that limits must be set to the autonomy of the economic system—as if that were the only social system in existence—and that it must be subordinated to non-economic values which man's moral consciousness rates more highly. Nor, in the empirical account, is there anything original in the assertion that the system in question, while capable of regulating fairly efficiently the public or private interests subject to market mechanisms, is a broken reed as regards the maintenance

of public services for the benefit of other legitimate human interests, which, however, cannot be exactly measured in terms of the mechanisms aforesaid. The intellectual appeal of Bell's reflexions on these issues consists in the undeniable plasticity of this approach. In a work written earlier than the one of most concern to us at present, when examining the contemporary operation of the "corporations" he had already shown through them the tension between what he called "economizing and sociologizing modes": a tension easily generalizable to the system as a whole. What this meant was that the purely economic concern for productivity found its compensation and its curb in the sociological concern for the effects produced on human relationships. Historically, indeed, this tension indicates that the advance of such sociologization implies as its inevitable outcome—not always consciously sought—the insertion of the economic system in a broader social system, geared to objectives different from its own (a line of thought which E. Heimann might have followed up in order to demonstrate his fundamental postulates).

But for our present point—the ever-increasing intervention of the State in economic life—greater interest attaches to a chapter in Bell's controversial book in which, taking as a basis an old and almost unknown article by J. Schumpeter, he shows the ineluctability of that expansion (besides dealing with other no less vital topics) by disclosing the real nature of the contemporary State as a fiscal system, as the articulation of a country's Public Household. This is not the place to enter into the details of the argument or to appraise its originality or validity. The family household was the sole economic object of the classic world (Aristoteles), and M. Weber had devoted

a long chapter to the household system as that corresponding to the *Oikos* economy—predominantly natural—which was widely prevalent in the past, prior, of course, to the domination of one or other form of capitalism. The Public Household—a term which up to a short time ago was still currently applied in Europe to the fiscal system—came into being with the modern State and at its service. But even its continual expansion did not overstep the bounds self-imposed by the State in relation to the liberal economic system: a system which, if it met individual needs or wishes, did so through their spontaneous satisfaction within the play of market forces. But the increasing complexity of contemporary life compelled the State not only to look after the viability of the market—maintaining capital accumulation as an essential requirement—but to cope with the various individual or group demands, fostered by cultural incentives, which in principle could not be satisfied through the market. In this sense the State as a country's Public Household considerably increases in volume, running the risk of bankruptcy if it does not properly balance its budget. The problem of the present-day State is that it cannot shelve the twofold function which has been imposed upon it in the course of history: to continue co-ordinating the economic system—keeping up the capital accumulation it needs—and to satisfy in one way or another the snowballing needs and wants of individuals and social groups that fall within its own sphere. The curious thing about these new demands is that they increasingly assume the guise of quasi-legal claims—or, if preferred, entitlements—which are so manifold and so conflicting that they can be met only by strictly political decisions. It will not be surprising to find



this point cropping up in all analyses of present-day democracy.

How much all this may be worth as a symptom of a contradiction in the economic system and on account of its repercussions on the dilemmas of development is, like the political solution proposed by our author—a restoration of liberalism—a question outside the scope of the present article. Our sole object was to discover once again, in the opinions of another economist, the predictions of the one previously cited: the foreseeability of an expansion of State interventionism in the near future in the great industrial democracies. But some reference cannot be omitted—since the topic has become an obsession in the thinking of the New Left, and given that allusion has already been made to the assumed tension between the economic and sociological approaches—to the fact that for Bell one of the most crucial dilemmas of the new State as Public Household is that posed by the relation between efficiency and equity: how it will be possible, to increase a society's productive capacity and at the same time restrict or limit certain types of consumption. The principle of equity also pertains to the liberal current of thought, touched upon likewise by Heilbroner from his personal standpoint. Let us now come to the other element in the prognosis which appears alongside the expansion of State activity; they might in principle be regarded as independent, although in practice this is not so.

## 2. *Breakup of democracy*

The presumption is that in the immediate future there will be a "Crisis of Democracy" (the title of the report mentioned above) in the major countries

which for the time being maintain that political régime; but the term crisis must be taken in its strictly etymological sense, as meaning a particular stage in the evolution of a system which is marked by sufficient symptoms of vacillation and disturbance to indicate a state of transition, ruling out neither the recovery and reinvigoration of the system or its final disintegration and collapse. At the same time, this crisis merely represents the prolongation into the future of difficulties already observable in the immediate past, and therefore at the present day.

### (a) *Conservative interpretation*

For the purpose of analysing the crisis and the existing predictions it will be useful to resort to a classification, as defective as any other, but an adequate basis for orderly presentation of the subject-matter. Those whose concern is focused on the breakup of present and future democracy can be grouped around three kinds of attitudes and motivations, conservative, predominantly liberal or coloured by radical negativism. The report of the Trilateral Commission falls especially into the first group, in the context of a technically functional theory. This position attributes the crisis of democracy to four main factors or causes which may be summed up beforehand as follows: (i) institutional distortions; (ii) the overload of demands on the State induced by the theory and the actual development of democratic tradition; (iii) supposedly functional connexions with economic development; and lastly (iv) the shrinking of territorial spheres of influence in face of the various forms of global interdependence in the contemporary world, above all in its economic sector. The

presence of these factors can be demonstrated in each and all of the countries under consideration, although it must be stated at once that great differences exist from one country to another for structural reasons or on account of political traditions. This point should be borne in mind to obviate the need for repetition, except where it is particularly appropriate.

(i) *Institutional distortions*

The proposition respecting institutional distortions is the least novel, inasmuch as for some time now attention has been insistently called to one or other of the forms they take: to the relations between the legislative and executive powers, to the inefficient operation of the political parties, and to the uncertainties of the average citizen's electoral behaviour *vis-à-vis* the parties in question. For years past stress has been laid on the technical weakness of any type of Parliament, over against the Executive and its administrative institutions, whose greater technical and scientific knowledge and training means that they have very little difficulty in imposing their basic decisions in the shape of proposals and bills. In face of this *de facto* situation various solutions have been put forward, ranging from the establishment of technical commissions at the service of the legislators, to continually renewed projects for the representation of professional interest, either parallel to or in association with the political Parliament. As regards the parties, attention has over and over again been drawn to their lack of representativeness, their imperviousness to the conflicts of social demands, which prevents them from fulfilling the function which in modern terminology is described as 'articulation of interests' (so that there is a want of relation and

proportion between the political 'inputs' of the population and the products and results of legislative decisions). New Left criticism in its extremest forms takes the view that the parties and the Parliament are only a deferential instrument, but that nevertheless they play an important role, inasmuch as they constitute in practice the necessary nuclei for legitimation of the system. Conservative comment confines itself to describing the dwindling attraction exercised by the parties over the electorate, above all when in their tactical coalitions they can be seen to differ only from electoral motives and over trivial questions of immediate topical interest (denoted by Gallup polls), not because of decisive stands taken in confrontations on major national issues. We must repeat that the situation varies from one country to another. For instance, the Administration may dominate the Parliament to a greater or lesser degree (extreme cases, Italy and France); in this respect, however, matters may be complicated by internal divisions in the Chambers of Deputies themselves with regard to the Presidential office, as in recent years in the United States, where the 'imperial' Presidency of former times has given place to the manacled authority of more recent days. The failure of political leaders to carry conviction or kindle enthusiasm and the apathy or wavering allegiance of the electorate are primarily attributed to these circumstances, which are perhaps to be seen as temporary in some parts of the world or as deriving from what seems functionally to be the result of a 'blocked society'. Blocked, that is, by the major administrative bodies.

(ii) *The overload of demands*

Many observers of the faulty operation of present-day democracy agree in

pointing out, in different terms, how one of the main factors in the crisis is what some call the overload of demands that a democratic government takes on its shoulders: demands, that is, for State contributions and assistance. Such an imputation is not so much merely unclear as equivocal. An increase in the volume of claims or requests with which State action is faced is by no means the heritage of democratic government alone; the same thing happens under any other form of government, in so far as such demands are the result of the intensified complexity of social life—of its technological postulates—and of the similarly increasing opacity it presents as a whole. The authoritarian States are by no means exempt from the pressures of this overload.

In the countries with a tradition of liberal democracy the existence of such an overload would seem perfectly explicable and natural, since it is nothing but the historical development of the very principles by which such régimes are upheld. The aspirations they necessarily encourage have gradually swelled as the people have come to see many of their ambitions as increasingly realizable. Better care of health, for example, is fostered by the progress of medicine itself, and this highlights the injustice implied by its limitation to certain sectors. Nevertheless, in the countries in question the allegation of the overload of demands barely conceals awareness of a deep-rooted inconsistency in the values underlying their centuries of civilization: the inconsistency represented by radical individualism. The individual was envisaged as the responsible centre of all activity—not only economic activity—who in order to exercise it needed only the guarantees extended by a remote and neutral State. This is not the place to

review the long history of the various episodes which have removed the complete fulfilment of this ideal farther and farther out of reach, although it is still rightly believed that no civilization is conceivable which would really attempt to turn its back upon the only forces that are genuinely creative—those of the individual. But any digression into the cultural field, however condensed, is to be avoided here.

