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Structural Ambivalence of Latin America

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The Social Process of Latin America during the Development Decade

The 1950's have been labelled as the "decade of development" for

Third World. The upper 60's provide the first good standpoint from which we can appraise the validity of this phrase and the extent to which the idea of change can be justifiably identified with the present day social process of Latin America. The last 20 years show a long, sustained drive towards a cumulative process of growth, that is "development" as it is understood and fostered by our "intelligentsia". The ultimate significance of this kind of change had to be related to qualitative modifications in the social structures, since new forms of capital formation and the re-distribution of income imply a change in the patterns of power and interplay structures. Thus emerged the concept of development as involving all aspects of society and revealing the limitations of strictly "economic development" on the one side, or of "social" or "political" development, on the other. This "global approach" to development gave birth to "strategical" forms of tackling the problem and an effort to discover the "dynamic" factors in the interaction between its economic, political, and social components.

Development came to be understood not only as a total social fact, but also as an historical experience, as an opportunity for nation building and the hallmark of countries capable of directing their own social processes. Thus, the last 10 years, have seen development linked with nationalism as an emancipatory Process, and the only one leading to a viable programme for changing present structures.

The Colonial Structure

There were two consequences of this understanding. The first was that the sociological background from which development would detach itself was recognized as a very coherent regime of social relations that could be called the "colonial structure". It could be characterised as a situation of social "atrophy", in which economic and political behaviour (e.g. capital formation and the diffusion of power) did not develop. The interplay of "atrophies", the regressive interaction between the super and infra social structure, the many compensations between the two within an inverse dynamism show how the situation could turn into a recognizable pattern in a way that it could be identified as a regime, without being a real system of social relations. It could produce an amazing and elaborate resistance to change, to what was perhaps too quickly called the "modernization process". Through an elaborate pattern of subtle compensations between the political and the economic collective behaviour, underdevelopment has been

labelled as "equilibrium of scarcities".

#### Transition and social change

The second was the recognition that the situation necessitated a truly new form of historical change that would be the opposite of evolutionary change. This modification of the social setting would not occur by the mere addition of new variables which would create gradual change merely by interaction and combination; rather it presupposes the simultaneous presence of two different sets of social forces, progressing by tension and, assuming the ultimate supremacy of the most dynamic, by the literal "abduction" of elements of the old structure by the new, and the revitalizing of those elements which had been crippled and aborted in the colonial regime. This is the fundamental premise for understanding the ambiguity or structural ambivalence of Latin American society. Its most important consequence is the dimension of revolution in that society.

#### Transition and revolution

It is impossible to achieve qualitative change in this structure simply by the modification of the patterns of power, essentially by a vast confiscatory policy, for this is to understand the malfunctioning of the old society as related merely to the dynamics of property and the control of institutions in the society. For example, the nationalization of the Bolivian tin-mines in 1952, although it gave the state control of all the export sector of its economy, did not make it less subject to the remaining colonial-like behaviour of the international market. If there is to be a genuine qualitative change in the social process of Latin America there it must be simultaneous and interacting between the economic and political levels of transition.

#### Latin America present screen of social change

Unfortunately, effective development is much more the exception than the rule today in Latin America. Perhaps only one country - Mexico - has succeeded in reaching the take-off point, and in matching the growing industrialization and re-orientation of its economy with both political stability and significant popular participation in this process. On the other end of this scale, countries like Ecuador or Paraguay are still struggling to assemble the basic factors that would give them strength to break the vicious circle of the colonial economy and to enter upon a viable development effort. In the middle are many countries in which economic growth is not necessarily associated with structural changes led by industrialization and would consist much more in the succession of extractive or primary activities. Some of these countries, such as Venezuela, have per-capita income comparable to that of many developed countries, yet may still suffer from a polarization of the new wealth, acute regional imbalances, absence of general social mobility and over-dependence on external economic dynamisms. On the political side, the maturing of a national consciousness, tradition of political stability and general participation in the political process, or the strengthening of authentic trade union movement may sometimes lead to an emphasis of super-structural modifications which displaces the real priorities for effective change. This may be happening today in Chile where

