

# ***The Third World and the West***

## **Development Theory in Transition**

Magnus Blomstrum and Bjorn Hettne

Zed £6.50

## **Aid: Rhetoric and Reality**

Teresa Hayter and Catherine Watson

*Pluto* £4.95

## **Zapping the Third World: The Disaster of Development Aid**

Marcus Linear

*Pluto* £4.95

Whilst we are taking note of the Live Aid phenomenon, it is not a bad idea to take note also of the available campaigning literature concerned with Third World issues. There has been a vast change over the years, from the 1960s when the aid lobby welcomed the Pearson Report, to the 80s when the very radical movements of today have displayed the utmost scepticism over the Brandt Report. During the same period, in more academic circles, there has emerged a left-wing critical theory - underdevelopment or, more commonly these days, dependency theory. This is totally opposed to the optimistic assumptions,

which still form the basis of orthodox development theory, about the possibilities of development through co-operation between the less developed countries and the West. The three books reviewed here should stimulate discussion of the relevant debates.

*Aid: Rhetoric and Reality* is mainly concerned with the World Bank - a follow-up to Teresa Hayter's well-known onslaught *Aid as Imperialism*. It is a very useful survey to set against more orthodox accounts, persuasively making the case concerning the World Bank's bias towards right-wing regimes, its devotion to private enterprise and the market, and the excessive influence within the Bank of the USA. It is appropriately cynical over the impact on the poor of the Bank's emphasis on agricultural projects and, more generally, the 'poverty orientation' of the MacNamara era in the 1970s. The appendix by Catherine Watson on her experiences whilst working for the Bank should be required reading for aid technocrats.

It could however be argued that the policy slogans of 'redistribution with growth' and 'basic needs', popular with the World Bank and other developers in recent years, might have been given a fuller airing. The 'basic needs' slogan in particular is based on the notion that projects should not just raise national income in the hope that the benefit will 'trickle down' to the poor, but should specify the target groups and their needs, and so arrange output and income that those needs are met. Although coming from the traditional aid agencies, this poses questions of reform versus revolution, of Utopian delusion versus realism, and of the relationships between states, that are at the heart of all discussion of aid.

Marcus Linear's target is the impact of Western aid and agribusiness on Africa, especially the impact of the pesticides with which agribusiness destroys the habitat of wildlife to create the conditions for the successful rearing of cattle for export markets. He lays about this in a somewhat indiscriminate way. He is fascinating on tropical forests, wildlife, the capture of apes for zoos, the spread of deserts, and the tsetse fly. He isn't enamoured of national park conservation policies. He favours controlled wildlife utilisation for food purposes, quite likes hunting (for food) and even has a sneaking regard for the tsetse fly which,

he says, preserves wildlife habitats from cattle encroachment. However, and notwithstanding his entertaining attack on his *bete noire*, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, Marcus Linear's book does not make out the case implied by the title. His arguments demonstrate that there are some very complex problems involved, and in particular that national Third World policies are at stake as well as Western interests searching for profits.

*Development Theory in Transition* is, in spite of its title, largely an exceedingly useful survey of dependency theory, which is the polar opposite of what most of us would call development theory. Dependency theory emphasises the exploitation by capitalist centre of Third World periphery, the extraction of surplus, the imposition of export crop monocultures, the role of comprador ruling elites, and the prevention or at least the 'distortion' of development. It has never been far from political engagement and the book is very strong on the political background to the theory's origins in Latin America, its period of influence in the Caribbean and Tanzania and its relative failure to gain credence in India. In Latin America, in the hands of at least

own massive intellectual resources and its history, the Left has long had its own well thought out attitude to imperialism and to its indigenous exploiting classes.

Blomstrum and Hettne accept the general verdict that the dependency school is now in disarray, and discuss at length its failings. Insofar as dependency theory is also referred to as neo-marxism, it is criticism by marxists that has provoked most debate. Marxist critics have argued, among other things, that indigenous capitalist development *is* occurring in the Third World, and not just as an appendage of the transnational corporations (TNCs) - though obviously in a very different milieu from that of the classical capitalist development of 19th century Europe. In addition, state-led development is a characteristic accompaniment of, or even alternative to, capitalist development, and the state is not necessarily to be seen as an appendage either of indigenous or of transnational capitalism. It reflects much more complex sets of offerees. This all amounts to the need for far more attention to be paid to causal factors internal to Third World social structures as against the excessive influence previously attributed to the international capitalist environment.

What are the implications of all this for radical campaigning organisations in Britain which certainly have, to date, been closely associated with dependency theorising? It could be argued that a mistaken picture of the TNCs as the cause of all Third World ills contributes to an equally false picture of the Third World as a uniform set of innocent, helpless victim states - a picture which, in due course, revolutionaries in those countries may reject as having provided convenient alibis for many reactionary regimes. TNCs are opportunistic, amoral, profit-grabbing overpowerful units of world capitalism, but they don't rule the world alone. There are those on the Left for whom any attack on TNCs is its own justification. But the Third World campaigners are genuinely seeking constructive solutions to world poverty and need a less one-dimensional approach. They are also creatively concerned with policy both for the Third World and for Britain. It seems clear that those marxists who are engaged in theoretical reformulation need also to join in a collective attempt at policy production. Hopefully, these three books will help to provoke such an attempt.

Phil Leeson



some of its exponents, dependency theory involved an attack on the local Communist parties' assumption that development could happen in a classical marxist way by means of an alliance of workers with the national bourgeoisie against feudal oligarchies. In both the Caribbean and Tanzania the academic argument was sharpened by the involvement of radical economists in policy formulation. In India, with its