In the empirical analysis of the difficulties of a democratic government, in face of the excessive quantity of requests addressed to it, further emphasis needs to be laid on two aspects of the question already reviewed or well-known. In reality, given the enormous distance between the concrete individual and the abstract State, the demands made by the former upon the latter call for the interposition of regulatory and intermediary mechanisms capable of judging each claim according to its weightiness and importance. But without going farther—to the point, for example, of assessing the value of the old Durkheimian idea respecting the need for *corps intermédiaires*—the question for the moment is to remedy the shortcomings of the existing instruments of adjustment, in particular the political parties—not to mention other professional associations—in the performance of their principal task: the necessary articulation and balance of the multiplicity of interests present at any given moment in the life of a society, so as to make them viable in due course. It may be that the supposed 'overload' is created more often than not by the deluge of interests that makes it impossible to discharge such a function. In this sense, the obvious problem posed by excessive demand is of an institutional character, and therefore can be dealt with by means of appropriate institutional reforms.

The other aspect of this menacing overload is perhaps more serious: the fact that today many group and individual demands ('needs' and 'wants') are peremptorily presented as quasi-legal claims, which, transcending the principle of equality of opportunities predicated at the start, in reality call for actual equality of benefits, and thus trigger off that rising revolution of entitlements of which one of the above-mentioned authors has spoken. Problems created by distribution of these entitlements on a quota basis have been typical of the situation in the United States, and not in that country alone. And it is a more serious matter than in the preceding instance, because the possible solution does not lie in the revitalization of familiar institutions, but in a new constitutional delimitation of the scope of old-time liberalism. This is why the topic is of concern to current trends in restorationist thinking, which is striving to identify and define what the past can show us that is still valid today. For reluctance to accede to the promptings of this line of thought would leave only one alternative: simply to accept the interpretations of some neo-marxists who declare, in a complicated 'functionalist' theory, that it is typical of the democratic forms of advanced capitalism ('late' in their terminology), to pursue a 'preventive' policy in relation to the crisis, whereby priorities among these social demands are in effect assigned technocratically, and those that do not jeopardize the viability of the system are left to take their chance (Claus Ogge). This is a position which up to a point is in accord with the conservative thesis regarding the overload of demands on the present-day State, without, however, offering possibilities of a truly democratic way out. It will be shown that the

liberal thinkers who start from the inevitability—even the desirability—of the conflict between the various requirements stimulated by the social environment itself are bound, of course, to devote special attention to this point.

In practice, the problem of the superabundance of claims with which the democratic State has to cope represents a sociologically inescapable situation, which cannot be dealt with by silencing or arbitrarily curtailing some of them. Nor, indeed, could an authoritarian State attempt such a solution without incurring the corresponding risks.

In theoretical discussion the subject of the overload of petitions from the various social units—individuals or groups—sometimes takes paradoxical forms or directions. For in this connexion the crisis of democracy can be interpreted as an 'excess' of democracy. And in contrast with the classic postulate that its ills can only be cured by more democracy, some contemporary functional analyses see amputation as the sole remedy. Not, of course, saying so in such forthright terms, but demonstrating the existence of dysfunctional elements in the democratic organization, which give grounds for assertions as to how and in what degree this type of political system often requires, for its effective maintenance, a modicum of political apathy and indifference. Is there an exactly measurable distance between a democracy of limited effectiveness and an authoritarian government? For the issue here is not the greater or lesser volume of demand that may paralyse a government's decision-making process, but the whole essence of democracy as political participation.

It would be by no means easy to formulate and prescribe appropriate

remedies if the cyclical process allegedly observable in a specific country were to prove a reality: a process whereby every increase in 'participation' would ultimately lead to a polarization of society, which in its turn would conduce to political apathy and indifference, thus creating situations of which the upshot would be a widespread perception of the inefficiency of political action. Functionalism has its surprises.

If, then, the argument is not to lead directly to an authoritarian position, it leaves, regretfully perhaps, no other way out than the corrective consisting in a permanent line of defence of a technocratic character, capable of breaking down the alarming repetition of the aforesaid cyclical process. But the domination of technocracy, to which other tendencies of the social structure are conducive, is exactly what is considered inadmissible from the standpoint of the traditional postulate of popular political intervention on a majority basis.

(iii) *Democracy and development*

During the 1960s, sociologists in several of the Western countries diligently bent their attention upon a social phenomenon which some were bold enough to describe as new or unprecedented, although there were variations in the terminology in which they attempted to pin it down. They pointed out that in all the industrial countries of the West an egalitarian trend was gradually advancing which, while by no means fully comprehensive —embracing status, income and culture—, was already bringing the various social classes and strata so much closer together as to promote a certain homogenization in many respects. There were still glaring inequalities where income was concerned, but its relative rise in the sectors that had previously been most unfavourably affected seemed

to be easing the deepest-rooted of the customary tensions. A sort of broad intermediate stratum —by whatever name it was known— had improved its material living conditions, so that its members were able to accept as tolerable what were still very marked differences at the summit of the population pyramid. It was not merely on account of their opponents' doctrinal riposte that the sociologists in question cherished no illusions whatever as to the existence of these limitations in their interpretation; and this prevented them from flatly denying the reality of the historical legacy of antagonism. They urged, however, how promising a sign it was that the reduced dimensions of the conflict or conflicts had allowed them to be institutionalized, and that the acceptance of this institutionalization by groups which had formerly been at daggers drawn not only attenuated thorny problems but gave temporary solutions increasing durability.

But apart from and alongside this mitigation of the conflict —above all in labour matters— the relative expansion of education and the impact of the mass media (press, radio and television) had brought about a cultural homogenization that had never existed before. In Europe, despite the subsistence of the marxist parties and of trade-union forces, the workers seemed to have renounced their own differentiated culture and were increasingly adopting the 'bourgeois' way of life; in this case, moreover, no mention need be made of the United States, where such phenomena had hardly ever appeared. It is not surprising that in view of what happened during the three decades following the war, some writers should exalt that period both as the years of the renewed triumph of capitalism and as a time of

abounding vitality in the democratic régimes which harboured it; or that, conversely, many should have begun to feel some anxiety about the continuity of democratic life in face of the difficulties that loomed up in it as soon as economic expansion encountered its first stumbling-blocks. Consequently, the thesis put forward by these authors is that of parallelism between economic development and democracy. During the past boom, the fact that the whole population shared in absolute terms in a higher level of well-being smoothed the way for democracy —notwithstanding the acknowledged institutional defects—in so far as most of the people unhesitatingly put forward their new aspirations in the firm belief that these could really materialize. Conflicts of interests could be relatively successfully settled, and fuller satisfaction —restricted here and there for the moment— was only a matter of time and a steady course of political action. What would happen if the expansion which moderated the acerbity of the traditional struggles began to show signs of stagnation?

The equation of wealth with pluralism which for thirty years has been affirmed by some political scientists is reflected today in the parallelism, asserted by others with equal conviction, between economic development and democracy. Given this hypothesis, the impediments to democracy in the Western countries (including Japan) in the immediate past and predictably in the years to come would in their turn constitute a decisive factor in the constraints which for other reasons threaten to handicap economic development in the future. Naturally, the thesis is of supreme interest to the developing countries in the context of a dependent capitalism; its initial presentation, im-

plicit as yet, possibly had to be made, where those countries were concerned, in the doctrinal content of the admonitions to 'modernize' themselves which were addressed to them.

Although for the moment experience seems to confirm it, how far is this really an irrefutable thesis? For it not only draws attention to the difficulties of the democratic régime in respect of the co-ordination or general running of the economy, but also underlines the demoralizing effects of both inflation and recession on political consciousness —the strength of the impact varying in the different social sectors— and, what is more, not merely in cases where recession and inflation occur together, but, above all, when as occasionally happens they alternate incomprehensibly. An analysis of the correlation between economic development and democracy would entail following up a considerable number of presumed internal causal relations without whose proven consistency the correlation in question —like any other— would turn out to be a mere outward appearance or façade. In this lightning review of the main topic it would take up too much time to attempt any such thing. Let us provisionally admit that the correlation does show a temporary validity in relation to the historical juncture at which it has been observed. But in this case there are still two major questions which cannot be shirked. The first is posed by the fact that in the history of thought liberal and democratic ideas precede and are independent of conceptions respecting economic development. *Vis-à-vis* the doctrine we shall presently consider, to the effect that the legitimacy of the democratic régime is identical with the success and efficiency of the economic system, a vigorous reminder is needed that the

type of domination which characterizes the modern State and which in one way or another upholds both its liberal elements (political rights) and its democratic features ('representation' as a legal faculty) has its origin in the evolution of ideas on natural law before and after the dawn of the modern epoch. It is worth while to recall the chapter on natural law in Weber's work on juridical sociology (in no way a philosophical treatise), where it is shown that the basic postulates of legal domination have their moment of faith consisting in the acceptance of charismatic inspiration. Accordingly, no essential relation links the development and historical consolidation of the modern constitutional State and its subsequent democratic structure with the specific conceptions of the capitalist system, and consequently neither the rule of law nor the institutional crystallization of the egalitarian aspirations of democracy has been formulated or defined as a function of what we now call economic development. Guarantees of the public and private rights of the individual date farther back than concern for the growth of the economic system. And while the legal rationale of the State undeniably has its parallel in the bureaucratic rationale of every kind of enterprise, it is no less true that the development of modern bureaucracy was in principle indifferent to the extension of democracy, although in practice favouring it within certain limits. The bringing into operation of the modern rule of law and of the democratic processes (by successive extensions of the right to vote) was never directly aimed at fostering economic development. Thus they might just as well thrive in countries where economic growth was slow as languish on the verge of defunction in others where it was rapid. The history of

Europe is a clear case in point, since poverty was no bar either to the ardent desire for democracy or to the gradual improvement of the footing on which it was established. The history of the various parties, of their doctrines, and of the steady formation of political habits and traditions, has its fount of inspiration in some of the European countries. The situation is not comparable with that of the United States, where entirely different conditions early permitted the consolidation of the wealth element. To the distinct and peculiar weight and continuity of these customs and traditions have been due, as already remarked, the differences in ability to tackle with greater or lesser degrees of success the difficulties faced in recent years by the democracies, some of which have kept going with exemplary vigour during the recent years of economic recession. And whatever the relationship of linkage or of independence between the political and economic institutions—a point we shall not discuss here—there can be no doubt whatever that these deep-rooted potencies of political education will have the final say in determining not only the cultural conformation of the economic recovery still foreseeable in the next few years—with ups and downs, to be sure—but also the course to be steered by the major countries in the so-called quest for their 'identity' expected to ensue in the coming decades upon the vacillations experienced during the earliest endeavours to bring about the 'détente'. If in the immediate future the democracies manage to re-create their traditional physiognomies in this readjustment of their 'personality', they may very well show themselves capable too of reasserting their 'will' to political continuity, even in the event—problematic as

regards dates and the nature of the factors that will trigger it— of their being compelled to accept varying degrees of limitation of their economic development, without on that account entering upon a definitely stationary phase. Although some maintain that the economic structure of capitalism has less capacity for adaptation to such problems than that of socialism, it cannot be stated *a priori* as a certainty that the democratic political mechanisms of compromise, pliability and accommodation to the corresponding sacrifices will necessarily prove inferior to the rigidities which in the long run authoritarian bureaucracy brings in its train.