general backing of President Frei has had to be linked to the "Chileanization" of the copper-mines, postponed up till now on the grounds of a coherent progression of change. The toll this is taking upon the popularity of this government shows how risky is the task of synchronizing political and economic emancipation. The other extreme of this imbalance between economic performance and genuine political participation and power diffusion is dramatically illustrated by the two biggest countries of South America, Brazil and Argentina. Both have lost the chance to reach the take-off point through spontaneous development, although they are, by far, the most naturally endowed. Both embarked upon a process of quick and decisive change during the 50's, through industrialization and the disruption of oligarchic patterns of power through "varguismo" in Brazil and "peronism" in Argentina. Their growth was finally slowed down by either a severe slump in exports or rampant inflation.

#### From thorough to rationalized change

Argentina and Brazil have now re-launched development policies following the classic neo-capitalist model with a classic curbing in inflation and a maximum degree of integration with the international economy of investments and foreign aid. These economic policies have been matched by the appearance of power-élite groups, generally based on an alliance between the military and a limited group of civilian planners, for example the Aramburu-Alzogaray joint venture in Argentina, and the intimate collaboration between Brazilian President Castelo Branco and Minister of Planning Roberto Campos. The latter regime aims to create a completely new political model - a technocracy - to match the present rationalized version of development. In this model, a power élite group, extremely homogenous in ideology, would enforce a definite policy of a rational approach to planning and social change. It would underscore the significance of popular backing in its system, either by seeking legitimacy through extended popular suffrage, or by broadening the needs for immediate participation in the political process. Such regimes try to perform these tasks "from the top", based on further acceptance by the people of the modifications now entangled by a process of development with limited "participation".

#### Emergent asynchronisms, latent structural tensions

What role has the ambivalence of the social structure played in the present slow-down in growth and the frustration of the hopes raised at the dawn of the "development decade". The fact that some of the countries which appeared most prepared to seize the opportunity to bring about this change have missed it shows that the key problem of achieving development lies in this ambivalence and especially in its side effects. New bottle-necks may develop due to the inadequacy of economic new forces, and their representation. The elaborate new mechanism of resistance set up by the colonial order and distortions in the growth of a national consciousness may lead to curious tropisms in the emerging new classes and their enslavement to the classical articulations of the old regime.

#### The extension and meaning of ambivalence or ambiguity

The transition process in which the whole of Latin America is involved is based on the coexistence of two social structures which are absolutely incapable of being integrated or related to the same social framework. This theme of

duality is basic to an understanding of the present tensions of Latin America, and the pattern in which two sets of social forces may develop an extended interplay without ever integrating. It explains why growth does not flow naturally from the simple quantitative increase of the many factors responsible for change, but rather through the permanent confrontation of the regimes, and by the "abduction" of elements of the old by the new. This, to succeed, supposes the "maximization" of efforts in certain privileged periods, that would enable them to take full advantage of a special constellation of elements, both internal and external, able to provide a definitive overcoming of development, upon the colonial structure.

The time effect of this coexistence on the over-all process of growth, creates unexpected set-backs or blockades in the continuum of change. The clash of development with/<sup>the</sup> colonial structure can be attributed to the protracted effect of mechanisms such as:

- the settlement of the embryo of a middle class in the super-structure of the society, through the permanent over-expansion of its bureaucracy;
- the over-expansion of subsidies and state controls, essentially in the export sector and through public investment and the "exchange and devaluation" policies, permanently "capitalizing the gains and socializing the losses", this making useless any true economic behaviour.
- the permanent interplay between the market economy and the subsistence level on which the colonial regime can count on a huge labour surplus which it can absorb or reject without fear of political consequences.

