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UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA

SANTIAGO, CHILE / SECOND HALF OF 1977

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UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION

Sales N°: E.77.II.G.5

Price: US\$ 3.00 (or equivalent in other currencies)

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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 socioeconomic 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