(iv) *Narrowness of national boundaries*

The last of the factors in the crisis of contemporary democracy which the various students of the subject are given to pointing out with unwonted unanimity is that deriving from the progressive contraction or shrinkage of national boundaries as against the breadth and interdependence of the world economy. The very definition of the State embodied its 'territorial' character; its mandatory powers and legal competence covered only a territory jealously demarcated by its frontiers. But in turn all activities carried out within that space by citizens of other countries were subject to its own regulations, which might equally well permit them, set limits to them or penalize them. And although this was true of any kind of State, those of a democratic character had to be able to count, up to a point, upon a minimum of participation of informed public opinion, both in the cases referred to and where external or international action was concerned—of course within the bounds of prudence. But the dimensions of what was mani-

festly becoming an increasingly global economy virtually shattered, along with the real efficacy of frontiers still theoretically intact, the nation-State's authentic capacity either to withdraw behind them and assert its sovereignty or, in practice, to prevent the internal repercussions of external activities, movements and pressures which it was impotent to control from its own power centre. The experience of the past few years shows that not even the most economically powerful democratic States have been able to fend off the impact of the world around them. The case of the transnational corporations would seem the most striking example at first sight, although it is in fact far from being the most important and profound. Recent economic history is all too well aware of the successive waves of pressures and counter-pressures which have surged up as the result of national economic policies, doubtless, moreover, quite outside the range of their original intentions. The economic recovery of Europe and Japan promoted by the United States created in subsequent years serious difficulties in economic relations between the parties concerned; just as later the repercussions of 'exported' inflation made themselves felt, or the financial effects of the joint policies of the oil-exporting countries and the understandably defensive action taken by the customer nations. The territorial space of the State is contracting, and the democracies perceive in this shrinkage the evidence that they lack the mechanisms to intervene 'democratically' in the new and vaster arenas in which they are bound to act. Only against this general background can the problem of the 'transnationals' be made intelligible. Far from creating, as some have maintained, a new type of interna-



tional society in which the old sovereign State tends to disappear or sink into obscurity, they confront that State, to whose supreme authority they are still subject, with a good many problems both of political and of economic control. The issues raised by the creation of a new international economic order call with varying degrees of urgency for the establishment of international 'authorities' in which the democratic governments need to participate, even if the equally democratic nature of those authorities is not defined and cannot be clearly and effectively established.

The necessity for regional policies—accompanied by the constitution of regional units, economic and political in their ends—throws into strong relief the difficulty of broadening the constricted national spheres of action and the ill-preparedness of the democratic régimes to transfer to the projected units the usual procedures of their own systems. The novelty of the situations created by economic interdependence takes political thought and action by surprise with exigent demands on the imagination that do not present themselves in the same way in face of the other factors of crisis which have been longer known and studied. In this case the tasks of reconstruction or restoration become real feats of inventiveness.

#### (b) *Liberal interpretation*

The ingrained propensity of the mind to classification led us to distinguish an interpretation described as liberal alongside the more functionalist and conservative approach we have just discussed. Strictly speaking, it is not so much a different interpretation as a nuance of the first, sharply apparent, it is true, in the drafting of the report

referred to above. On the one hand, a marked feature of its critical orientation is the peculiarly liberal vein, quite distinct in European tradition from the concepts of democratic and egalitarian participation: influenced by Stuart Mill, for example, with his doctrine of the essentially representative nature of the democratic régime, or by Tocqueville, with his apprehensions that some day the advance of democracy might perhaps lead to the anti-liberal assertion of a drivingly authoritarian 'majority'. On the other hand, the sociological postulates of this sector of liberal thinkers diverge from a purely functionalist conception—always drawn towards the lodestar of order and social harmony—to stress, in contrast, not only the inevitability of struggle and conflict but even their positive value. Consequently, every liberal-democratic conception of the political system tends to accept as its point of departure the existence of opposing interests and ideological positions which cannot be finally reconciled at the dictates of an absolute truth possessed as such, but can only come to temporary arrangements, successively amplified to meet the needs of the moment, and worked out through agreement, compromise and mutual moderation of incompatible extremes. Hence the democratic value of procedures which, by allowing this form of give-and-take, represent the institutionalization of the conflict; that is, the value of the liberal condition which consists in respecting, while it lasts, the validity of an opponent's interests and opinions. Any régime that believes itself to be in possession of the one and only truth and tolerates nothing in the way of dissension, thus precluding discussion that might lead to a relatively satisfactory agreement, is in principle unmitigatedly

authoritarian, even if it is democratically elected and appears to express the will of the majority. In face of the difficulties and dangers besetting contemporary democracies, the thinkers who still draw their inspiration from this vein of liberal tradition point out, first and foremost, what aspects of it are imperilled by excess or by defect. R. Dahrendorf's brief statement during the discussion recorded in the reports of the above-mentioned 'Trilateral Commission' is an accurate résumé of the position which—together with others, of course—he had already defended on more than one occasion. He deems inadmissible the acceptance of any proposal for 'remedial action' which in practice implies curtailments or limitations of the democratic process, even though it may appear to be supported by a theory concerning the existence of dysfunctional elements in the system. A few brief comments will not be out of place in this connexion. The assumption of kinship between democracy and development would be admissible only if a much broader and more human conception of the latter were accepted—a conception released from the exclusive sway still exercised by that enthralling indicator, gross income. Is there no room for other forms of development at the service of human dignity and freedom? Curtailment of the expansion of education because it proves unfavourable—especially at the higher level—to the purposes of development and social stability is a 'regressive' step for everyone who regards education primarily as a 'human right' to the enrichment of the personality. The tensions between the mass media and the government cannot be eased by stifling or circumscribing the media's cultural effects. And, lastly, one must have the courage to point out the

dangers involved in any hypertrophy of the desire for 'participation' where its introduction leads in practice to the immobilization of the political process. In the democracy of today the traditional sense of 'citizenship' is the most important thing to save, even from the perils of what are often generous attempts to perfect it. Liberal tradition must recognize and accept its own limits, since otherwise it runs the risk of crashing. These echoes of the great classics of political liberalism are a prelude to the keynotes of a 'restorationist' strain of thought which may perhaps gather strength in many quarters without needing to break off its profound dialectical relation with the more ambitious revolutionary hopes cherished by the New Left, or rather with the ideals of the most serious section of contemporary critical thought.

(c) *The New-Left interpretation*

But if we now go along with the New Left, its view of the crisis of contemporary democracy takes us right out of the terrain in which we were moving. For it is no longer a matter of singling out the negative factors making for disintegration in order to cure bad habits as far as possible, but of showing that democracy is suffering from a fatal disease; which means that in any case its future must be envisaged on radically different bases. For in this type of thinking its essential malady is diagnosed as a complete breakdown of the principles of its legitimacy. And as the starting-point is once again a constitutive correlation between democracy and development, the criticism also extends to any other political system which has thrown in its lot with the efficiency of development. But for the moment let us confine ourselves to the

Western countries, where democracy and capitalism interweave the two strands—economic and political—in a single system. It is true that besides the New Left, with its plunge into sweeping cultural criticism, other less heterodox currents of thought had in their time called the problem of legitimacy in question in a different way; that is, by denying its existence as such. According to the theorists of the democratic political patterns proper to late or more mature capitalism, the entire system, concerned solely for its own stability, uses an institutional complex whose one and only objective is the loyalty of the masses, i.e., simply to be able to secure a state of apathetic obedience which is functionally satisfactory. Thus the traditional concept turns into something quite different, since fostering a belief in the validity of a specific political order does not matter as much as promoting the renunciation of all notions of legitimization (C. Ogge).

The New Left neither contemplates such a renunciation nor abjures the old concept of legitimacy, but alleges the brittle falsity of the principles to which at a given moment the more intelligent section of the bourgeoisie resorted. Incapable of secularizing on a lasting basis the images of legitimacy of power formulated by the Enlightenment—and founded on the abstract ideas of liberty and equality, almost sacred in their origins—, it resolved to transfer the legitimization of this 'political class' on to economic grounds. In an adroit résumé of the process, H. P. Dreitzel says that with the development of monopoly capitalism and State interventionism, the legitimacy of the ruling bourgeoisie and of persistent inequality was based on the steady growth of *per capita* income. This idea had already been hinted at in

conservative criticism, which, while recognizing a kinship between democracy and development, did not thereby imply any principle of legitimacy. All that was intended was an empirical interpretation of the fact that democratic organization flourished during a boom in economic growth; and this also warranted certain apprehensions as to what might happen if that growth were slowed up or brought to a standstill.

