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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 salied 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 Echavarria—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 legitimization 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 censornousness toward national societies that combine dynamic economic growth with highly uneven distribution and disregard of environmental damage, under the control of authoritarian regimes, 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 emphasize 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 feting of the national societies to an authoritarian bed of Procrustes.