All these mechanisms impinge deeply upon the continuity of change, either by harnessing new social forces to old social patterns, by protracted disruption, by creating new bottle-necks between the super and infra-structure in countries which are well advanced in their economic development, or by slipping old unintegrated elements into the new dominant structure.

#### From structural ambivalence to ambiguity in the universe of thought

The theme of ambiguity is significant between the Third World and the western nations, for there is a fundamental "scientific gap" in the confrontation of the "have" and the "have-nots". The presupposition that all social dynamisms fit within the classical evolutionary patterns of change is dominant. The specific new changes of Latin America are measured and understood in western categories of historical time. Transitional change is coerced into categories of evolutionary change. Some typical antinomies have made of the polemics of development a veritable "Tower of Babel".

1. Development versus progress.

Latin America's growth cannot be encompassed within the classical linear and cumulative idea of "progress". Asynchrony, a change "by jumps" a "strategic interior time": these are much more descriptive of the effective qualitative change presupposed by development. Latin America cannot count on the "continuity" of change, and she may be misled by the classical idea of the "inevitability" of progress. There is rather a specific "moment" for this change and this whole continent may let it pass by. Moreover, the chances to grasp it are unequally distributed in time, and one generation may have an historical mandate to accomplish it.

2. Modernization versus Cultural Authenticity.

According to the dominant stereotype, Latin American societies are traditional, not colonial, regimes. The modernization process is seen as a gradual rhythmic evolution from old to new forms of social life, involving a general acculturation for the dialogue between the centre and the fringes of the western world. This view forgets that the old society is a very elaborate complex of relationships based upon classical international capitalism. We forget the essential dualism and non-integrated character of these societies. We forget that this split comes to the very soul of these complexes of relationships which, as long as they are under a colonial structure, cannot be called nations. They are not the historical subjects created by the west but only its external proletariat. The "civilization" process is world-wide today. But what about the social process, the cultural process, to follow Alfred Weber's famous distinction?

Modernization deals only with the civilization process; it is irrelevant to the true cultural process, which can grow only "from within", challenged in this case by development, and maturing into a certain conception of the world and a definitive style of life. As the historical external proletariat of the West, Latin America was diverted from a true cultural process, and was unable to create a self-centred community.

3. Nationalism versus Collective Egoism or Xenophobia.

Nationalism in Latin America today may be defined as the political consciousness of development and the effort through a collective decision to exploit all the energies of society towards a successful "nation building" experience. It is a movement of promotion, not of resentment or Xenophobia, based on the conviction that those who live on the fringes of these collectivities have to count massively on their own effort to overthrow the colonial regime and use the "nation" as the most effective instrument for maximizing the exploitation of their potentialities.

4. Formal Democracy versus Popular Participation.

In the Third World and especially in Latin America, the formal legitimacy of political regimes bears little relation to the inner values of democracy, and to effective popular participation in this process. This antinomy challenges traditional Western ways of thinking, whenever the new dynamics of instant and increased participation prevails over formal democracy, or when formally constituted regimes which are in reality tiny power elites, lack the capacities for effective nation-building.

## THE IMPACT OF AMBIVALENCE ON SOCIAL CHANGE

### 1. Revolution - The Luxury of Wealthy Countries.

Perhaps the most striking result of the ambivalence of Latin American social structures is the failure of the labour sector to be socially articulated; the huge reserve of manpower is used sagaciously as a permanent cushion that annihilates its bargaining position and any sustained patterns of dynamism, sometimes leading to violence. The workers are permanently caught between the economic market and the subsistence level, simply merging into the latter one, when they are ejected from the former. They "fade away", but don't ultimately starve. In Latin America, in contrast to the developed societies, massive unemployment did not tend to produce a revolution in the classic sense. For revolution as the climax of the social tension presupposes previous forms of effective social bargaining, the creation of a social conscience, and above all, the incorporation of the whole population into an effective system of social relations. That is why revolution is a luxury of a certain stage of development and why it never appears in colonial structures built on the interplay between two unrelated levels of social life on destroying class alignments or other homogeneous social groupings by linking them with other classes or fomenting division within them. For example, in Brazil this policy is destroying the proletariat as a social force, through the following factors :