The New Left, backed by a widespread cultural criticism of our time, carries its negation of the dominant bases of political legitimacy to an extreme, without waiting for this or that specific historical experience to demolish it completely and for any real belief in it to die out. The mission of any culture at a given point of time is to provide the grounds for the legitimacy of the political system, to clarify the assumptions relating to the structure of personal motivations, and finally, to interpret in symbolical terms the natural limitations of human life. As Weber puts it: to offer some of the fundamental 'meanings' of man's existence. The aforesaid H. P. Dreitzel, in an excellent and concise summary of the cultural criticism of our day, including both the spontaneous movements of the various 'counter-cultures' and the philosophical analysis of leading thinkers, deals with each and all of these points, which we have no intention of dwelling upon here and now. Suffice it to bear in mind, as in the case of other aspects of New-Left thinking, that the analysis of present-day democracy, despite the vigour and generous impetuosity of its attack, is also brought up short when it comes to putting together the necessary proposals for reconstruction. What can be the substitute for industrial democracy—capitalist or socialist—and on what economic system can it be based?

It is common knowledge that the strictest conceptual refinements of philosophical criticism have emphasized and perhaps demonstrated the aberration implied for civilization by the predominance of the instrumental rationale. The practical or perhaps historical rationale upon which depend the values people look to in everyday life—ethical and aesthetic values, values relating to community support and fraternity—, has been increasingly dimmed by the instrumentality of the relation between ends and means in science and technique, in economic development and in the technocratic expertise brought to bear on political decisions, leaving the ordinary human being painfully frustrated in his most intimate and most vitally essential aspirations. All the personal—i.e., psychological—*'malaise'* of our time stems from the combination of the alienation imposed by institutions subject to the instrumental rationale with the anomie bred of the frustration of personal values (Dreitzel, Habermas, Schroyer, etc.). The welter of attitudes of protest in our time—ephemeral in some of their manifestations—represents the immediate expression of these tensions in men of flesh and blood. Yet all this energetic movement of rebellion has so far been unable to find its indispensable functional equivalences in the decisive sectors of the economic and political system.

In face of the dangers of a breakup of the democracies of today, the 'conservative' and 'liberal' positions seek to avert the disaster it would signify to throw overboard the values and the meaning which the 'old' institutions still preserve, defective as history may have shown them to be.

Perhaps the movingly human exaltation of the New Left may not be only a

voice crying in the wilderness. In the future more and more strength may possibly be gained by a 'restorationist' type of thought, disposed to take the just criticisms of the iconoclasts into account in reinvigorating all the valuable elements of a civilization that cannot change in a single day, by magic art or by an act of religious conversion, its imperfect institutions, laboriously worked out over a long period of time. A necessary and patiently-sustained dialectical union of such 'restorationist' thought with critical thinking may perhaps in due course establish the balance that is indispensable for reaching a constructive position. It is a question of the possibility of a new type of intelligence—already making its appearance in some quarters—well-armed to meet as from now the challenge of the uncertain future. But this would lead us into a digression which for the moment must be cut short.

(d) *The implications of the post-industrial society*

What is not a digression, although it may seem so in view of the time limits set to the forecast in these pages, is a reference—necessarily brief—to the future image of the society described as 'post-industrial'. For if it should more or less approximately materialize, it would fall within our subject in the context of a question as to what type of government would be appropriate for it. Would it be meaningful to speak of the survival of democratic organization in such a society?

All those who nowadays devote some attention to a structure like this—even beginning with its most careful designer—are doubtful about the form it might presumably take. What, at bot-

tom, does it involve: a new type of society or a transformation of the capitalist system? Post-capitalism, in short, or a post-industrial society? Despite these doubts, however, the writers in question do not categorically deny the presence of certain features which might in the near future stamp it as the latter.

Thus what years ago was an English writer's fanciful presage of a 'brave new world' must be taken more or less seriously today. The idea of a Meritocracy, of a society with a rigidly pyramidal structure, its differences of status predetermined by summing variations in the intelligence quotient to the result of special educational techniques for and exclusive to each IQ, would begin to look like the probable horizon of a civilization increasingly dominated by scientific knowledge. Accordingly, science and technique would constitute the dynamic force of such a future.

The first signs of this transformation, assumed to be incipient, can be detected in the shifts that are taking place to a varying extent in the occupational structure, whose goal is the qualitative pre-eminence of the services sector. Concurrently, or previously rather, the stepping-up of demand for the requisite training has entailed a contraction of the unskilled labour force, within certain limits. This observation, statistically substantiated in most of the industrial countries, is the starting-point for the sociological processing of data and the advance of speculative thought. To take development, for example: is it destined to depend more on qualitative than on quantitative factors? Will not that alone suffice to mitigate the problems posed by its possible limitations? For the purposes of the present article, however, it is the political aspect that is of most interest. If the essential basis of these

and other changes consists in the increasingly intensive penetration of life by science (Shelsky), their political and economic manifestations must be subject to its dominion. Will not the growing tendency for policy to be guided by scientific advisers ultimately hand over to specific experts the full and exclusive responsibility for all decision-making? Some people are beginning to see politics as a mere illusion.

When D. Bell attempts to tackle this subject he is faced with the necessity of a choice between the technocrats and the politicians in the power centres of the future; and although he finally and explicitly casts his vote in favour of the latter, it must not be forgotten that the key feature of his picture of the stratification of power is the predominance of knowledge, university research, technical know-how and skill, education, co-optation, etc. In this connexion, the crucial issue seems to lie in the existence of co-optation as a means of access to power. For notwithstanding the depreciation of technocracy as the summit of political power, it is not easy to conceive of democracy under a political régime in which co-optation takes the place of the free vote, unconfined to exceptional circles. What sort of future would there be—near already, or more distant—for a democracy subject to such conditions? Is this a trend that must inevitably be reckoned with?

Bell himself, apparently more a liberal than a democrat (let us not forget that according to him the sociologically fascinating riddle of a democratic society lies in the fact that as inequality decreases, resentment, in contrast, increases), tends to find the solution in what would be a really just meritocracy. From the standpoint of participation, of the people's share in setting the course

of policy and in arrival at specific decisions, the riddle would be posed in a different way, even if it had to be based on the existence of that resentment. How would it be best to deal with the resentments that find more or less explosive expression in the current movements of protest? Would it not be a matter of

investigating their various causes—over and above the human condition—and how they could be rendered innocuous or tolerable by being properly channelled? Thus we return to the subject of the difficulties of democracy, not only today but tomorrow too. Let us content ourselves with what has been already touched upon.

### III.

## The revitalization of democracy

The foregoing concise analysis of the crisis in the Western democracies—its common factors and divergent trajectories—was undertaken mainly under the aegis of intellectuals of a rightist inclination, since they were men who were more interested in the continuation of such a political system than in its downfall and termination. The factors indicated by them as being at the root of the system's weaknesses therefore enable hopes of a good recovery to be maintained. It would be wearisome, however, to go yet again over the path already covered by examining at this point the proposals made for improvements (the necessary areas of action and the establishment of a generally-accepted agenda). All the negative elements caused by imperfections of an institutional nature, whose manifestation have a long history behind them, are capable of being tackled through reforms inspired by instrumental considerations, which are fully valid in this field: i.e., by the creation of new techniques of social organization which do not, however, claim to offer definitive solutions. In the case of the measures called for by the situation

metaphorically described as 'the shrinking earth', which affects all of us alike, bold efforts of inventiveness and creative originality are demanded which can, however, be facilitated by their co-ordination with those being initiated in the common quest for a new international order. The prospects do not seem completely unpromising as long as the competitive phase of 'détente', which will continue to set the scene for quite a few years to come, is maintained without serious deterioration, since this phase does not rule out the possibility of making some partial amendments, even though the completely new order to which the majority of the countries claim to be aspiring may not be achieved as quickly as could be desired.

Furthermore, it has been assumed in this study that in all probability the rate of economic growth in the next twenty years or more will not be lower than in the decades prior to the current recession, although the more pessimistic observers foresee the occurrence of serious technical complications within the system. Even on the more favourable assumption, however, it would be a

serious political error to persist in the belief that there is so close a correlation between economic development and a democratic régime that the latter depends entirely on the former. On the contrary, revitalizing the democratic system could be an excellent means of sustaining the continuity of development, especially if the apparently unavoidable expansion of planning could be achieved by an effort—hardly as yet successfully attempted—to use the functioning of the system of representation as a suitable mechanism for the parallel channelling of economic and political options: in other words, to try out a parliamentary political régime which would be at the same time an effective organ for democratic economic planning on the basis of the participation of all those concerned, reckoning in anticipation, of course, with their differences and antagonisms. Moreover, there is no reason why, in the time left, an attempt should not be made at a new type of development, less obsessed with quantitative indicators and more interested in those of a qualitative nature. What could be achieved in such a case through a new relationship between development and democracy would no doubt be of decisive importance for the materialization of different and perhaps completely novel ways of life which might be able to survive even when the winds of prosperity drop and the possibility has to be faced of remaining becalmed, as some think might occur in the more distant future, in a stationary economic situation. Against such a time it would be desirable to conserve as far as may be the flexibility and capacity for adaptation and change which the democratic institutions maintain as a matter of principle.

