

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF WEAK NATIONS*

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Any attempt to understand political and administrative change in the developing countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa must begin with an assessment of characteristic problems of such countries. Identification of problems must be highly selective. Yet, the net must be cast widely, precisely because political and administrative change responds to all major problems of its social setting.

Accordingly, this analysis is divided into two major parts: first, analysis of developing nations, and second, prognosis of political and administrative change in response to these problems—for the next decade.

I. CHARACTERISTIC PROBLEMS OF DEVELOPING NATIONAL

Some scholars are successful in understanding one or another of the developing countries. Anthropologists, area and language specialists, and others in the world's leading universities are imparting much of this needed specialized knowledge. Few students, however, are able to comprehensively understand the problems of developing countries, because

of their sheer number and diversity. Political leaders throughout the world are baffled in their attempts to formulate broad and workable foreign policies concerning these developing countries. All the vicissitudes and vagaries of human behavior are reflected in the heterogeneity of the less developed world. Yet, major powers must achieve comprehensive understanding of the problems of the weaker nations if they are to recognize the basic causes of poverty and war, and to induce well-being and peace through workable foreign policies.

Most comparative studies stress the differences among institutions and problems of developing nations. While it is true that every country is unique and has indigenous problems growing out of circumstances peculiarly its own, *compare* means to discover similarities as well as dissimilarities of two or more subjects.

After years of related study and visits, totalling four and one-half years, to fourteen Asian, two African, and two Latin American countries, I conclude that most developing

nations face some problems similar enough to be termed characteristic—or common—problems. What follows, then, is my attempt to broadly assess some common problems of less developed nations.

Societies

Societies in developing nations are heterogeneous and pluralistic. Populations are fragmented into various religious, ethnic, racial national, tribal, or kinship groups. National boundaries frequently had been drawn without regard to their distribution. These groups represent divisive and centrifugal forces as against unifying and centripetal forces.

Social structures are highly formalistic, traditional, and rigid. Since most of the population is rural and agriculturally based, parochialism of rural kinship fosters local and communal loyalties rather than national citizenship, often by conservatively interpreted and applied religion. Inherited corruption and wealth generally determine status, class, or caste among illiterate peasantry.

Debt is widespread among small holders and landless tenants much of which is non-productive, incurred to defray costs of weddings, jewelry, funerals, and festivals. Many are economically dependent upon traders, merchants, and money lenders, and are bound in feudal servitude to absentee landlords.

Widespread poverty induces apathy or indifference to possibilities of progress. Peasant life is conducive to large families (for

virility is usually associated with high fertility). The importance attached to fecundity fosters fear of barrenness among rural women whose esteem often depends upon issue of male offspring. Their frequent seclusion, or associated values of shyness and conservatism, inhibits instruction in family planning, health, and education.

Popular attitudes toward government vary according to the segment of society. Besides indifference, rural attitudes frequently associate government as the captive of the urban elite who merely have taken the place of former rulers—colonial or otherwise.

The mixture of cultural diversity, traditional social structures, rural servitude, and popular values, inhibits nation-building generally. This mixture causes grave problems in social organization of poor nations, makes political maturation difficult, and frustrates attainment of social and national unity in education, politics, and administration.

Legacies

Unparalleled in world history is the rapid liquidation of European empires in Africa and Asia. Very recently a colonial preserve, Africa today comprises more independent states than any other continent. Leaders of new states of Africa and Asia have created a climate of world opinion intensifying the pressure for independence of the few territories still under colonial rule. The surging tide of Afro-Asian nationalism—their common quest for national integrity, dignity, and stability—is registering increasing influence in world affairs.

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