- A. The urban workers tend to behave like the middle classes and are deprived of all contact with the rural area or with the other groups of workers.
- B. The rural workers employed in the plantation system are generally at the mercy of fluctuations in the foreign markets; they operate within an economic enclave, surrounded by the labour reserve, at the subsistence level.
- C. The rural workers who produce agricultural commodities for the new urban areas, are entirely dependent on the financial support of the mercantile bourgeoisie.
- D. The proletariat, trapped at the subsistence level and that is used as reserve labour supply for the other three layers, and in this way contributes to depress their wages.

### 2. The Pseudo-Capitalist Sector.

Since economic conditions in the colonial regime did not encourage private investment, productivity or the rationalization of markets, the state became the main economic agent. Through manipulation of the rate of exchange it insured the transfer to the whole collectivity of any losses suffered by the wealthy. Any accumulated surplus assumed immediately the form of waste, was used for ostentatious living, or hoarded. With the breaking in of development, the ambiguous position of the group supposed to direct industrialization in the national interest immediately became obvious. The national Bourgeoisie kept to the tradition that state support is not merely a contingency of an early period of development, but part of the economic structure which grew in the ensuing years.

Generally speaking, they were ideological captives of the old order, one of the strongholds of conservatism, often opposing fundamental development policies. When inflation produced an abnormal and sterile form of re-distribution of income, the industrial bourgeoisie became more predatory, refused to reinvest its capital, and counted entirely on government loans and subsidies. When attempts are made to re-launch development, that private national sector emerges as a very marginal one socially eroded by inflation. It becomes a minor partner of one of the remaining sources of capital formation; foreign investment or the state. The latter, nevertheless, instead of admitting some kind of a semi-socialist model, lends his whole potential to a nominal capitalist economy.

#### The Intellectual versus the University.

The role of the university in social change in Latin America also reflects the ambivalence of its social structures. Rather than a commitment to reflection on the mandatory tasks of transition, we generally find in the official culture a position of sheer proselitism and utter insensibility to the needs of the emerging Latin American countries. This forces the "intelligentia" to break with the university - that turns into the flower of the establishment in order to perform its functions as a creative minority, especially in the early phase of this process of change. Their task is a tough one: they must not only build ideological links between the fundamental forces of change, but must develop a critical national consciousness which recognizes the utter alienation produced by the colonial structure. They must appraise and denounce the many trends by which the drive towards development can be distorted and even made captive. That is why the "intelligentsia" carries out its function outside the University, sometimes in Institutes of Advanced Studies, with the double task of applying traditional social thinking to the problems facing the country and serving as a permanent critic of the government's development policies. Brazil has created an Institute of Superior Studies (ISEB) with the specific task of formulating an ideology for development. This divorce between the intellectual and the university is a clear demonstration of how the colonial structure is impenetrable to an authentic cultural process change from within.

#### The Compromise of the Church with the Status Quo

In the colonial regime the attitudes of the secular and the religious orders towards the status quo are much more mutually dependent than in Europe or the United States. In some Latin American countries, catholicism, is still the state religion. When the old regime collapsed, the Church either had to go along with the establishment, or support the new social order in which it could no longer benefit from a privileged position. The problem was never clearly formulated. On one hand, the church never simply supported the stiffening of the old or openly, but on the other, it advocated its gradual change by what became known as "reformism". i.e. some redistribution of income and the divesting of old privileges to reduce scandalous economic differences. Here to the perspective of evolution prevailed over the needs of transition. The church would opt for the old order when stressing voluntary change and the imperatives of charity.

The effort to interpret the social doctrine of catholicism within the perspective of evolution and organic change in this case prevented the church from giving full support to the political forces struggling for development and thus helped to defend and enlightened status quo.