The problem of the 'overload' of demands which seems to suffocate

democratic governments with its weight is undoubtedly of a different nature, since its resolution does not depend entirely on the successful reconciliation of means and ends within a purely instrumental rationale. Nothing can fulfil that mission but a political education under the aegis of the practical and historical rationales which alone are capable of bringing about a change in the attitudes—currently impaired or downright perverted—of individuals and other social units with respect to the State. This is the problem, in reality, of a form of liberalism restored in social and technical conditions totally different from the traditional ones. It is a question intimately linked with that of the essential bases for the complete recovery of democratic life, i.e., the possibility of a full return to its authentic principles of legitimacy. The criticism of the New Left—of sociological reflection as the critical conscience of our time—will remain as potent as ever if the transposition of the bases for that legitimacy is persistently condoned by unhesitating acceptance of the fallacy that they are identical with technical efficiency and success in running the economy. The real legitimacy of a State based on the rule of law, of its liberal function and of the organization of democracy as participation by the people depends on higher requirements relating to the meaning of life both in itself and in its humblest manifestations. We will not speak of happiness, because of its element of unattainability, but let us deal at some length with ways of consciously preventing the occurrence of many avoidable ills.

It was a positivist-type error when men like J. Schumpeter and M. Weber (who were never pure positivists) tried to defend democracy by presenting it as a

mere technical instrument for the election of rulers. Indeed the latter, though a liberal through and through, went to the extreme of proposing his famous formula of a democracy operating through plebiscites. This is not the moment to go into lengthy historical explanations, however.

Neither the rule of law nor the concept of democracy can be reduced to the status of mere instruments; and while the times we live in do not, perhaps, permit a return to the original justification of these two institutions, which was based on natural law (secularized religious elements), it would at least seem necessary to make full use of all that still remains alive in these beliefs, in consonance with the various national credos (the nucleus of political values referred to by the functionalist M. Crozier as being, in the case of France, liberty and equality), and initiate a renewal of a political 'will' open to the anguished protest of needless frustrations. That is to say, a 'will' which really 'wants' to transcend instrumental rationalism and once again found the legitimacy of democratic rule on the supreme values of a form of human society which has a real significance for man and his community. The future of Western democracy depends on whether it can find itself again—renew its 'identity'—in the same generous and enthusiastic spirit of endeavour as pervades the history of its origins.

In a quite recent (1971) manual on political sociology which is widely read in academic circles, the author (Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg) entitles two of his chapters, in a telling antithesis, *Sous-développement et sur-pouvoir* ("Underdevelopment and over-power") and *Sur-développement et sous-pouvoir* ("Overdevelopment and under-power"). In them

he expounds the doctrine—apparently valid at that time—that there is a correlation between the degree of economic development and the degree of forcefulness of the political authorities. Countries in process of development, according to this writer, seemed to need energetic governments with plenty of mobilizing capacity if they were to develop fully, while in democratic countries at a high level of economic development, in contrast, the public authorities tended to be singularly limp. Moreover, it usually happened that this weakness of the organs of the representative régime was accompanied by an outburst of strong reaction on the part of society against the obsession with purely economic growth and against superfluous wealth (this was particularly so in the United States, during the decade when the so-called 'counter-cultures' were at their most flourishing). All this cannot be categorically dismissed as past history now. But neither can it be claimed, after these few years which have gone by, that the inverted correlation formulated above, with its undeniably impressive impact, can still be said to hold good. In the restricted compass of these pages it has been made clear, on the contrary, that in the richest democracies there has been an anxious call for more authority and a stepping-up of State intervention, destined to increase at the rate dictated by the expansion of economic planning in one form or another. The main concern of the observers cited and many others was that it should be possible for such conditions to exist without causing fatal disturbances in the established democratic régime. Most likely this will not happen, but only provided the régime is willing and able to regain its past energy.



But does the opposite correlation hold good? Is there really no way open to the developing countries but the purely authoritarian path, with scarcely any possibility of representation of the people or popular participation?

It was necessary to start from a factual observation regarding the Latin American countries: the observation that in many of them there is currently a propensity for authoritarian régimes which have at least temporarily suspended the exercise of the liberal and democratic procedures previously known and practised. The very use of the word 'suspended' indicates that there are reservations about this development and that it does not represent a decision so indefinite as to appear definitive. Once again the countries which are in such circumstances display the contradiction inherent in the respective rationales of their political and economic institutions. This is of course nothing new for them, and it has been pointed out so many times before that there is no need to consider it here. Today this contradiction is justified as the inescapable result of the tensions and conflicts precipitated by the effects of economic growth itself, which could not be resolved at the right moment through effective compromises—acceptable to the opposing groups concerned as interim expedients—within the field of manoeuvre afforded by their already long-standing democratic and liberal institutions. Yet at the same time the significance of the role played by these institutions over the years has not been forgotten, nor ever completely denied.

What interests us now, however, is not to go into this subject for its own sake, but simply to follow up the pointers to future developments contained in the foregoing pages. The Latin

American countries as a whole have undoubtedly increased their wealth and well-being in the last few years; and if it is true that the foreseeable picture for the next two or three decades suggests the probable continuance of general economic growth, they may reasonably be expected to enjoy a period of further enrichment, keeping the gap between them and the central countries the same as hitherto, or perhaps even narrowing it. If the likewise favourable prospect for the continuity of democracy in the capitalist countries is also confirmed, the model thus emerging could perhaps help to rub off the burrs of the authoritarian systems prevailing in the region. Provided, of course, it is understood that there is no question of interference or pressures—most of which have a negative effect— or of straightforward copying of foreign models, which is unthinkable in the case of countries now fully mature; but that rather it is a matter of the existence of a generalized political atmosphere which the Latin American nations could hardly fail to breathe too, given their birthright of membership of a common culture and their long-standing spontaneous links—economic, political, cultural, technical and scientific—with the great democracies whose future still holds out a promise. Of course, this is all subject to the general conditions of the world economic order, as long as it retains roughly its present character.

The hazardous days in which we live do not warrant complete confidence in the instrument of persuasion: the circumstances which surround us are the driving force, and the action we can take depends on the way they turn out. It should not be forgotten, however, that in the consciousness of the Western countries still echo the dispassionate but

resounding words with which John Stuart Mill concluded his deeply-reasoned essay *On Liberty*: "The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it; . . . a State which dwarfs its men . . . will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished". This conviction of the classic champion of liberalism, shared by other thinkers of similar stature, exalts the supreme meaning of politics and the decisive value of the human element in shaping a lasting social order. Such an order is the real goal of futurological studies, which give it pride of place over the prognostication—in the last analysis 'reactionary'—of man's possibilities of technological achievement and purely material satisfaction, his income and resources, on earth. Any civilization which is dominated by concern only with these is indeed doomed beyond hope.

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## *Comments by John Durston*

The author has succeeded in expressing, in a style as precise as it is elegant, a deep and sincere concern for the democratic and humanistic values. From the methodological standpoint, he begins "by seeking the support of studies written in a conservative spirit" on the subject of the present and future of "the great capitalist democracies". The article may largely be regarded as an able synthesis of conservative interpretations, since basically they are not at variance with the brief remarks on the ideas of the 'New Left' or with the general conclusions. In point of fact, the statement of the problem in terms of a 'crisis of Western democracy' and of the urgent need for democracy to recover its real efficiency is conservative in the strict sense of the word, since it assumes the existence of a situation, prior to the current disturbances and threats, which should be preserved or restored.

The author bases his summary of the conservative diagnosis primarily on the works of two North American thinkers, D. Bell, and R. Heilbroner, who voice their uneasiness about the political trends followed in their country during the past few decades and their anxiety as to the long-term implications. Here I want to discuss, in the empirical context of the recent history of the United States, only one aspect of the conservative approach summed up in the article under review —but an aspect which is in my opinion of great importance for the argument. I refer to the 'overload' of demands made upon the contemporary State.

To condense this argument even further, the suggestion is that a principal cause of the "faulty operation of present-day democracy" lies in a recent overload of new demands and the consequent State transfers and contributions. These claims would seem to constitute a deep-seated menace to the survival of democracy, not only inasmuch as they imply an increasing degree of State interventionism, which would do away with individualism and personal rights, but also because the fiscal impossibility of meeting all these demands for 'entitlements' would inexorably lead to the collapse of the Public Household, or to a curtailment of democratic participation as the only possible safety measure whereby to conserve that very democracy itself.

But who are the 'individuals or groups' that are urging these excessive claims, and why are they doing so? Sometimes the 'civic consciousness' in general would seem to be the source of this view of things, according to which the new consumer aspirations have acquired the character of entitlements. But the article makes it quite clear that it is not the general public that is responsible for this overload; it is the groups which have not been able to satisfy their demands through the market that 'peremptorily' and "transcending the principle of equality of opportunities predicated at the start, in reality call for actual equality of benefits". It would hardly be an exaggeration to formulate the conclusions of the argument as follows: certain groups and individuals that have been

incapable (from limited intelligence or from laziness?) of availing themselves of the equality of opportunities to satisfy their consumer wants, are now claiming as a right the satisfaction of their needs and wants by the State. These excessive demands are a threat to the stability of the democratic system itself; it would be partly imputable to the irresponsibility of these groups if the outcome to be faced were a fiscal crisis and the danger of an authoritarian and interventionist régime.

The article offers no indication whatever of the identity of these groups. It is common knowledge, however, that in the United States this controversy was precipitated by the new demands and the new ways of putting them forward that emerged in the chronically poverty-stricken sectors: the black and the Spanish-speaking populations; the indigenous groups; and the whites of Appalachia (miners, smallholders, migrant agricultural workers), which, although minorities, make up in the aggregate about one-third of the national population. But in the context of the operation of the socio-economic system in the United States, it is perfectly possible to interpret these demands in a different way, which would lead us to conclusions very different from the concept of an 'overload of demands'.

In the study by Medina Echavarría it is categorically declared that no attempt will be made to examine in detail the relation between political and economic institutions. Strictly speaking, it is a matter of divorcing 'political science' from 'political economy'. Such a decision seems particularly regrettable in the present case, for several reasons. The relegation of economic factors (with the exception of the growth of the gross product) to the *ceteris paribus* of the

analysis eliminates several economic premises as implicit bases of the political analysis; what is more, although the new demands of the groups in question certainly included their basic civil rights and some measure of proportional participation in the public decision-making process in general, they were (and still are) mainly economic demands, as the article itself makes plain. By evading discussion of the relation between politics and economics, the analysis discounts the possible economic causes of the crisis, besides ruling out solutions which would imply structural changes in the economic sector.

But before considering the causes underlying the underprivileged sectors' new demands and possible ways of dealing with them, let us briefly revert to the economic assumptions implicit in the conservative argument. The most obvious is the idea that real equality of opportunities exists in the United States. It is sufficiently proved and admitted that this aspect of the *American Dream* is largely a myth; although a certain very limited social mobility does exist, from which one-third of the population has been in fact excluded. More subtle are the implications latent in the assertion that the demands of these groups constitute a danger for democracy because they are new, peremptory and likely to overstrain the capacity of the Public Household. In reality, the history of economic development in the United States is in part the history of the demands and pressures brought to bear on the State by the economically powerful sectors, from the railroad owners and the great financiers of the past century, to industrialists in the steel, motor-vehicle, petroleum and other sectors, and the giant defence industry of today. They attained most of their objectives in the shape of special policies and concessions, not be-

cause these demands were fairer than those made by the deprived groups now, but because they were put forward by powerful sectors. Acceptable, too, are the nowadays traditional demands of certain professional organizations, such as the powerful American Medical Association, and, after an initial period of struggle for their rights, the great industrial trade unions which constitute a sort of labour élite with exclusivist mechanisms of its own. If these groups' demands on the State have not exceeded the latter's capacity, it is because the present 'pluralist' political system represents precisely the product of the various demands and influences of the interest groups and the private sector. Obviously, the black and the Spanish-speaking populations, etc., have been traditionally excluded from the system as far as full economic and political participation goes. The mechanisms and causes of this discrimination are many and complex, and are mainly of economic origin, although among them racism cannot be overlooked.

The recent demands of these underprivileged sectors are 'new' in several senses. In the first place, they are demands for State guarantees of a new type, respecting equality in employment, several non-traditional services, etc. The history of these movements certainly began with demands for equality of opportunities, but it gradually moved on to demand for "actual equality of benefits", and this for two main reasons. Even if future generations were to have opportunities equal to those of the other sectors of society, one-third of the present population would continue to be poor because it had not enjoyed that equality "at the start"; and, furthermore, it soon became clear that the measures applied (access to education, non-discrimination in em-

ployment, etc.) did nothing to undermine the real mechanisms of economic discrimination. In this context, the quota policy (in higher education, in employment, etc.) is essentially a "liberal solution", since it is not based on a full appreciation of the relation between the social classes and does not seek to bring about fundamental changes in the relevant economic institutions.

Secondly, the tactics employed by the underprivileged groups were also distinctly novel, especially during the 1955-1965 decade, when the black civil-rights movement was in its heyday: marches, boycotts, sit-ins, etc. Pressures on the State within the pluralist system are exerted through the local 'machinery' of the two great traditional political parties, and through lobbyists or professional agents of the pressure groups and enterprises in Congress itself.

In contrast, the 'passive resistance' tactics of the deprived groups produced their impact partly in the form of direct economic pressure, but much more through the moral confrontation of the general public with the realities of oppression. In this sense they constituted a tremendous stimulus to civic responsibility, a 'conscientization' with respect to the true principles of democracy —that is, the very opposite of a threat to such values.

Lastly, since the new demands represent pressures on the part of groups which have always been outsiders in the pluralist democracy, they logically exceed the possibilities of the existing structure of the politico-economic system.

From this standpoint, therefore, in what sense could it be said that a public medical insurance scheme (to take the only concrete example of 'demands' given in the text) constitutes an overload

on the system, or a threat to democratic principles? Innovations of this type, based on concepts of social justice, would manifestly imply substantial changes in the distribution of income, economic power and political participation, but it would be absurd to argue that they exceed the capacity of the United States economy. As regards the jeopardy in which increasing State intervention might place creative individualism and personal rights, it must be remembered that there are several forms of interventionism. The intervention of powerful economic interests in public affairs is obviously not very democratic, nor, by definition, are the restrictions imposed by an authoritarian State. But popular

participation in decision-making is in itself a kind of interventionism in the economic field through the State: it would make a difference to the operation of an economic system at present based on the decisions of the great enterprises, yet it does not necessarily imply any diminution of personal rights, much less a 'crisis' of democracy. It seems more than ironical that some authors of functionalist analyses, while rejecting at the outset solutions that imply structural economic changes to resolve the problems and demands stemming from socio-economic inequalities, find it perfectly acceptable to contemplate the possibility of a curtailment of democracy as the only remedy for this 'crisis'.

### *Comments by Carlo Geneletti*

I very much appreciated Medina Echavarría's article because of the decision and clarity with which he approached a problem of major significance and profound relevance for us.

However, there are two points of differing importance about which I think it would be useful to raise some doubts. The first, and the less important, concerns the statement that the type of political system prevailing in the Western countries influences the trends towards change in the political systems of less developed countries. It is not clear whether, by this, he means that the democratic régimes might use their economic power to impose political projects which they favour, or whether he is merely thinking of the spread of cultural patterns. In the first case I believe that the statement would be mistaken, at

least in its general sense, while in the second case the connexion, if there is one, in my view is only very slight.

However, the main point that I wish to discuss is his assertion, firstly that the Western democracies are passing through a period of crisis, and secondly, that this crisis also affects the democratic ideal — Democracy with a capital D, understood as a system of protection of personal rights and of channels for popular participation in the running of the *republic*. It seems to me that the author shares this conception of democracy, since he expresses concern lest the basic values of Western civilization may be threatened by the difficulties which these political systems are experiencing. I do not entirely go along with the first assertion mentioned, however, and I particularly disagree with the second, so let us analyse each in turn.

First of all, is it really true that the Western democracies are in a state of crisis? The reply cannot be the same for every country. If by crisis we are to understand, as the Trilateral Commission does, a trend towards the breakdown of established authority, economic and financial crisis, the division of society into openly conflicting groups, and a situation of increasing ungovernability: in short, if crisis means the growing illegitimacy of the power system, reflected in a high degree of instability, then few countries in Europe and North America could be considered to be in a state of crisis. France is not, and neither is Germany, whose political system has been stable since the post-war period. Could it be asserted that democracy is in a state of crisis in the United States? What basis would there be for this?

In reality, it seems undeniable that the assertion is based almost exclusively on the Italian situation, and that the author, like the Trilateral Commission, considers Italy to be the weakest link in the chain, the test case for all the Western democracies, so that the crisis of the Italian political system anticipates and points the way to the crisis of the other systems.

I could hardly argue with the view that, in most of the developed countries suffering from economic crises, the conflicts between the executive and legislative powers over questions of efficiency, the difficulties of the traditional parties in channelling the demands of the social sectors, and the overload of pressures on the State for employment, benefits and services, have all increased the causes of social conflict, while at the same time they have reduced the possibilities of political negotiation between the opposing sides.

Nevertheless, the chief aim pursued in the crisis of the Western political

systems, to put the matter in somewhat idealistic terms, is the expansion of democracy rather than its abolition. Although my view of European events from such a distance may be a little out of true, I have the impression that the kind of democracy which is in a state of crisis is the reduced and limited democracy which has prevailed in the Western countries since the end of the war, and that the main trend of change to be seen in these countries is towards a democracy of broader scope.

Since the case of Italy is the most typical, I should like to refer to it at greater length, laying emphasis, of course, not so much on the individual case as on the possible theories that may be deduced from it.

The political system still in force is the same, with some modifications, as that established at the time of the first elections of the republican régime, which brought about —because of the need to stimulate the economy, the Marshall Plan, and the presence of foreign troops— the exclusion of important groups of the population (the peasants in the south and a large part of the workers in the north) from political influence and from the benefits of economic development. It is hardly necessary to recall that this exclusion was by no means bloodless, but was accompanied by riots, the rebellion of whole cities, sanguinary acts of repression, and political tension lasting for several years; it was only possible to bring the situation under control by recourse to such palliatives as agrarian reform and national and international migration.

Economic development was based chiefly on the compression of the domestic market and the export of goods of intermediate technological content, whose prices were competitive in the



European market owing to the low cost of labour. It was only from the time of the "hot autumn" of 1969, and thanks to trade union pressure, that a significant redistribution of income in favour of the wage-earning class, with a consequent expansion of the domestic market, was achieved in Italy. Even so, the effect of unearned income, sinecures, and the State bureaucracy was to maintain situations of economic privilege incompatible with economic efficiency, and consequently prejudicial to the welfare of the lower classes.

With regard to the exclusion from political participation, suffice it to say that not until the 1970s was the Communist Party (supported by more than a quarter of the population) admitted, albeit marginally, into the spheres of national political power, although not into municipal institutions, especially in the centre of the country.

These brief observations show that the Italian democracy was an incomplete democracy. In saying this I do not wish to belittle its value, but only to affirm that its concept of legitimacy was limited and exclusive, and that there is still a long way to go in the process of democratization.