#### The abduction of power by the Technocrat

Transitional change is absolutely dependent on the emergence of the new social order based on planning and on social behaviour derived from logical correlations and rational models.

This places tremendous power in the hands of a new priesthood : the economists, the sociologists, the political scientists who are concerned with management of the fundamental equations of social changes and the evolution of the policies to assure it. This group, which behaves like a "clan", seeks to rid itself of all sociological conditioning and to remain absolutely neutral concerning "class" or "status" interests. Evidence on the emergence of this super-structure is increasingly apparent in the under-developed countries, especially in situations in which spontaneous growth has failed and had to be re-launched artificially. In rare cases this technocracy has risen within the civil service ( as in Tunisia, for example). In others it has required the direct backing of a military apparatus although keeping separate from it (predominantly in Latin America as for example in Brazil and Argentina). As a third alternative the power elite has resulted from the structural transformation of the military into technocrats (as in Egypt). It is possible in Latin America, today, to establish a correlation between the awakening of a development policy and the decantation of a new store of techniques and skills which have been developed by professionally, dedicated to the improvement and acceleration of the various factors connected with the expansion of the national income.

Although this attitude is positive, it brings with it the danger of an excess of "technicism" which weakens or even annuls sensitivity to the historical or meta-economic conditions of the social structure. It leads to the cult of rationality and to the idolatry of the lucid approach - both of which are often incompatible with the rational procedures which characterize the developing country. The final crystallisation of this perspective consecrates an international formula for development through a neutral technocratic elite capable of repeating endlessly with slight adjustments the same diagnosis and the same therapies. This is the danger that today haunts not only plain technocratic regimes like Brazil's but also governments more concerned with immediate popular participation such as Chile's which has shown a passion for model building and ultra-sofisticated efficiency, in new formulas devised by such groups as DESAL, within the Frei Staff. In other words, the technocrat, seeking the mountain peaks of social progress may die of suffocation, in this rarified atmosphere in which he has lost contact with the historical and concrete elements required to make viable his stern rational approach towards development. Lacking this setting, a conflict between the stiffness of his behaviour and the response from within the community would seem inevitable although the technocrat may compensate it by developing even a lust for unpopularity. Thus the reign of the "King Philosophers," now at its dawn may be short, for it is endangered by the rejection of the popular classes. What is really at stake in this drama is the difficulty of ideological role-playing in the process of transition between total social structures.

### The Emergence of Popular Culture

Immediately related is the fact that the transition process gives full light to a genuine new form of culture - different from the classical offspring of creative minorities. For instance, the maturing development in Latin America tends to be characterized by such distinct phenomena as the emergence of national consciousness, and of a popular culture. These are the direct effect of the speed of the collapse of the old structure, the increased social mobility, the significant role generally given to the collective. Popular culture is thus a result of the historical challenge proposed by development: it derives from the immediate call to the entire community for significant action against the colonial situation and results in the quick obsolescence of that situation. "Conscientization" becomes its fundamental element, accompanied by the immediate awakening of associative feelings expressed in many forms of "sindicalization", or by the increased disciplinary behaviour that leads either to the more generalized use of labour surplus (in changing the "ratios" of production), or to new attitudes towards consumption, capable of increasing the saving functions of the economy. Essentially what emerges from this effort is the shaping of a "social memory", i.e. the whole community is itself the ultimate and complete agent of the change. This means that the people themselves and not an elite group are the protagonists in the nation building experience of these countries. That is why in this experience the inner meaning comes from beyond the perspective of the technocracies, that is to say from an "irrational dimension": the feeling of exploitation, the sense of being "marginal" and of being alienated which characterize the population of the underdeveloped countries.

We see then that the authenticity of the nation-building effort must be determined by the degree of permanent popular participation. Only then will the ultimate result of development no longer be the little success of the technocrats, but the deep, historical experience of a mass which has become a people.