To sum up, then, the crisis of the Western democracies does not signify a crisis of democracy. Carefully considered, the causes of this crisis, as specified by the authors whom Medina Echavarría quotes, also point to the same conclusion: the conflicts between the supposed efficiency of the executive power and the responsibility of the legislative power, the crisis of the representativeness of political parties (including the Communist parties), the so-called overloading of

the State with demands, which reflects the increased power of the lower classes to exert pressure, all indicate a state of conflict between the old order and the recent demands for popular participation, while at the same time they represent a transition towards new forms of democracy. For these reasons I do not share Medina Echavarría's basic concern.

However, I do not want to leave an over-optimistic impression, either of the Italian situation or of the trends towards change. Although in my judgement it is a fact that the dominant trend of political change in Italy is towards the achievement of a more complete democracy, I do not wish to imply that political instability has a natural tendency to bring about this aim. If the conflict arising from the demands for participation by the excluded groups were to produce—as is feared by some leading Italian statesmen such as Amendola—a reaction towards an authoritarian political system, democracy would obviously suffer. It is impossible, however, to attempt a prediction.

I wish to conclude these comments with the following observation: I have tried to show that the crises of the Western democracies do not constitute a crisis of democracy, and I have referred principally to the countries most frequently cited as examples: Italy and, to a lesser extent, France. I think, however, that the attention of those interested in the fate of democracy should move further north, to Germany, where there does indeed exist a democratic system which respects democratic procedures and formalities, but where there are also signs of a dangerous tendency towards the reduction of civil rights.

## *Comments by Eduardo Palma*

The article by Medina Echavarría is, in essence, an attempt to forecast the democratic régime's chances of survival in the near future in the countries where advanced capitalism prevails, and the consequent repercussions on the political systems of the Latin American countries. For the purposes of this intellectual exercise, the author does not conceal his preferences in respect of values, but acknowledges them, as a tribute to a humanistic tradition.

Great care is taken to keep the prognosis within such limits and of such a character as to overcome not only the difficulties inherent in separating events from their interpretation, or in linking up the possible futures depicted by authors and schools of thought with their specific ways of understanding society, but also the additional stumblingblock represented by what the author calls 'moot questions', where the fact of dealing with contemporary phenomena makes it impossible to form conclusive opinions as yet.

My brief and fragmentary remarks are directed towards three aspects of the article. The two basic comments relate to that part of its significance which, as I personally interpret it, is grounded on the 'history of the origins' of democracy, and to the author's conclusion with respect to the 'revitalization of democracy'. The other, which is of a more circumstantial nature, although linked to the foregoing questions, has to do with the technocratic modality in the Latin American régimes. The article in itself would suffice to warrant a respect-

ful silence; and if I venture to make these comments it is because I hesitated between the role of annotator—'gilding the lily'—and that of conformist—accepting that there should be 'a voice crying in the wilderness'—until in the end my difficult choice lighted upon the former.

With regard to the profound underlying significance of the 'Notes', I repeat the phrase I have already quoted: 'the history of the origins' of democracy. This, in my opinion, points to a decisive question: there exists—probably beyond the domain of philosophy and in the realm of social science—a mass of historical information and various ethical value criteria for a theory of democracy as a political system. What is more, only democratic theory is meaningful as a continuous background extending past the time-limits of each particular political régime. The shaping of democratic theory, as from its Greek origins, permits the accumulation of its own body of wisdom, when its content is abstracted from the vicissitudes of any given historical conjuncture.

Conversely, the authoritarian régime does not possess a cumulative history that can be defined as development in various areas of human progress. In other words, authoritarianism begins and ends with itself. (It would take too long to give details here of the enterprise represented by Hobbes' *Leviathan*, or to specify the Roman origins of the institution of the Caesar, at the time of the decline in democratic customs.)

Whenever a generation of intellectuals wishes to turn over the page of the

complex tradition of the democratic school and open an unpublished book, the tensions that affect the content of their promise of utopia reappear under apparently novel guises. This is why – to refer to a case cited by Medina– Weber and Schumpeter, under the influence of the positivist spirit of their times, impoverished the content of the democratic dimension. It must be pointed out that Schumpeter's contribution was intended to design a transitional mode of operation for socio-economic régimes, while keeping the democratic political system constant. The refinement of his scheme of electoral competition between teams of leaders representing a government formula and individual candidates for power involves a functional interpretation of democracy which neglects certain of its aspects that are considered essential in our day. They imply a new consciousness of individual rights, and an increasing concern for social autonomies and social consensus, matters classifiable under the head of social and political participation. It is only fair to the author of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* to recognize that his positivist emphasis must be viewed against the background of his entire contribution to theory, in which democracy as he sees it is unquestionably assimilated to a way of life.

A current trend in social analysis which postulates, in the Latin American scenario, an elective affinity between technocratic patterns and authoritarian régimes may, if the terms of reference are not clearly defined, tend to undermine the principles of authority and efficiency of democratic legitimacy.

Medina speaks of these régimes and principles as 'moot questions', moot of course while investigation is still continuing, at least in Latin America, with respect to 'authoritarian-bureaucratic'

régimes or the role of the technocratic estates. Here the simplest questions must be framed –who form the so-called technocracy, how, where and when? – so as to explain in a more complex fashion its role in contemporary Latin American régimes. And this not from empiricism, but because up to now it is not clear at what level of development or growth and in what historical context technocratic bodies emerge as the power élite. Moreover, the mere presence of technocracy does not appear to be an inherent and exclusive modality either of authoritarian or of democratic régimes.

The article under consideration concludes with some reflections on the revitalization of democracy within the next two or three decades, on the assumption of continuance of the international *détente*. The form in which this revitalization is presented is neither more nor less than the democratic planning towards which the author's thinking has long been directed. One need not be unduly prejudiced to imagine some replies to the proposal. Nevertheless, let us acknowledge that among those most disposed to support this 'tomfoolery' it has been the object of verbiage rather than of methodical research, much less of attempts to introduce it.

The issue involved in the proposition, however, is and will continue to be crucial. The growing tendency of social groups to programme their activities means already that the existence of order –somewhat more exacting than equilibrium within an accepted disorder– will entail bringing political and economic institutions into operation under a national planning system. There is no guarantee that this will be democratic. The futurological debate does not make for optimism while it continues in its present style of parallel lines of thought.

The phrase 'parallel lines of thought' is intended to highlight the widening gap between scientific monism and social criticism. The two ways of thinking manifest no empathy whatsoever: they keep their discourses strictly parallel. No search has been made for the procedures, mechanisms, instruments and institutions which could really reconcile, within a common social technology, the political demands for participation with the canons of economic and social theory. I have deliberately assumed that the science and the criticism to which I refer are optimum products in their respective branches of knowledge. I know

that this is not always the case; in that event, their mutual estrangement paves the way for all the obfuscations proper to those who lack a common term of reference.

To conclude, if the study were just one more testimony to the existence of an unaccomplished task, that merit alone would qualify it as a real contribution. But since the author bases these 'Notes', as he modestly calls them, on vigorous backward- and forward-looking cogitations upon the future outlook for democracy, they are an invitation to put into practice "the ways of consciously preventing the occurrence of many avoidable ills".

### *Comments by Gregorio Weinberg*

The power of suggestion is one of the many virtues of José Medina Echavarría's alert and sensitive thinking. His reflections enrich analyses and formulations, and go straight to the heart of any problem; hence their perusal is always stimulating. In this sense, his article "Notes on the future of the Western democracies" brings us face to face with what are some of the most vital issues of the contemporary world, since they relate to the destiny of the human race, yet does not on that account disregard the specific characteristics of the Latin American process at this critical juncture in the region's history.

Out of the compact sheaf of questions laid before us with so much acumen, we will take up two. The first relates to the author's timely reminder that "in the history of thought, liberal and democratic ideas precede and are independent of conceptions respecting

economic development": that is, they cannot be validated only by the success—nor, therefore, refuted by the failure—of their capacity to meet the requirements of increased well-being. The difficulties habitually encountered by all attempts to reconcile 'democracy and development' are not observable in the under-privileged regions alone (as might be presupposed at a very rapid glance, in view of the growing institutional instability of the developing countries, and the frequency with which they deviate or debouch into authoritarianism). Rather do they constitute, as Medina Echavarría stresses, a key concern of political thinkers everywhere and of all tendencies, for they underlie the whole spectrum that stretches from conservative interpretations to those of the so-called 'New Left'. What is more, "the criticism also extends to any other political system which has thrown in its lot

with the efficiency of development". In short, neither by their origins nor by their future are the concepts of 'democracy' and 'liberalism' necessarily linked to those of capitalism as an economic system, and much less still to the efficiency criterion, whatever the code of values selected as a point of reference.

To corroborate the conclusions of the foregoing paragraph recourse to history will suffice. We will dismiss straight away the facile arguments of those who attempt to impugn the concept of democracy from its very origins, and to that end recall only that it was confined to a small number of 'citizens' and excluded slaves and foreigners, even though these latter sometimes formed the numerically largest groups. They forget, however, that it has been undergoing elaboration and enrichment from the time of the Greek city-State to our own day. In any case, such reasoning is a very shaky foundation for criticism of what are still fruitful elements in the ideas of Plato and Aristoteles, since stating the question in those terms means shirking the real issue, which is not a matter of justifying a restricted democracy such as that undoubtedly was, but of creating the necessary and adequate conditions for progressive expansion of the range of participation (in addition to the guaranteeing of rights) until it is made really universal.

But let us look at another example closer to ourselves. Spinoza, for instance—to cite one of the greatest thinkers of the modern world, and perhaps one of the least remembered—, in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, when he is analysing the various known political régimes, considers democracy to be the best of them, for its government is based on reason, since in it—in democracy—

sovereignty is vested in the person of the human individual. Still according to Spinoza, in the *republic* (that is, the political community), *authority* (for him a synonym of legitimate power) rests on the *jus naturale* (the law of nature, i.e., the law of self-preservation, and preservation of one's rights, not only as a reality but also as a potential), which does not, to be sure, fail to recognize the *jus judiciaire* (the law of society), but sees it as a means of safeguarding the idea of *tolerance*. Shortly afterwards a decisive contribution was to be made to the theoretical formulation of this last concept by John Locke, precisely one of the greatest architects of liberalism, in whose system the right to own property came to be given a privileged place. But at no point in his reflections, formulated—obviously—during the century of absolutism and of the consolidation of national states, does Spinoza resort to economic arguments to lead up to his conclusions, still less to justify them. Thus, in this seventeenth-century rationalist we find a forerunner already concerned with "secularizing on a lasting basis", as Medina Echavarría puts it in relation to the following century, "the images of legitimacy of power formulated by the Enlightenment". Consequently, the fundamentals of the democratic society are legitimized in ways perceptibly divergent from the paths followed by those who pursue the same end today via the 'instrumental rationale'.

This is not the place to explore the background of the ancient concept of 'democracy' or of the more modern idea of 'liberalism'; nor to stress their distinguishing marks or to linger over an attempt to discover the intentions of those who confuse them. What is of interest, in our opinion, is to underline the fact that they have a history, since this

criterion, on the one hand, facilitates their dissociation from specific régimes; and, on the other, makes it possible to relate them—especially the first—to a very old tradition of incessant search for the appropriate means of satisfying human aspirations, which, of course, transcend those concerned with “purely material satisfaction”. Nor does this approach shut out the potentialities of utopian thinking, which, although it does not hazard an interpretation of existing realities (a task, moreover, impossible for it, since strictly speaking it is not analytical), nevertheless can constitute a proposal for action. Provided that, as Ernst Bloch insisted, the utopia meets the twofold requirement of being satisfactory as a theory and efficacious as a praxis.

The second question, which we shall touch upon very lightly, is a reversion to the theme of what Medina Echavarría calls the “narrowness of national boundaries” and the political problems it involves, ranging from the constitution of regional units to the exploration of the possibilities for “establishing international authorities”. His remarks in this connexion suggest the innumerable difficulties raised in relation to the problems of democracy and its future—the focal point of the article under discussion—as well as the tests to which democracy is and will continue to be subjected. On our part we would venture to assert that the depth of the contemporary crisis could perhaps also be sounded from another point of view, not indeed completely divorced from that of Medina Echavarría, but expressed in other terms and approached on a different level.

Man in our day has witnessed a convulsion in his categories of space and time—not to mention others—whose dimensions and characteristics generate

much of his *malaise* (to refrain from speaking of a concept so mishandled and at times equivocal as that of ‘anxiety’). These assertions may be illustrated by recalling three significant moments in the course of history.

(a) The first consists in the transition from the Greek city-State to the Hellenistic empire, which generated a veritable civilization, distinguished by its brilliant lights and the uncompromising darkness of its shadows, in which strong individualism existed alongside a no less intense cosmopolitanism, engendering a *rootless* human being who looked on in perplexity at the rapid ousting of the culture of the cities by another with claims to universality (although its whole ‘world’ was a modest sixteenth of the planet).

(b) The second was the Renaissance, when within the short space of a few decades geographical discoveries gigantically enlarged the earth, and the theories of Copernicus deprived it of the privileged place it had held in the Ptolemaic system which had pervaded the western *Weltanschauung* through and through. (The known evidence seems to suggest that for sixteenth-century man the difficulty of grasping a fact so astounding as the existence of the Antipodes was apparently much greater than any that our twentieth-century contemporary finds in coexisting ‘naturally’ with manned spacecraft. Similarly, for the former—living in a markedly hierarchical society—it must have been easier to accept in a fatalistic and passive spirit the prevalence of poverty, famine or plagues, perhaps to some extent made tolerable then by their very inevitability, than for us—children of a more affluent society, vigorously mobile and fluid—at a time when historians as conservative and ethnocentric as A. Toynbee can say

that in view of our economic situation social injustice is becoming avoidable and therefore intolerable.)

(c) The third is our own time, when, again in an interval of only a few years, contemporary man has sallied forth into the universe (as witness his daring feats of space travel), and in the laboratories has explored the microcosm of the atom and succeeded in liberating energy by splitting it. The particular form of human tension deriving from confrontation with the macrocosm and the microcosm, combined with many others, such as those stemming from the speeding-up of the tempo of history, the disruption

of most of man's frames of reference, and the doubts consequently cast on many of his accepted values, constitute additional elements that no searching criticism of the culture of our age can afford to disregard. On the contrary, it must take them in conjunction with the motives of concern for the future of democracy—as enunciated by Medina Echavarría—in order to understand that if the contemporary world has new dimensions and new contents, it also needs new tools and new attitudes for their analysis and comprehension. All of which represents an unparalleled challenge to man's intelligence and imagination.

### *Comments by Marshall Wolfe*

As one has learned to expect from an essay by this author, the text is so tightly knit and deals so judiciously with the questions it sets itself that it leaves few loopholes for comments. On rereading one finds discreetly suggested and dismissed what one was at first tempted to point to as omissions. The main factors bearing on an uncertain future and the reasons for hoping that pluralist democracy will hold its own against 'authoritarian democracy' and 'people's democracy' (since the future of the word 'democracy' as a symbol of legitimation for all kinds of régimes seems assured) are here. The essay will start each reader on his own mental exploration, possibly leading to other essays rather than comments.

The author makes use of one prognosis borrowed from certain economists to make somewhat smoother the future of pluralist democracy: that the central

countries can expect more than twenty fat years of economic growth in which to reform their styles of development and prepare for a longer-term future in which such growth will no longer be feasible, in which 'development' will have to focus on quality rather than quantity. Are these twenty-odd fat years either probable or desirable? As to the *probability*, one can surmise a predisposition on the part of crusaders for a 'new international economic order' to suppose that the central countries are going to be in a position to meet the demands now being made on them without undue strain. In view of the multiplicity of problems with which the central countries are now contending, however, the odds in favour of such a future seem to be poor. As to the *desirability*, an additional twenty-odd uninterrupted fat years would almost inevitably mean a relapse into complacency; they

would entrench still deeper the life styles of the consumer society, possibly even more in the semi-developed peripheral capitalist countries than in the centres themselves. Neither in pluralist democracies nor in authoritarian régimes dominated by beneficiaries of the consumer society can one expect the partnership of a Pharaoh plagued by bad dreams and a futurological Joseph to plan realistically for the lean years.

Perhaps the best that can be hoped for and also the most probable immediate future is one neither so dynamic economically as to strengthen the momentum of growth for its own sake nor so catastrophic as to overstrain the capacity for adaptation of the pluralist democracies; in other words, a future not too unlike the present. A learning process is under way in the central countries that are also pluralist democracies, paradoxically combined with a paucity of inspiring leadership and images of the future capable of mobilizing consensus. There are grounds for hope that the accompanying debate and the concomitant groping for different life styles, while confused and conflictive, are generating a capacity to reach democratically new positions regarding social equity, protection of the environment and husbanding of resources. Already some aspects of life styles and some demands made on the State have changed in ways that would have been inconceivable a few years ago. The question remains whether the continual responses to new challenges and sources of insecurity can proceed with a reasonable degree of flexibility, innovativeness and perceived participation in decision-making, or whether the societies will become enmeshed in technically-based regulations and legal protections of group rights so complex that pluralist democracy will become irrelevant.

It is possible that the 'new form of intelligence' that Medina points to and then sets aside for future exploration will mean a certain devaluation or delimitation of political democracy—a version, approached through devious historical paths, of Marx's replacement of the State by the 'administration of things' or Christ's injunction to 'render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.' That is, a technocratic administration might be accepted with indifference as long as it does not demand too much nor make too egregious blunders, while the people, whether individualistic or communitarian, would place its main interests elsewhere. The preconditions would include achievement of an acceptable level of consumption and services for at least the visible majority of the population, consensus between the technocrats and the articulate parts of the population concerning the limits of growth and the futility of national aggrandizement, priority for interests that can be satisfied without significant increases in productive capacity: sex, sports, meditation, rituals.

The implications for the rest of the world of a future of 'cultural mutation' (the term proposed by Alain Touraine) within pluralist democracies in the central countries are obviously complex. The likelihood that these countries will presume to act coherently as *dei ex machina* to bring into being a new international economic order diminishes. One can expect a turning inward combined with a projection on the rest of the world of the issues being debated within the national societies. Vicarious utopianism—the disposition to identify and aid new styles of development in poorer and supposedly simpler societies—will coexist with rejection of responsibility for the problems of the rest of the world.



Public censoriousness toward national societies that combine dynamic economic growth with highly uneven distribution and disregard of environmental damage, under the control of authoritarian régimes, will coexist with tangible signs of favour for such patterns from the transnational enterprises and lending institutions.

Under these circumstances, the Latin American national societies cannot expect to receive unambiguous signals from the pluralist democracies in the central countries; different groups will empha-

size the signals that correspond to their own preferred style of development. At the same time, as semi-developed countries that are tributaries of the same systems of political organization and culture as the central countries, struggling with intensified versions of the same crises; the Latin American countries transmit signals that have a real impact in the central countries; in particular that the penalty for failure on the part of pluralist democracy to cope with such crises may be the fitting of the national societies to an authoritarian bed of Procrustes.